

Folkloristic studies in Scandinavia  
Personal research experiences and reflections

*To my wife Kristina, our son Johan, his wife Rebecka,  
their sons Emrik and Lukas*

# Folkloristic studies in Scandinavia Personal research experiences and reflections

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Front cover: The merpeople living at the bottom of the sea were a threat to the men out fishing and to the women rowing home from the islands who are shown at the top of the picture. Painting by the folk-life artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson. Bohuslän museum No. 009.

Back cover: The parson Simson wearing the insignia of the royal Order of Vasa together with islanders of Kåringön during the visit of King Oscar II on the island in 1889. Photo Aron Jonasson, Bernadotte archives in the Royal Palace, Stockholm.

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# Introduction

I was inspired to write this book at an international conference in Visby on Gotland in 2015; the name of the conference was *Why folkloristics?* Participants from a great number of countries all over the world were gathered there. In the invitation for the conference, the organisers emphasised the importance of discussing, as a matter of principle, the future of Folklore Studies as an academic discipline. In later years, this subject has come under threat in the Scandinavian countries, at the same time as it has been facing new challenges on an international level. In Sweden, folklore studies have been part of the academic discipline of Ethnology during my entire research career since the 1970s. Folklore studies as an academic subject has disappeared entirely during the twenty-first century in Denmark. In Norway, a folklore perspective is included in the discipline of Cultural Studies in Bergen and in Cultural History in Oslo since 2005. The only countries in the Nordic countries to keep Folklore as a university discipline of its own are Iceland and Finland. I have been active as an ethnologist in Lund in the years 1967-1986, in Uppsala in 1987-1996 in Sweden, in Oslo 1997-2005 in Norway and as a culture historian in Oslo from 2005 until now.

In the invitation to the conference in Visby, the following fundamental questions were posed. *To what end do we need folkloristics?* and *What kinds of knowledge do folklorists claim to produce?* I would like to consider these questions in the light of my own ethnologic/folkloristic research in Sweden and Norway from the 1970s until the 2010s.

Within international anthropology and ethnology the term auto-ethnography has emerged in several contexts. This means that researchers use their personal experiences in a self-reflexive way in the ethnographic research process (Chang 2008; Ellingson & Ellis 2008; Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011).

Before the conference in Visby, the Ethnological Department there had published an anthology named *Folkloristikens aktuella utmaningar* [Current challenges of Folkloristics]. One point of departure was to discuss the role of Folklore Studies in a “rapidly changing university world” (p. 12). In this context, the question arises about what should be regarded as the main fields of folklore studies. Three areas are pointed out as significant in Scandinavia, these are analysis of narratives or narrativity, rituals and performance (p. 14); results of my studies in these areas are discussed in this book.

The main questions at issue in this book are the following

*Which role has folkloristics had in my ethnological and culture historical research?  
What kind of knowledge has folkloristic aspects helped me to produce as a cultural scholar?*

The purpose is to illuminate the usefulness of folkloristic perspectives in my ethnological and culture historical research. Folkloristic perspectives, not only have a value of its own, but also provide new perspectives which are highly significant in ethnological and culture historical research. As an ethnologist and later as a culture historian, I have always made sure that one of the platforms I base my work on is positioned within folkloristics. Several of my essays have been published in the journal *Arv. Nordic (Scandinavian before 1993) Yearbook of Folklore*. Ever since volume 44 1988 to volume 71 2015, I have been a member of the editorial board of this yearbook. During the years 1981-1989, I was a member of the board and executive committee in the *Nordic Institute of Folklore*, NIF, which was active during the years 1959-1997. In the 1980s and 1990s, I published several reports in *NIF Newsletter* and later in its successor *NNF News* 1998-2001. The latter was edited by the *Nordic Network of Folklore*, NNF, which existed in the years 1998-2002. Since then, there have been no folkloristic cooperating committees in the Nordic countries.

This book concentrates on four fields of research in which folkloristic perspectives have been of decisive importance:

- 1 *small narratives* considered in a social context in studies of cultural encounters, cultural conflicts, inequality of social, economic or national power, emotional crisis situations and the imprinting of norms;
- 2 *rituals* of various kinds such as those that are characterised by continuity, rituals that disappear over time (regression), those that reappear after a period of decline (revitalisation) or that are adapted to modern times (acclimatisation), new rituals (innovations), the use of rituals among ethnic minorities, and, finally, national rituals in contexts associated with the Norwegian-Swedish border;
- 3 *beliefs* that are connected with oral narratives and rituals, encounters between traditional folk beliefs and revivalist movements, beliefs connected with after-life existence;
- 4 *folklore and materiality*. This field of research includes beliefs manifest in folk-life art, pictorial symbols and inscriptions on older grave memorials as well as on grave memorials from our own times. Studies of grave memorials also address an actual issue of cultural heritage and protection of churchyards for the future.



# 1 Small narratives in a social context

Small narratives or micro-narratives are local stories based on personal experiences, which can be juxtaposed to grand narratives that deal with a macro level and are more or less collective (Marander-Eklund 2013, Ljungström 2015).

## 1 Power-related contrasts in small narratives

### 1 Summer visitors and local population

On the west coast of Sweden, summer holiday visitors from towns have long gone out to coastal localities. Contact with the summer visitors was a new experience for local residents starting from the 1880's. When visitors rented an accommodation in the house in which the landlady lived, preconditions for contacts between these women and summer guests were established.



*1. Landlords and summer lodgers arranged together simple social gatherings during the summer. They might gather on house steps, as here in the house of a fisherman on Kåringön in 1921. The picture shows that even on such occasions the local people and summer guests kept a certain distance from each other. The local residents in their black dress arranged themselves on one side of the steps, while the lodgers, in light-colored attire, sat on the other side. A local couple, similarly dressed in dark colors, stands next to the steps. Photo privately owned.*

Within the Cattegat-Skagerrak project in the 1980s, I examined the behavioural patterns of these two population categories, showing differences in their cultural, economic and social backgrounds (Gustavsson 2013). The diverse backgrounds of local residents and summer visitors may create the basis for conflicts. Moreover, latent displeasure may have existed under the surface. I examined how oral narratives critical of the opposite party reflected such contacts.

Emphasis on marking social inferiority among the resident population was perpetuated. The best and most spacious rooms in the main house were reserved for renting by summer visitors until the 1940s. In addition, local residents took careful precautions not to disturb their lodgers in the mornings, in spite of the fact that the daily rhythm of fishing population was completely different and necessitated their early rising. Subordinate behaviour was carefully impressed in the younger generation by older residents. Parents instructed their young sons that they should lift their caps and bow when they met summer visitors.

In cases when the residents' behaviour was marked by the demonstration of their inferiority, one can wonder whether it could imply a kind of latent criticism of summer visitors. How could this be channelled if one neither saw any opportunity for



*2. Summer visitors often passed their time walking around observing at close hand how local people performed the arduous task of processing fish. The picture was taken on Mollösund in the beginning of the twentieth century. Summer lodgers often photographed the work life of the local residents. Photo Vikarvet Museum, Lysekil.*

expressing criticism openly nor dared to do so? You did not want to risk losing the earnings from letting the rooms out.

In sources dated before 1940, there are no traces of any latent discontent, but oral accounts critical of summer visitors that were exchanged among local families, however, provide insight into dissatisfaction that was experienced internally as well as self confidence, even occupational pride felt by local people. Narratives from the early 1900s focused on negative qualities of summer visitors, such as their indolence, stupidity, pride, and ignorance about fishing. Their laziness was contrasted with the diligence and hard work of local people during summer. This was the time of year when the local residents were at their very busiest, and they internally made fun of the ignorance and indolent behavior of their summer visitors. When elderly men were hired to go out on fishing expeditions with summer guests, they purposely went out to sites where they knew there was no fish. In this way summer visitors were hoodwinked while local fishermen avoided having to land fish for the visitors.

Local young people ridiculed the white attire worn by summer residents. “We thought their hats, their white trousers and walking sticks that they swung about were so funny. We giggled and thought they looked really silly in their clothes”, a woman born in 1914 observed.

It is obvious that there was a latent protest among the permanent residents against the social and economic superiority of their summer guests; one can also feel the protest against the necessity to show these guests so much consideration. Summer visi-



3. Summer visitors on an islet outside the fishing village of Kåringön in 1896. Photo privately own.

tors complained openly if they were dissatisfied, while local residents felt forced to keep their criticism to themselves. Accounts about such matters, told exclusively among like-minded individuals, served to modify the local residents' sense of social inferiority. At the same time, the feeling of internal solidarity was reinforced since positive qualities of the local people were thus indirectly accentuated.

Another manifestation of self-assurance or internal pride was reflected, as far back as the early 1900s, in narratives testifying that local residents disassociated themselves from the customs and behaviour of summer visitors. A man born in 1890 in the fishing village of Bohus-Björkö stated that in his young years the local residents of his community "thought it embarrassing to imitate the gentle people". When summer visitors began wearing shorts in the 1930s, the residents of Fiskebäckskil joked among themselves saying that summer guests "were dirty about their knees".

An increasing amount of recreational fishing in local waters was being carried on by summer visitors in their own boats during the 1960s and 1970s. This was increasingly regarded by local residents as being a threat to their own fishing. As a field researcher, you often heard statements to the effect that these fishermen from outside "are taking the food out of our mouths". Many permanent residents took a particularly negative attitude toward ex-villagers. These were viewed as being a special menace since they possessed greater experience than other summer visitors and had more knowledge about fishing spots from having fished before. Dissatisfaction was directed against summer residents who had begun to set out nets. By doing so, they could catch more fish than they needed for their personal use and the surplus gave them an extra source of income by their being able to market it in the towns and to other summer visitors. In situations of increasing competition regarding the fishing waters, oral accounts critical of these non-local fishermen arose and were repeated from one local resident to another. The stories centred on how these summer visitors supposedly had sold their surplus catch for "black money" i.e., unreported, and hence untaxed, income. By forwarding accounts like these against a conflicting party, who was regarded as being a direct threat to their chances of making a living, local residents could actually strengthen their own selfconfidence. At the same time they demonstrated the unevenness of the struggle they had been waging. The dishonesty of the summer visitors toward the State was depicted in stark contrast to the honesty of the fishing populace, who had paid taxes on all the fish any of them had caught.

In summing up, the surveyed narratives express an undercurrent of critical feelings. The narratives take on an active and upwardly-directed function within a social and economic hierarchy in reinforcing internal solidarity and reducing a feeling of social inferiority.

## 2 On customs officials at the Swedish-Norwegian border

In the research project from the 1990s “Cultural meetings of the border”, the focus was on national border relations in the late 19th century and the 20th century at the most southern part of the Swedish-Norwegian border (Gustavsson 1999). The State represents the authorities that make sure that the border is respected by local inhabitants and travellers who cross the border. The representatives of the State include customs officials who control the border crossings. The State power is interested in controlling and regulating the contacts at border crossings, while borderers and travellers have their own social and economic interests - to be able to cross the border easily.



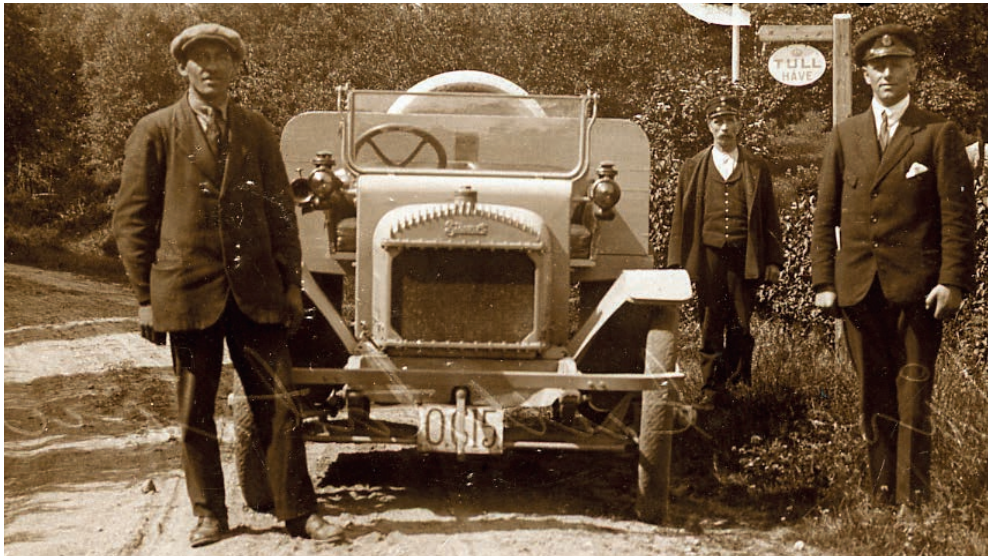
4. A Swedish, to the left, and a Norwegian, to the right, customs officials standing in front of the Swedish-Norwegian border bar at the frontier station Vassbotten in the 1960s. Photo Bohuslän Museum, number 53 671:16.

The customs officials were to observe and take measures against crimes such as smuggling and illegal border crossings. Families of customs officials formed a social contact network between themselves that stretched across the border. The customs officials were seen as outsiders in their respective local surroundings since they were the controlling authority of the State. They were, to a large extent, excluded from local

social communities near the national border. To be able to carry out their job, the customs officials on both sides of the border needed to stay in touch with each other. The solidarity between their families, as well as their special status among the borderers were strengthened by the fact that this profession was, to a large extent, passed on within the same family for generations.

Contacts between customs officials were facilitated when the telephone came. As customs officials could hardly count on any reporting help from the local population, since everybody felt controlled and wanted as much freedom as possible in the contacts across the border, they tipped each other about suspicious individuals. Here the oral narratives enter the picture. The narratives from the time of the Norwegian alcohol ban 1916-1927 collected for our research project relate what incidents were observed and what interventions were made against smuggling from Sweden to Norway (Gustavsson 1998).

Since customs officials have a duty to control people's ways of life and take measures against revealed or suspected breaches of the law, they are easily subjected to critical narratives or songs. These could describe how easily they were fooled when people smuggled or produced liquor in their homes for distribution across the border. Moreover, the smuggling of alcohol was not regarded as something negative by many borderers. It had for a long period of time been so common in the border areas that it was viewed rather as a common right and a way of manifesting oneself against the control of authorities. Smugglers regarded as law-breakers in the eyes of the State,



5. Two customs officers, on the right hand side of the newly bought car, at the customs office at Håve in 1921. Photo Strömstad Museum 927.

could be more positively viewed by the borderers and even seen as some sort of heroes who had succeeded in escaping the control and sanctions of the State. The testimonies to the police and the court during the Norwegian alcohol ban 1916-1927 show that secret oral narratives played an important role in the circles of smugglers. Thus, smugglers informed each other where liquor was found and could be procured and how one could avoid confronting the customs authorities. One meeting point for this type of oral communication and transactions was the Grand Hotel in the Swedish border town of Strömstad, which was locally named the “liquor hotel”.

Svante Söder, a handicapped shoemaker born in 1887 on the Swedish side of the border, was in 1927 sentenced and arrested for illicit distilling during the Norwegian alcohol ban. He composed satirical songs about the customs officers, and these were spread within the circle of people he associated with (Wigström 1993).

The life of customs officials was, according to this folklore, far from irreproachable. A named customs officer was said to have regularly visited those engaged in illicit distilling and accepted a drink when being offered it. The narrative demonstrates that the representatives of the authorities did not live by the laws they were set to supervise. Otherwise they should have avoided drinking the illicitly distilled or confiscated alcohol. After the death of the mentioned customs officer Svante Söder wrote the following:



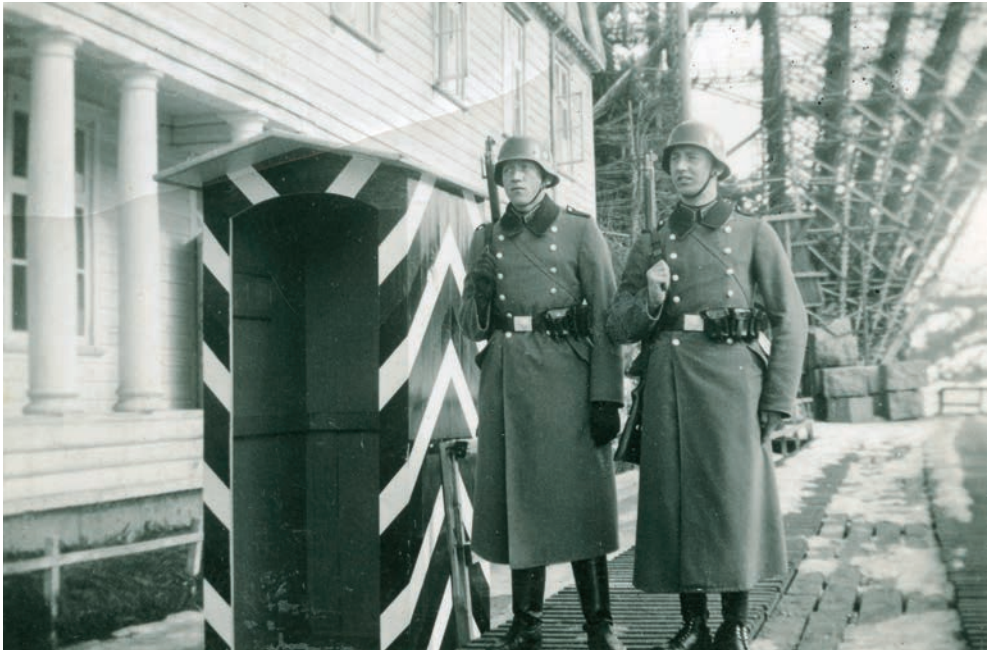
6. Ten litre cans and bottles of spirits were confiscated at the customs house in Strömstad in the beginning of the 1920s. Photo Strömstad Museum D 632.

Now he sits in Valhalla and drinks mead from a horn  
 well weaker than the aquavit made from our Swedish barley  
 and not as good as that distilled at the Norwegian border customs  
 and not as strong as the export liquor from Hamburg or from Hull.

During the Second World War when the border was closed by the Nazis in Norway, there was smuggling of alcohol in the opposite direction - from Norway to Sweden. The customs officers made particular efforts to get hold of the illegal liquor that was smuggled from Norway to Sweden, since it was mostly German soldiers who delivered it, often to Swedish soldiers. A Swedish inhabitant of the border region said, "The customs officers were not looking for refugees, they were mostly interested in smuggled spirits". However, this was no easy task. Cheating the customs was an old ideal that still lived on during the war despite rigorous control.

In the poem "Muckskiva" (Demob party) from 1944, the shoemaker Svante Söder related about the Swedish soldiers stationed at the border:

But they have smuggled Norwegian aquavit from the border  
 both Andersson, Pettersson, Hansen and Jensen  
 they ran into woods as a deer takes a run



7. A German border post by the Norwegian ferry at Svinesund in 1940. Photo Bohuslän Museum.



and slipped away from both Klöver (customs officer) and Mats (customs officer) (Söder 2003: 141).

The critical narratives directed against the customs officials may counteract the feeling of inferiority and inability of the local people to influence their own situation. Such narratives act as a form of safety-valves which are necessary in order to put up with a situation one is not satisfied with, and when one hesitates to express criticism openly as that might lead to retributions. What one can easily do in such situations is to be outspoken within the circle where one experiences solidarity and thereby security.

### 3 Acceptance of technical novelties: social aspects of cycling in Norway and Sweden

Many technical innovations were introduced during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. I have studied responses to the appearance of the first bicycles in Sweden and Norway as well as later developments related to cycling up to the mid-twentieth century. The source material is found in the Norwegian and Swedish folklore archives (Gustavsson 2014b).

The earliest design of the bicycle was called *velocipede*. Among ordinary people it was named “High wheel” because the front wheel was significantly higher than the small rear wheel. The rider sat on top of the higher wheel that had two pedals spun with the wheel. This type of velocipede enjoyed some popularity in Norway and Sweden during the late 1800s. The history of the velocipede was short and can be seen as the initial phase of cycling. Bicycles began to appear around 1900.

Velocipedes were especially popular among the higher social strata people. A man born in 1867 in Gothenburg reported that in his childhood, in the 1870s, velocipedes began to appear, and they were owned by sons of upper-class families. Similar data exist from Norway. Owners of a velocipede gladly displayed their vehicles which attracted many astonished spectators.

When people became more accustomed to seeing a velocipede, humorous jokes about cyclists emerged. A man who studied at Trondheim University in Norway acquired a velocipede to get home more easily. His comrades shouted out asking him how high the temperature on the high wheel was (Østfold County, Norway).

Due to the high cost of a bicycle, the first owners of bicycles were well-to-do people in both areas: rural and urban. To memorize this special purchase, owners of the first bicycles went to a photographer’s studio to take a picture of them with their bicycle. This helped to emphasize social contrasts when not everyone could afford to acquire such a new invention as a bicycle.

In the early 1900s in both countries, Norway and Sweden, it took several months



8. Alban Thorburn (1862-1933) from Uddevalla cycled across Europe on his velocipede in the 1880s. Here he was photographed in a studio in Genoa before arriving in Rome in 1884. Photo Bohuslän Museum, private archives. No. 139, Uddevalla.

of work to earn enough for a bicycle. The bicycle was in any case an advantageous purchase because it had a practical value as well as a high social status. In a northern Norwegian district, the parish organist was the first to acquire a bicycle around 1900. He rode it back and forth on the road after church services for the sake of public display according to an informant born in 1888 at Troms County, Norway. This helped to accentuate social contrasts when not everyone could afford to acquire a bicycle.

Elderly people did not like the fact that the horses were frightened by earlier velocipedes and bicycles. These were the first vehicles that moved faster than horses. So, the term “run-away machine” was coined, a man born in 1907, Rogaland County, Norway, stated. Sometimes bicycle wheels were compared to spinning wheels (Halland Province, Sweden).

In addition to horses, many people were also scared. Children would run away and hide themselves, when seeing cyclists. The older people could perceive the first velocipedes and bicycles as a danger of supernatural character and associate them with the devil. A Swedish woman, born in 1833, saw a man on a summer day in the 1880s riding a velocipede at a high speed down a hill. She was absolutely terrified and thought that the devil himself had come rushing on the road. In small narratives, this technical novelty could be also considered as a sign foretelling the end of this world.



9. Cyclists in a photographer's studio around 1900. Photo The Nordic Museum, Stockholm 0023339.

A Norwegian informant reported that a woman living on an island in northern Norway was so scared when she saw a bicycle for the first time that she sat down on the roadside, exclaiming that this meant the end of the world (Nordland County, Norway).



10. A man and a woman cycling in Oslo in 1922. Photographer Anders Beer Wilse. Photo Norwegian Folk Museum, Oslo.no NF. Wb 15700.

Envy to bicycle owners could be expressed through negative comments. Thus, a young Norwegian man who bought a new bicycle with his own money was so happy about this that he wanted to display his vehicle to other people. However, not always did he get positive comments from his environment. One neighbour who saw the new bicycle said: “Well, well, there must be an old woman chasing you”. The bicycle owner was deeply upset by this remark (Rogaland County, Norway).

Jealousy among neighbours could at worst lead to damages done to bicycles such as letting the air out of the tyres, or even worse to harming them. Some young men were really rough on other’s bicycles.

Balance is important in cycling. It was something that no one had learnt previous to the introduction of the cycle. It was especially difficult to learn riding a velocipede with its high front wheel. In Norway it was called “Veltepetter” (Peter Tip-over). People were ashamed when a tumble was mentioned by those who had experienced this personally. A man born in 1916 in Oslo said: “I did not tell anyone about my fall then and I have not done it later. I was ashamed about what had happened”.

Women’s bicycles came somewhat later than men’s bikes, but they were not uncommon in the 1920s in Norway and Sweden. Young women could loudly demonstrate their jealousy towards other young women who had got their own bicycle (Østfold County, Norway). Also, stories were told about skirts being tied together and pulled up with the help of a belt when riding a bike (Rogaland County, Norway).

## 2 Power relations and group norm setting in small narratives

### 1 Local revivalist clergymen and upholding of norms

In the preindustrial Swedish society, the State church to a great extent, formed the norms for the daily life. On the local level, the priest had to control if these norms were observed. As the priest could not keep track of everything that happened in the parish, he depended on informal information nets. This applies, for instance, to the situation on the fishing island of Kåringön in Bohuslän during the period from 1849 to 1900 where Laurents Olof August Simson was known as a dominating priest (Gustavsson 1979a). The oral tradition tells how he surrounded himself with “gossipmongers” who reported what happened in the village. This informal report system was said to have been mainly



11. A lady's bicycle in the early twentieth century. Photo The Nordic Museum, Stockholm.

sustained by women, who were called “old gossipers” or “the parson’s old women”. They quickly reported to the parson if they found any other parishioners departing from his directives. Thus, a man born in 1917 stated that “the parson had a number of persons, mostly women, who tattled to him. He readily listened to their gossip and then he admonished the persons in question. My father said that such and such ‘came to the parson’s ears’”.

The parson was also said to have encouraged these women to check if the fishermen took brandy with them on board a ship in the harbour. Those caught in some transgression were reprimanded by the parson. In church, he might reproach individual parishioners from the pulpit for their transgressions – an approach which other contemporary clergymen in western Sweden were reported to practise as well. This was an event of public disgrace, and parishioners feared to fall victim to public reproach. In addition to public reprimands, the oral narratives present several examples of how parishioners were called to the parsonage in order to receive further chastisement. This form of private reproof was reported particularly dreaded by the parishioners. No one among fishermen dared to fail to respond to a summons to appear at the parsonage.



12. Kåringön ca 1890. Mostly women and children were to be found in the fishing vil-lages during the summer, when all the able-bodied men were out at sea for lengthy periods of time. The photographer was the resort physician in Lysekil, Carl Curman (1833-1913). Photo The Nordic Museum, Stockholm.

This type of report system with consequential reprimands from the priest is not specifically unique for Kåringön. It is also observed in several other areas of western Sweden. Thus, it was said that during the 1920s in Bro parish in Bohuslän “the old gossipmongers ran to the parson and told him everything they knew, especially if someone had done something wrong”. The priest could summon suspects to questionings and give reprimands insisting on a change in their way of life.

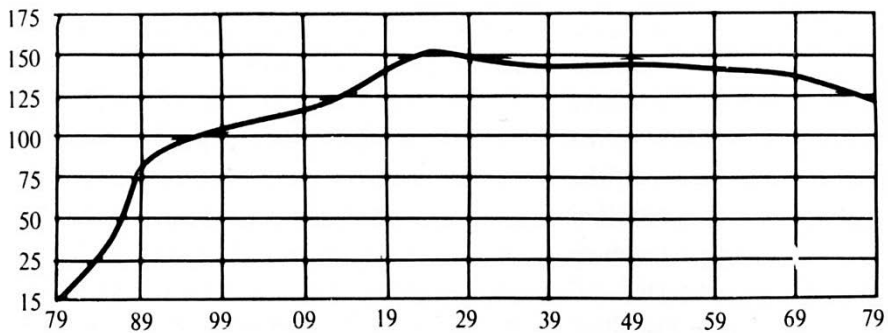
## 2 Norm related narratives in a Swedish Mission Congregation

### *Norm regulations*

Power relations in the local community tend to use people’s narratives about other people to sustain prevailing norm systems. In such cases a type of *report system* may be created. When loyal individuals report violations of group norms, authorities can take measures against offences.

The mission congregations that were established in Sweden during the later half of the nineteenth century were characterized by a set of fixed norms working within a relevant group. These norms governed the conduct of mission members and were formulated in rather general terms, a type of regulations. Thus, in the congregations of the Swedish Mission Society (SMF), founded in 1878, it was the responsibility of the board to interpret the norms and to see if they were observed. In cases of norm violations, the highest authority that applied sanctions was, according to the example in the New Testament, Matthew 18: 15-17, meetings of the congregation. These meetings were generally held once a month, and only members of the congregation were allowed to attend them. The minutes from these meetings can therefore provide insight into how the congregation scrutinized the daily life of its members; these minutes also contain discussions, inquiries and testimonies related to the alleged norm breaking cases committed by individual members. The question discussed at the meetings was whether such members should be considered guilty and in that case be subjected to the sanctions of the congregation, or whether they should receive absolution if they repented and asked for forgiveness of their wrongdoings (Gustavsson 2012: 179ff).

The aim of this section is to examine what steps the congregation took to uphold the group norms, taking as an example the minutes of a local mission congregation on the island of Smögen off the coast of Bohuslän, western Sweden. During the late 19th century and the early 20th century, fishing was the main means of livelihood there, and it was coupled with a considerable export of fish and a certain amount of shipping. This congregation was founded in 1879 and experienced a number of revivals in 1882 (54 new members), 1910 (28 new members) and 1919 (67 new members). The highest membership in the history of the congregation was recorded in



13. Membership of Smögen's mission congregation from 1879 to 1979. From *I Herrens tjänst* 1979.



14. Adults and children belonging to the SMF congregation on the island of Smögen on the fishing boat "Two Brothers" about 1920. Photo privately owned.

1927 (157). Since then the membership has varied between 125 and 140. The total population of Smögen during the 1910's and 1920's, when the mission congregation reached its zenith, was around 1500 (Hasslöf 1941).

The first regulations of the congregation were adopted in 1906 and partly revised in 1913 and 1926. The first permanent preacher was appointed in 1910, and from that time on the detailed minutes of discussions and decisions are available; they have



provided the material for the present study. My focus is on cases in which hints or accusations concerning norm breaking had been made against individual members.

The aim of the present analysis is to show how oral reports or rumours, to use the wording in the minutes, about group members functioned as a means of checking whether the norms governing the everyday life of the mission members were followed.

It is interesting to observe that oral accounts of this kind could be traced in the minutes. Both sides - those who had spread or heard the rumours and those who were accused of alleged breaches of the norms - were called before the board and the congregational meeting. Such meetings functioned as a kind of court within the congregation. After the first hearing of witnesses, in some cases, two representatives were sent to explore the situation by talking with the person suspected of offending against the norms. Then they presented a report before the accused was called in front of the congregation. If this person did not appear, he/she was more likely to be condemned than otherwise.

The regulations that were approved on January 26, 1913 stated that anyone who joined the congregation had to answer the question: "Will you, through the mercy of God, lead a Christian life in accordance with the Gospels?" (regulation of the congregation, section 1: 1). With regard to the members' ensuing life within the congregation, it is stated that they "should keep an eye on each other in accordance with God's word, should correct, give redress, help and forgive - to stir up one another to love and good works" (regulation of the congregation, section 4). Individual members of the congregation could take an instruction of this kind as a pretext for reporting any offences against the norms by other members, which they had either witnessed themselves or heard of from other members within the congregation. All this was similar to the way an informer system works. When such rumours became known to the leaders of the congregation, thorough inquiries were undertaken.

On February 21, 1917, the youth association of the mission congregation, founded in 1902, to which the majority of the members of the congregation belonged during the 1910's (for instance, 140 persons in 1919), formulated more detailed rules. They demanded a "seemly and respectful conduct", namely, under no circumstances should swearing occur or be tolerated; card-playing, consumption of intoxicating liquor or use of tobacco products in any form were forbidden to the members of this association. If norms were violated, the congregation had the right to "exclude any member that they found unfit to remain within the congregation" (section 4: 1).

In what follows I will mention some concrete cases which show how these instructions and rules were applied during the congregation's period of ascendancy in the 1920's and 1930's. In all these cases, the inquiries were initiated by rumours going around. The minutes mention the names of the accused, witnesses, members of the board and other members of the congregation who spoke during the discussions. In what follows the names are replaced by the letters A, B, C etc.

During the period when the membership expanded, there were special reasons for carefully safeguarding the norms and applying respective sanctions when the norms were violated. In a situation of this kind, sanctions could be really effective, in contrast to the situation in a period of decline when many members did not find it essential to remain in the congregation.

### *Alcohol consumption*

Among offences against the norms I firstly choose the consumption of alcohol since a member of a free church in Sweden was not allowed to touch this type of drink. When men spent their working lives out at sea and in foreign ports, they were exposed to many temptations through their contacts with people who lived according to other norms. It was difficult for the congregation to keep an eye on men's conduct when they were away from the local milieu. These men were therefore requested to get in touch with the congregation at regular intervals.

As an example, I present a matter that was thoroughly discussed and investigated by the congregation board from September 1922 to April 1923. A skipper, A, on a cargo boat was suspected of drunkenness in foreign ports and of having smuggled spirits to Iceland on his boat. On Iceland, alcohol consumption was prohibited since 1915. At the board meeting on September 10, 1922, the following rumour was mentioned: A "had smuggled spirits to Iceland this year and last year and had even consumed intoxicating liquor". One of the members of the board, B, was delegated to have a talk with A as soon as that person came home to Smögen. At the meeting on October 22, 1922, another board member related that A had admitted to him that he "had tasted a strong drink". In his report to the board from the meeting with A, B stated that the man was repentant, and on his advice the board suggested to the meeting of the congregation that A should be allowed to retain his membership.

The matter was raised again on March 18, 1923, "on account of some rumours that were spread by C (also a skipper)". Four male members of the congregation who were supposed to have heard these rumours through C were called before the board and had to give testimony which was carefully noted in the minutes. One of the witnesses stated that C had said that A "consumed intoxicating liquor", and as evidence of this he mentioned a telegram that he had received from him during his visit to Iceland in 1919, in which A said that he was enjoying himself and also named "various kinds of drinks he had". When the witnesses left the hall, the board decided that "for the good name of the congregation, it was necessary to hold an inquiry into whether there was any basis for the rumours that had been spread about". Two members of the board were to meet A and "hear what he had to say about these rumours". According to the report from these members, on March 28, 1923, A informed them that he had helped C to smuggle alcohol from the harbour in Fredrikshamn in Denmark to Iceland. He did not own any part of these strong drinks – they belonged to C who had also received the money for the drinks

that had been sold. However, A admitted that he had acted wrongly. As there were conflicting reports from A and C, the board decided to summon both of them. A did not come to the meeting on April 11, 1923, whereas C did and confessed that he and A had agreed upon smuggling spirits to Iceland. They bought herring with the obtained money, but they had not made any profit out of this business. The board referred this case to the meeting of the congregation, at which the both men, A and C, were expelled.

Rumours also circulated if alcohol was consumed by men in their home district. For example, the minutes from the youth association, dated September 21, 1917, mentioned “rumours that had been circulating for a long time” about D consuming strong drinks. Also, C was reported to “drink intoxicating liquor with D”, and a woman reported that E, an accountant, had seen D drinking. Another female member saw him in an inebriated condition. Yet another person said he had heard from another member of the congregation, whose name is given, that D consumed spirits. The pastor and a member of the board were delegated to visit D “to explore the real state of affairs”.

#### *Women's relationships with outsiders*

In rumours spread about women in the congregation, they were often accused of having an all too close relationship with men who were outsiders. One temptation for women was to take contact with male summer guests visiting the place. On September 21, 1917, a discussion was held in the youth association about “a rumour that had been going around, first, that F had been with and gone swimming with a German gentleman who had visited Smögen in summer, second, that she had spent a night with him and left him at four o'clock in the morning, jumping out of a window”. Two men were delegated to question her. At a later meeting, F denied “what she had been accused of”. The youth association accepted this answer and expressed regret that “such rumours should be spread about”.



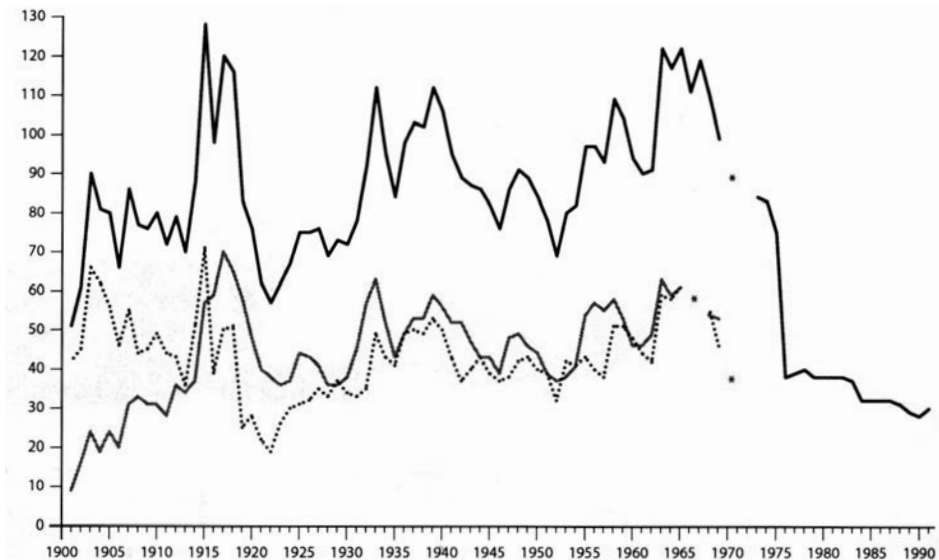
15. *The women of the Swedish Mission Society sewing group in 1894 on the island of Smögen making items for mission work while one of the older women reads from the prayer book. Photo privately owned.*

There was a similar case in 1928 when a woman, G, was excluded from the fellowship of the congregation for an indefinite period. This occurred even though she denied the charges of having had a forbidden connection with a man that she had, according to "a rumour ... been seen to visit ... in the evenings" (the board minutes from April 15, 1928, and the congregation meeting minutes from July 22, 1928).

### Summary

The problem facing the leaders of the congregation was to obtain a system of control that enabled to disclose cases of norm breaking. The rumours that arose and circulated among the members were fit to fulfil a function of such a system. It was then essential to conduct a thorough inquiry about the truth of statements which were passed from mouth to mouth. The purpose of inquiries was to ensure that suspected members could remain in the congregation.

Acquittal was possible either if the accused was found innocent or if he/she confessed the wrongdoings and asked for forgiveness. To expel members was the last resort if the guilty party did not show any repentance. No one who repented and begged for forgiveness was expelled. On that score, the congregation showed leniency in their judgment, which indicates that the system of control largely served to retain members in the congregation. At the same time, it was essential that inquiries, testimonies and discussions at the meetings about breaches of the norms should be kept in secret from outsiders. Any information about them might harm the reputation of the congregation



16. Members in the temperance lodge *The New Star* 1901-1991. — Number of members — Women ..... Men. \* No information.

in the community and thus diminish the possibilities of recruiting new members from outside. It remained difficult, however, to keep in secret the proceedings of the congregation meetings. Thus, “owing to circumstances that have occurred”, one such meeting on June 10, 1923 decided to “issue a statement that it is un-Christian and unworthy of a member of the congregation to reveal and discuss what goes on at private meetings as thereby the reputation of the congregation suffers harm”.

### 3 Narratives and norms in Swedish temperance societies

In Swedish temperance societies we observe a pattern for norm control which is similar to that of revival movements. Within a Nordic research project in the 1990s about alcohol and temperance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries I studied a local temperance lodge called *The New Star*, situated in western Sweden (Gustavsson 1992). It is part of the international temperance organization IOGT (International Order of Good Templars) and has been active since 1901 within an agri-



17. A group of members belonging to the lodge “The New Star” in Valla on a trip in the 1930s. Photo privately own.

cultural parish, Valla, on the island of Tjörn in the Bohuslän province. At the outset, there were more men than women in the society. But from 1916 the roles were reversed, and women have been in a majority ever since. Minutes have been preserved since the lodge foundation, and my study is based on minutes from the lodge meetings as well as on interviews.

The surveyed minutes record discussions about general issues, fundamental attitudes and clearly defined moral principles which must govern the everyday lives of the lodge members. These minutes evidence how the internal lodge discipline contributed to maintaining the moral principles, they also give an insight into relationships with the local community outside the lodge.

Total abstention from alcohol inevitably means intervening in another's way of life. It concerns something that members are forbidden to do. A great number of broken pledges according to the minutes show how difficult it has been to live up to the norm that was the very *raison d'être* of the temperance movement. The number of people expelled for breaking temperance pledges was significantly greater than those who left for non-payment of fees.

For its survival, it was essential that the lodge should also be associated with something that could be perceived as positive; hence the emphasis on fraternity, and the efforts to raise the level of education within the lodge. Fraternity was to be experienced not just at lodge meetings, but in everyday life. In Sweden, education, as well as fraternity, has been a crucial principle of the IOGT.

Entertainment is another positive activity to which the lodge has attached great importance, and theatre and games have played an important part at its meetings. In fact, some members joined the lodge to satisfy their need for social contacts. Joining for social reasons was especially common among young people during periods of growth, when one has particularly good opportunities to meet other young people.

When new members were admitted, they were carefully examined. Until the 1950s, a committee was appointed to interview every applicant for membership. This then reported to the lodge, and the applicant could be accepted or rejected in a secret ballot of lodge members. The committee was to impress on applicants what membership involved, in particular the lifelong pledge of abstinence, which meant more than simply not drinking alcohol; it was a promise "not to manufacture, buy, sell, use, provide other people, or let them be provided, with intoxicating beverages as stimulants, mealtime beverages or social drinks".

The lodge strove to gain knowledge of the members' possible breaches of the given promise of abstinence among its members. It was via oral communication, or sometimes through letters from other members, that the board learned about members who had broken their temperance pledge. The minutes usually refer to a breach of article two of the IOGT constitution, whereby a member should "set

a good example through total abstention, create healthy habits of life in society, and prepare the way for an alcohol-free culture". There was a kind of informer system among the lodge members, similar to that in free church congregations. A prominent man within the lodge stated on the 25 May 1919 that "the members of the lodge immediately report breaches of the promise as soon as they found out about it". This was in the year when 30 members were expelled from the lodge.

Local people outside the temperance lodge tried to persuade lodge members to drink alcohol, for example at dances. They were also willing to report breaches of the promise, when a member had indulged in the forbidden drinking. The locals had other reasons for this than the lodge members as they wanted to counteract the lodge and its norms. "They were extremely pleased to coax a Good Templar member into drinking a glass of wine", declared one male member, born in 1917, who had been a member of the lodge since 1928. This shows how difficult it was for members of the lodge to keep their temperance pledge in their encounters with the surrounding society, especially at public festivals. Non-members tended to associate festivals with alcohol. A woman born in 1908, who had been a member of the lodge since 1923 reported, "there was always somebody who told tales saying that so-and-so was drunk at a party". In the minutes from the meeting on 8 January 1950, it was stated: "there is a rumour going around that some members appear to have broken their temperance pledge".

Similar stories of the lodge members being criticised by people in the surrounding society for breaking their vows occur in other parts of Sweden as well – in particular in places where the temperance movement was prominent. In some cases, people in the neighbourhood, referring to the moderation ideas rooted in German and Lutheran tradition, actively tried to persuade those who had become teetotallers to go back to moderate social drinking of alcohol (Alkohol 1987). As a member of the lodge, an informant from Älghult in Småland, born in 1876, experienced this, "It was exceedingly difficult to keep your abstinence vows, because wherever you went, you were offered spirits. In particular, people wanted to urge into drinking again those who were members of the lodge" (LUF M 12 427: 6). Market days were a trial for those who had recently joined the Good Templars. A manifest discrepancy between abstinence vows and daily life reality could tarnish the reputation of the lodge members and the lodge itself. People took a particular interest in gossiping about persons who previously drank a lot and were unable to abstain from alcohol after joining the Temperance Lodge. Such cases just confirmed the idea that a person could not be changed, and previous habits could not be abandoned through the principles, vows and social life of the lodge. There are plenty of stories about such matters in folklore archives (Gustavsson 1996: 179f).

As soon as an oral or written accusation of a broken pledge reached the attention of the board in the Valla lodge, a committee was appointed to visit the suspect. The committee, which consisted of both men and women, would ask the

accused whether he (mostly men) had committed the alleged breach, and whether he repented and wished to amend his ways. Occasionally, the committee relieved the person of all suspicion; sometimes the suspect denied the charge. There were also cases where members asked for permission to leave the lodge, but the lodge condemned them to expulsion for breaking their pledge. The minutes show that there were sometimes differing views, in the discussions and in the ballots, about how a suspect should be treated. A considerable number of the accused were expelled, more men than women. In the first ten years of the lodge, it was almost exclusively men who were expelled. On 20 August 1916, 16 men and two women were expelled; a week later, four men followed. On 20 April 1919, 17 men and one woman were expelled. Since 1920, women have only occasionally been expelled for broken pledges. For the reputation of the lodge and its survival as a society with idealistic, moral principles, it was essential that members whose behaviour did not match expectation were expelled. A person expelled for a broken pledge had the chance to apply for readmission, but only a few were allowed to rejoin. The highest number of readmitted members in one year was six in 1919, when 30 members were expelled.

### 3 Narratives related to struggle for local power

#### 1 Narratives about a parson and his parishioners

The data from the fieldwork in Bohuslän in west Sweden has revealed antagonism between the coastal fishing and shipping villages, as well as between the coastal villages and nearby inland areas dominated by farming. This hostility was manifest in derogatory epithets used by members of these communities in reference to each other. Thus, the fishing population spoke about farmers as dirty people smelling of manure. The farmers, on the other hand, spoke of the inhabitants of the fishing villages as smelling of fish. This was observable until the 1950s, before a severe decline in fishing and shipping in this part of Sweden.

Such derogatory epithets could be used jokingly when fishing and shipping people met at sea or in foreign harbours, but also in a clearly offensive way. Discrediting names were used to emphasise the existing antagonism. Plausible reasons for such hostility between inhabitants of different coastal villages could be competition when fishing in common waters and selling the fish on the same market. Such rivalry was most likely strengthened by the fact that the crews of the boats from Bohuslän were hardly recruited from outside the local community (Hasslöf 1949). Moreover, the places for finding marriage partners was usually quite limited to the local area, which meant that there were no strong family bonds with inhabitants of other coastal villages.



Rivalry at the festivities of the young people was mainly about girls. Similar competition about girls occurred between the youngsters of the farming and fishing communities. Otherwise, antagonism between fishing communities and farmers was mainly caused by economical factors. Sometimes, envy on the part of farmers aroused, since fishermen and seamen earned more money for less work. The farmers could not but see that the fishing population could dress nicely and take weekends and evenings off, whereas the farmers were always bound to looking after their domestic animals.

The purpose of this section is to highlight how antagonism between the neighbouring communities is reflected in oral narratives told by people from different communities and of different professions and occupations. To interpret these narratives adequately, one should understand how fundamental values in people's views of the surrounding world contextualized the content of various versions of oral accounts. In the context of social antagonism, rivalry could cause debasing and mocking others, but it could also boost one's own prestige.

With this in mind, I intend to analyse the narratives told by outsiders about the inhabitants of the fishing village on the island of Kåringön and their relation to the



18. The parson Simson wearing the insignia of the royal Order of Vasa together with islanders of Kåringön during the visit of King Oscar II on the island in 1889. Photo Aron Jonasson, Bernadotte archives in the Royal Palace, Stockholm.

allegedly dictatorial ways of the clergyman Laurents Olof August Simson, who officiated in the community for just over fifty years, from 1849 to 1900. Only some of these stories could be stated as having been told in neighbouring fishing villages, shipping communities or farming areas, but not on Kåringön itself. It is not certain whether these stories were known on Kåringön or whether their telling was withheld there. In the latter case, the reason might have been a conscious effort to maintain the prestige of the village.

The point of the stories was that they presented the islanders of Kåringön as submissive, or even simple-minded people who let themselves be completely governed by their clergyman. When the fishing population of the surrounding communities met in the evenings, they would talk about the islanders of Kåringön as people who did not dare do anything without the permission of their parson.

One story of this type was about a deceased woman; while waiting for the burial, she was preserved in salt in a large vat that was normally used for salting fish. This woman had been ill for a while before the parson went away on his annual summer visit to a health resort in the summer. He was said to have expressed a particular wish beforehand that he, and nobody else, should conduct the funeral service over this woman when she died. It was known that he held her in high regard and that she belonged to one of the families on the island who had the closest relationship with the parson. Only a few days after the parson had left, the woman died. Her relatives were worried about the funeral since they did not dare act against the will of the parson. Then, one of the fishermen had an idea, “to keep her, we could put her in brine in a salting vat” (informant born in 1900).

When the parson came back, he was sorry that he had not had the chance to hold her funeral service, but some of the fishermen told him to go to a certain boathouse where “she is pickled in the big vat” (informant born in 1940). According to some versions, they added “and there she lies as white and beautiful as ever”. A farmer from the inland, born in 1893, had heard that the woman had been all crooked when they got her out of the pickling vat and that it was next impossible to straighten her.

When I spoke of this story on the island of Kåringön in the 1970s, the islanders denied any knowledge of the event. An old fisherman uttered in a reproachful tone, “Surely, you are not writing fairy tales”. Even among informants who had a critical view of the clergyman, one could observe this kind of dismissive behaviour – either as the result of conscious censoring or because of the lack of knowledge about the event. The reticence of the islanders can be explained by the fact that the sting of the stories was not directed against the parson but against the submissiveness of the inhabitants of Kåringön. A female summer resident, who had stayed on Kåringön every summer since the 1950s, remarked that she had never heard this story told by people from Kåringön; she heard it from a skipper, born in 1903, from the neighbouring shipping community Hälleviksstrand. He used to ferry her family to the island of Kåringön.

Are there any real facts behind this story? In the register of the deaths and funerals of Kåringön, it can be seen that during the parson Simson's days the period between day of death and day of funeral only exceeded two weeks in a couple of cases. Usually it was less than ten days. In one of the cases, it was a fisherman's wife who died in the 1880s, the date was 17 July; she was subsequently buried 15 August, that is to say after a period of 29 days. Her husband was among the parishioners who had a close relationship to the parson. He was one of the persons who, according to the instructions of the parson, frequently officiated as godfather at christenings. Over a long period, this fisherman was active within the church and on the school board, of which the parson was the chairman. In the will of the parson, this fisherman was mentioned together with eight other men as "my dear friends".

According to the diary left by the parson, he returned on Monday the 9 August from the health resort and the woman was buried the following Sunday. On 15 August, the parson noted, "Burial sermon for NN, four o'clock" and "her body was today interred for eternal rest". It is mentioned that the deceased woman had "a long drawn-out serious illness", which is in line with the accounts in the narratives. To begin with, at the time of the event, it might not have been regarded as embarrassing for the islanders, rather just as a natural remedy to preserve the corpse from decay. However, in the surrounding coastal communities, this course of action was considered peculiar and thus became a fitting example of the islanders' weird behaviour. By telling this story, it was possible to give vent to the antagonism, which was kept more or less under the surface, and to make fun of the inhabitants of Kåringön. In such a context, the event became embarrassing for the islanders which could have well contributed to the censorship of the accounts and suppression of storytelling. Thus, the narrative has only survived in the neighbouring communities. With this early censoring, it is understandable why the generation of informants on Kåringön whom I met during the 1970s and 1980s never had heard of the event. The denials are not necessarily the result of conscious censoring. For example, a pilot on the island said that he only heard hints of the event late in life from outsiders; he had never heard the story in his youth.

Another kind of story circulating in the neighbouring communities was about the parson Simson's sexual relationships with the female population of the island of Kåringön. Here, we see a difference in stories about illegitimate children of the parson and the stories of his bathing in the nude together with young women, which were mentioned by some critical inhabitants of Kåringön. According to these accounts, such intimate relationships only referred to a few women in the parson's nearest circle.

In the neighbouring communities, on the other hand, such tales claimed that the parson had intimate relationships with all the women of the island. Such stories would have been humiliating for the islanders. If most of the women on the island were so

submissive that they let the parson take advantage of them sexually, it would have been a shame for the islanders, rather than the parson. Thus, this version only suited the surrounding neighbours, not the inhabitants of Kåringön.

Such stories with the purpose of portraying the islanders of Kåringön in a less favourable light can be exemplified by the account of a female informant, born 1913, from a neighbouring community. Her father (1870-1949) was a builder, constructing houses on Kåringön in the days of the parson. He had heard several people from his home village say that the parson held the morning prayers at the parsonage naked. The participants largely consisted of women, since the men were mostly out fishing or on cargo ships. However, this informant maintained "Father always said this was a lie, he had taken part himself and seen that the parson was fully dressed" on these occasions.

In the neighbouring coastal communities and farming areas, but not among the islanders of Kåringön themselves, there was a belief that the parson Simson had the right to the first sexual intercourse with the women of the island after their engagement or during the wedding night. It was told that the parson was the biological father of the first-born child in every marriage on the island. Such ideas must have contributed to making a laughing-stock of the islanders of Kåringön, and narratives on these matters seem to agree with the above-discussed spirit of antagonism or rivalry among the neighbouring coastal communities.

In this context, the accounts told by inhabitants of Kåringön concerning the endeavours of the parson to influence the islanders' choice of marriage partner should be mentioned. Informants with a positive attitude towards the parson considered this practice as an attempt of the parson to counteract inbreeding or to help all women to find somebody to marry and thus be provided for, even those who were ugly or who were widows. By contrast, people with a more negative attitude to the parson, instead pointed out that it might have been a way for the parson to manifest his position of power. None of these informants, however, expressed the idea that the parson took sexual advantage of all the women, which was just what informants from the surrounding communities held to be the reason for his action. In their view, the parson aimed at preventing marriages in cases when he was the biological father to both the man and the woman.

It is worth mentioning here that there are three accounts from other parts of Sweden, all dated from the beginning of the twentieth century, about clergymen having the right to the first sexual intercourse with the bride. Thus, in 1900 a farmer from the county of Jämtland in northern Sweden stated, "the minister should open the womb" (ULMA 10 363). The fact that there are no later accounts of such view could imply that it was spread previously but dismissed later. The three informants were all born around the middle of the nineteenth century and were told about this matter by their parents or other older relatives (The Nordic Museum, Folklore section, ULMA 10 363, IFGH 3354). However, there were no references to any named clergymen in those narratives.

In older historical sources, this idea is termed “*jus primae noctis*” (right to the first night). It was not just associated with the clergy but also to other persons of power, largely to prominent landowners, who are said to have taken advantage of dependent women. The idea about an alleged right to the first night was ascribed to chiefs, priests, medicine men and shamans globally (Westermarck 1893: 84, Kohler 1883: 279 ff, Kjellström 1973: 172).

Similar accounts from Norway concerning a story that was told in the province of Sætedalen during the nineteenth century about a medieval parish clergyman should be mentioned here. He had “a particular right when there was a wedding, he should go to bed with the bride on the first night” (Skar 1909: 20, cf. Olaus Magnus 8: 31). Interestingly, in the nineteenth-century Norway such ideas were still known among country folk.

Among early legal historians, the German researcher J. Kohler (Kohler 1883: 279 ff) and the anthropologist Edvard Westermarck from Finland maintained that “*jus primae noctis*” was practiced in medieval Europe. The latter referred to examples from Russia (Westermarck 1893: 86, 1891: 78). The German legal historian Karl Schmidt, on the other hand, sought to disprove earlier ideas of such occurrences in his thesis *Jus Primae Noctis* (Schmidt 1881, 1884). Similarly, the German legal historian Adalbert Erler pointed out in 1973 that no actual instances have been found of when “*jus primae noctis*” was put into practice (Erler 1973: 498, cf. Schmidt-Bleibtreu 1988). The German legal and culture historian Jörg Wettlaufer regards this “right to the first night” as a symbol concept indicating social hierarchy and social conflicts (Wettlaufer 1999).

In this study, it is irrelevant whether “*jus primae noctis*” ever occurred in reality or not. The essential point is that stories about this were heard in the region of Kåringön and that they were a way of expressing antagonism between the neighbouring communities.

With all this summed up, it is important to interpret the oral narratives circulating in the neighbourhood of Kåringön in their social context. In cases when certain narratives with negative or derogatory connotations about a community and its inhabitants only appear in the surrounding communities, a most likely reason for this is that these narratives have an instrumental purpose for the respective storytellers. The pattern discerned in this study demonstrates that in such stories real facts are embroidered with additional details for the purpose of deriding the others and thus emphasising one’s own standing.

## 2 Evangelical National Missionary Society and Pentecostal movement in western Sweden

From the latter part of the nineteenth century onwards, various religious revival movements grew up in Sweden. Representing new ideologies, norms and ways of life, they

broke with earlier religious patterns. Conflicts arose between the new religious movements and the older ones. In many cases, the revival movements remained minorities. In other cases, they were able to grow stronger in the local milieu. In the Cattegatt-Skagerrak project in the 1980s I studied the rise of the Pentecostal movement on the island of Åstol in Bohuslän. Up until the time of the severe fishing crisis in 1968/69 the island was dominated by fishing. On Åstol, the Pentecostal congregation started in 1923, and during its first period it was a restricted minority.

In the 1980s the field work was done in collaboration with the folklore collection of The Nordic Museum in Stockholm and The Institute of European Ethnology in Gothenburg during which the informants were asked to provide information on older revival movements. Not only representatives of the Pentecostal congregation, called Elim, were studied, but also members of the congregation, namely the Evangelical National Missionary Society, abbr. EFS, founded in the beginning of the twentieth century.

During the big revival from January to March 1923, the number of EFS's members increased within a few weeks from around 50 to about 200, out of a population of 430 islanders (*Budbäraren* April 1, 1923). The majority of the families on Åstol were involved, to a greater or lesser degree. The meeting hall in the mission house could not hold the ever-growing number of visitors. The revival affected the men at least as much as it did the women.

This revival within EFS soon faced a serious competitor in the Pentecostal Movement. It first appeared in the summer of 1923 among a few young fishermen who came into contact with the proclamations of the Pentecostal Movement in some ports in England. The catches were landed in the English ports, chiefly Grimsby, and a small number of young fishermen, aged between 20 and 30, were promptly influenced by the Pentecostal teachings. Several of them began to speak in tongues and experienced spiritual baptism while out fishing. When they later witnessed in the EFS mission-hall, strong opposition arose from the somewhat older fishermen who were leaders in EFS. In many cases, these conflicts arose between the younger and middle-aged generations in the same family, between fathers and sons.

In addition to the demarcation lines between the generations, there were also marked ideological boundaries. This became quite obvious in discussions on the baptism of faith, speaking in tongues and spiritual baptism. After the external break with EFS the Pentecostals began to hold meetings in the home of a young fisherman's widow born in 1890. Several younger members of a number of families became the leaders during the early 1920s, and a congregation of 11 members was founded in the autumn of 1923. With the establishment of the new congregation an obvious competitive relationship between EFS and Elim developed. The ideological demarcation lines, the conflict of values, also gained the character of a conflict of interests.

The percentage of Pentecostals in the population on Åstol had risen between



19. Aerial photograph of Åstol taken in 1934. Photo The Nordic Museum, Stockholm.



20. Members of EFS on Åstol departing by boat to the mission house in the nearby town of Marstrand in 1925. Photo privately owned.

1924 and 1928 from 5 to 18 per cent. After the massive increase in 1928, there was soon a marked decline in the number of new recruits followed by the period of recession in the 1930s. The recession was reinforced during the 1940s when baptisms almost ceased (Gustavsson 2012: 106ff).



21. Fishermen from Åstol resting in the harbour at Grimsby, England, on a Sunday, around 1925. Photo privately owned.

Among the members of the EFS, who all belonged to the older generation, their critical oral accounts referred to the first generation of Pentecostalists, especially their leaders during the 1920s. These accounts reveal the antagonism characteristic of that time.

One category of negative accounts concerns differences in religious beliefs that the Pentecostalists stood for. These views were presented as preposterous or ridiculous. One example has to do with the idea that you become free from sin after conversion, which is also the belief that the Free Friends in Norway were accused of (see the next section). One EFS informant from Åstol born in 1896 told that during the first period Pentecostalists could often declare the following: “I haven’t sinned for 10 days”, at the same time referring to the Bible (First Epistle of John 3: 9). However, after the first revival period in the 1920s quite a number of Pentecostalists, even those who belonged to the first generation, disassociated themselves from this view. This resulted in the loss of the belief in freedom from sin – a development that should be seen in the light of the fact that the Pentecostalists were openly criticized when they were a minority in the island community.



Another conception prominent during the first period of the Pentecostal congregation, reported in the accounts of EFS members, was the belief in faith healing. There is evidence on effects of faith healing in contemporary sources of the Pentecostal Movement; thus, someone who presented himself “a member” wrote about



22. Pentecostals on Åstol outside their chapel one Sunday in the 1930s. Photo privately owned.

Åstol in the magazine of the Pentecostal Movement *Evangelii Härold* on January 22nd, 1925:

The sick have been healed. A brother who has suffered from a chronic illness for six years and sought medical help in vain has now been made whole by the Lord.

This belief, nevertheless, was also questioned by the Pentecostals as time passed. No doubt, the criticism from outsiders during the early days of the congregation contributed to this. At the same time, this belief lived on in folklore, as in the account from the 1920s by an EFS man born in 1892 about a Pentecostalist who suffered from

severe asthma. When this person joined the Pentecostal congregation and came out after the meeting, he declared that he had been healed in the chapel:

But a day or two later, I met him, and he complained about being sick as he was. He hung over a fence and said, "I think I'm dying. I can't breathe". That was how long that faith healing lasted.

Beliefs such as speaking in tongues and spiritual baptism also distinguished the Pentecostal congregation from EFS. At an early stage EFS members voiced a sharp criticism against that as at meetings in the Pentecostal Elim chapel people, speaking in tongues, carried on in an altogether too violent, unsuitable or indecent way. The parson at Rönning wrote in his official report in 1927 that "speakers in tongues aroused public ridicule. This also applies to the so-called 'spiritual baptism'" (Rönning Church records). Stories about what was going on at Pentecostal meetings, similar to the one below told by EFS spokesman born in 1892, began circulating in the island community:

They switched off the lights and they crawled round each other, all round each other, and they got up to all sorts of things. It's stupid to switch off the lights when I'm going to pray to God. People who lived near Elim never had any peace at night.

The people living around heard loud shouts inside the chapel; so, it was quite natural that in a situation of tension stories about this matter were easily woven. Such accounts strengthened antipathy towards the Pentecostals. That all this happened at the early stage is evident from the official report from 1927 by the parson in Rönning where the so-called "angel dance" is mentioned.

This consisted of the participants at the evening meetings taking off their clothes and wrapping themselves in sheets of cloth and jumping around. However, this came to a sudden end.

The criticism voiced by local people after the revivals in the 1920s contributed to the later modification of the noisy speaking in tongues and shouting out of prayers at meetings. Many of the later Pentecostals reported that they talked in tongues either in a low voice or in silence in God's presence. However, critical accounts about the earlier speaking in tongues and loud calling out of prayers did not die away as late as the 1980s when we performed our field work.

In contrast to EFS, in Elim, especially in its first period, much more importance was attached to "external things", as the informants put it. The particular emphasis on

the many and strict behavioural norms of the Pentecostals gave birth to critical accounts about the alleged covert breach of norms which many of the first generation of Pentecostals were supposed to be guilty of. Thus, men were reported to have taken snuff on the sly. One EFS informant born in 1892 told of a Pentecostal who warned others: “those who take snuff will go to Hell”. But some of those outside the congregation observed that this very person kept snuffboxes under his boat-house and often sneaked off there.

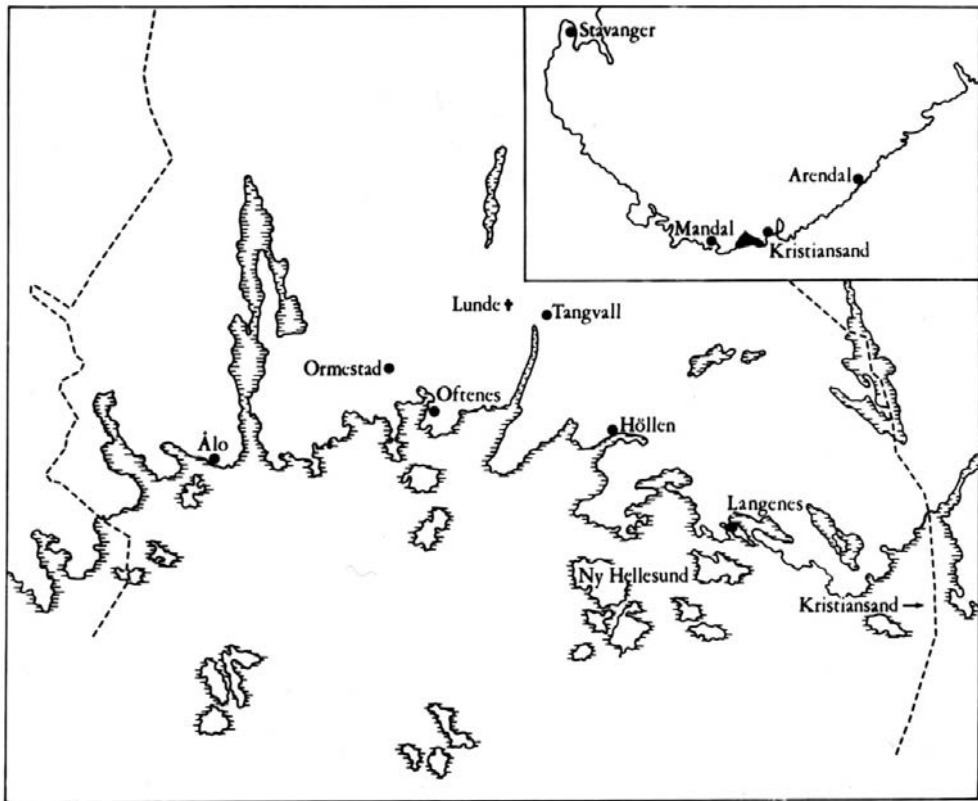
Other accounts were related to the cases of dishonesty that were detected among the early Pentecostals. For example, one of the leading men of the Elim congregation was said to have sold one of his fishing vessels in the 1920s to the neighbouring island of Dyrön without informing the buyer that the boat had once been already damaged. The informant born in 1896 pointed out: “This was treachery. It was dangerous that the buyer wasn’t told about this. The boat could have sunk with its crew and cargo, if it took on a bigger cargo than it could stand after the accident”. These accounts from the EFS members are from the 1920s and 1930s - the period when the Pentecostal congregation was in the minority position.

### 3 The Home Mission and the Free Friends in southern Norway

Within the interdisciplinary Cattedagat-Skagerrak project in the 1980s a field work was held in the municipality of Søgne some 20 kilometers west of Kristiansand in southern Norway. Søgne’s economy was based on agriculture, fishing and shipping, often combined within the same family.

Søgne has experienced a number of significant revival movements since the 1870s. The material on these movements collected during the field work was comprised of contemporary sources such as letters, diaries and photographs; the interviewees were chosen from members of various religious associations.

To begin with, a free-church group known as *the Free Friends* broke with the Norwegian State Church in the early twentieth century. In comparison with the inner-church movement, that is *Home Mission* dating its origin from the late 1800s, the Free Friends represented in Søgne a clearly minority position beginning with the late 1910s. This movement was prominent in the coastal regions of southern Norway (Slettan 1992, Seeland & Aagedal 2008). Important lines of demarcation between these two revival movements in Søgne included the ritual of blessing instead of baptism of children, belief in a baptism of faith in adulthood, spiritual baptism, speaking in tongues, and prophecy of the future among the Free Friends. Also, the older informants told that in their young years they experienced a lighter sense of Christianity among the Free Friends compared with the more serious atmosphere which they met in the Home Mission.



23. The Søgne coastal region in the southern part of Norway. The Free Friends were centered in Tangvall, with meeting houses in Høllen, Lunde and Ormestad. Drawing: Hanna Nerman, Lund.

The material analysed within the Cattedgatt-Skagerrak project has shown that stories told by the members of these religious groups about one another played an instrumental role in forming relations within the same local surroundings. What did the Free Friends think of the members of the Home Mission and how is it manifest in their stories? What, in turn, did the majority religious groups have to say about the Free Friends? These research questions were addressed within the project.

Hardly any farmers, fishermen or shipmasters attended the meetings of the Free Friends. Some of the interviewees from the more established social classes gave as their motivation for not attending these meetings the fact that the Free Friends were considered as to be “the underclass”. Moreover, the first members of the Free Friends were primarily women, and the interviews made it clear that these women belonged to the lowest social classes. Many of them were spinsters or widows with children to



24. *Anlaug Tangvall (1864-1950) outside her home around 1920. She was one of the very first women to join the Free Friends. A simple meeting room was arranged in her home in 1923. Photo privately owned.*

support. At the meetings, they were often warned against a lust for money or social climbing. Initially, men were hesitant or openly against joining this religious group.

Divergent points of view led to opposition between the Free Friends and the Home Mission. The latent nature of this tension reveals itself in stories which members of both groups told about one another. For example, stories from the Free Friends' side show implications about the striving for economic success which is said to characterize members of the Home Mission. In some cases, it is even reported that they made themselves guilty of fraudulent behavior in order to gain an economic advantage. Such accounts demonstrate that critically aimed oral narratives directed against others is instrumental in a tense situation when people in a subordinate position feel themselves suppressed by others.

In the Home Mission, on the other hand, stories told in a denigrating tone about strange occurrences at the Free Friends' meetings circulated. In these stories, the Free Friends were accused of teaching freedom from sin to their

converts. This type of negatively oriented folklore aims at marking the boundary against a minority group with a deviant ideology. As long as such stories are kept within the group, they are indicative of latent oppositions. However, conflicts between the two revival movements could also be expressed openly. Thus, members of the Free Friends were called names, particularly during the early days of the movement; they were, as mentioned above, accused of teaching freedom from sin to their converts. In the situation of antagonism between the two conflicting groups, the Free Friends played down or entirely denied this point of view; they were also more restrictive in their practice of speaking in tongues.



25. *Women from the Free Friends on an outing around 1950. Singing and music were essential for such outings. Photo privately owned.*

## 4 Contradictory narratives about a nineteenth century parson

### 1 The royal Order of Vasa

Narratives about the parson Laurentz Olof August Simson who was active from 1849 to 1900 on the fishing island of Kåringön present an example of contradictory narrative versions worth analysing (Gustavsson 1979a). The focus of the analysis will be on the parson's behaviour related in the narratives collected at fieldworks in the 1970s and 1980s, that is a long time after his death. From a variety of narrative themes, I have chosen stories about the insignia of the royal Order of Vasa, which the parson always wore. My analysis will survey different versions of the same narrative theme and reveal motives behind differences of these versions.

#### *1 Critical accounts about the parson*

A couple of stories are associated with one of the parson's personal attributes: the royal Order of Vasa which he received in 1887. These stories tell how the parishioners thought the parson himself viewed this attribute. Why did he like to display it and how did the parishioners attempt to evoke a negative or comical image of the parson by mentioning this attribute?



26. The clergyman Simson with his royal Order of Vasa on his breast and his wife standing in front of the parsonage about 1890. In the foreground there is a wooden figurehead taken from a vessel and representing the American president Abraham Lincoln. Photograph by Robert Lindahl, privately own.

The critical narratives pointed out that the parson was said to have made a point of wearing the order on all public occasions. This was even mentioned in a newspaper article from 1896 written by a summer resident of Käringsön (*Handelstidningens veckoblad*, September 19, 1896). These accounts mention the fact that the Swedish King Oscar II ordered that his royal ship *Drott* should stop at Käringsön during one of his annual summer excursions to the west coast of Sweden. Consequently, the parson would have had the Order of Vasa painted ahead of time on the breast of a wooden figurehead representing the American president Abraham Lincoln. This figurehead was taken from a ship-wrecked vessel and was at that time placed in the parson's garden. To give an idea of how this account could be spread during the parson's own lifetime, I quote what a summer resident on Käringsön around the turn of the century heard from a local islander. The summer resident noticed that the figurehead:

wore an Order of Vasa, carefully painted, on his black frock-coat. There is a little story about this Order that I recently heard from a very respectable source. Should it unintentionally be untrue, it is at any rate so innocent that it can nonetheless be told. It goes as follows: Some years ago, when King Oscar was expected to visit

Käringön during one of his tours of the west coast, there was, naturally, clearing and decorating throughout the island before his fitting reception, and among the embellishments which the parson undertook on his part was the painting of the Order of Vasa on Lincoln's breast—why precisely this decoration he told no one, but people believed that it was just in order to give Lincoln a more festive appearance. However, when the King came and saw the comical old figurehead, outfitted with an Order of Vasa, he burst out laughing and asked the parson "why did Lincoln receive the Vasa?" "Well, Your Majesty", the old parson replied with a bow, "I thought someone on Holmen should have one". The King was much amused by this response, and shortly thereafter the parson himself was named a member of the Order of Vasa—and it was likely that he really had intended this.

This version agrees with several accounts that I collected during the 1970's, which indicates its transmission across generations. The essence of various critical accounts of this story is the same, even though the versions of the dialogue between the king and the parson may somewhat vary. In response to the king's question "Why is that old wooden fellow wearing a Vasa?", the parson is said to have answered either "I thought someone here in the parish should have it" or "Since no one else here in the parish has one, I thought he should". The king "got the hint and upon his return to Stockholm gave the parson the royal Order of Vasa".

An intention behind spreading this narrative version could be that the narrators wished to stress that the parson had not received his royal Order for his clerical service at the parish, but owing to his artful manoeuver. He would later attract attention to his own person by wearing his Order and thus proudly demarcating and consolidating his position of social leadership in the local milieu, socially distancing himself from his parishioners. The humorous aspect of this account could, on the other hand, counter-balance the position of social disadvantage, which the parishioners clearly felt and which was reinforced through the parson's royal Order of Vasa.

### *2 Reinterpretation of critical versions*

The stories criticizing the parson are not, however, the only ones involving his Order of Vasa. There are completely different accounts from other local individuals, who attempted to reinterpret the criticism against the pastor so that he was portrayed in a more favorable light.

Certain informants interpreted the story as if the parson received his Order for his services to the parish. In this case, the Order painted on the figurehead acquires a reasonable explanation. These informants referred to the parson's Order as a reward received from the king for his altruistic efforts on behalf of the school on Käringön. This version points out the fact that the parson was a schoolmaster from 1849 to 1868, and according to contemporary sources, he had no real financial remuneration for his



work. This interpretation may be related to the positive testimonial given by local education inspectors since he — as numerous other preachers of his time in western Swedish communities — undertook educational duties along with his pastoral duties for "almost no payment". In the education inspector's record book from 1861 there is the statement about Kåringön that "the school is run in an extremely creditable manner by the chaplain residing there" (GLA Morlanda K IV, cf. a letter signed 'Bathing-guest' in *Handelstidningen*, August 14, 1895). Such accounts can be compared with respective records in the Office of the Secretary of Orders in Stockholm, which indicates that the clergyman was awarded the Order of Vasa on December 1, 1887, four months after the king's visit to Holmen. However, no justification for awarding this distinction is given in the records.

Furthermore, these informants often made a point of saying that an Order of Vasa was painted on the figurehead only after the parson received his, rather than vice-versa, as the critical accounts have tried to maintain. A fisherman born in 1892 claimed that the parson "got his Vasa and then painted it on the figurehead. That's the way it must have happened. He couldn't have painted the Order on the figurehead before getting one himself. But people like to add on things like that. They rarely subtract anything". Other informants said they were told by older family members that an artistic clergyman Johan Alfred Gullbring born in 1845 from the neighbouring fishing village of Gullholmen, acting there 1880-1892 (Jarlert 2014: 644ff) was said to have borrowed the parson's Order during a visit, gone out into the garden, and painted it on the figurehead. Certain older inhabitants were even reported to have seen this take place. A contemporary report should also be mentioned as it speaks against the figurehead actually having borne an Order of Vasa during the king's visit (travel diaries in the Royal Archive). In describing his visit to Kåringön at the end of August 1887, American minister W. W. Thomas described this figurehead as "a man, standing in a flowerbed, with his right hand stuck into his vest, and his face and eyes lifted toward the heavens" (Thomas 1893: 639). There is no suggestion, however, that this wooden figure bore an Order on its breast.

### *3 Denial of the veracity of the accounts*

In addition to a reinterpretation of the critical stories certain informants denied the veracity of the stories circulating concerning the Order of Vasa. Thus, it is claimed that the parson was not on Kåringön during the king's visit, but rather was visiting a spa in Västergötland. A woman born in 1896 on Kåringön referred to what her mother, born in 1866, had stated upon hearing the above story of how the parson reportedly had received his Order on account of what he had said during the king's visit: "That's not true, because the parson wasn't on Kåringön then." According to his diaries and applications for leaves of absence submitted to the cathedral chapter (GLA GDA A

Ia), the parson used to visit the spa in Mösseberg for nearly a month each summer, starting in 1868. Whether he was on Kåringön or not during the king's visit cannot be determined. Nor is this as interesting as learning that there were individuals who sought to make use of the common knowledge in the local milieu that the parson usually visited this spa for a time each year. His diary for 1887 has not been found. According to chapter records (GLA GDA A Ia: III), he received a leave of absence for five weeks starting July 1st until August 4th, that is three days after the king's visit to Kåringön. Judging from Register of Proclamations, the parson did not hold services there between June 26 and August 7 (GLA Kåringön P 2).

#### *4 Withholding of information*

Other inhabitants of Kåringön, belonging to the older generation who remembered the parson, were reticent when giving out information about him. In these cases, an underlying positive view of him was implied. These individuals attempted to protect his reputation, which was manifested, for example, in certain statements to outsiders visiting in the parish. This was true, for example, in the case of summer residents, who from the 1880's on increasingly began to rent dwellings from the local people. When one summer resident came to Kåringön in 1901 and questioned a verger born in 1850 about the recently deceased clergyman, he only got a brief reply: "I shall only say that he kept the worst ungodliness away from Kåringön". In the late 1930's, a female summer resident held a party, inviting some women who were year-round residents. She noted that a perceptible silence ensued when she attempted to obtain information on circumstances in the parish during the time of this clergyman. Later she was informed that several of the women present at the party came from families who had been close to him.

Younger persons, born after the parson's lifetime, also met this reticence on the part of older people within their own family. When a woman born in 1902 asked for information about the parson in her youth, the only response she received from her mother born in 1866 was: "Much of what is said about him is not true. He was a good preacher and wanted what was right. We should let the old parson lie peacefully in his grave". A man born in 1917 encountered similar reactions in his family: "Some wouldn't speak of that time at all. They wouldn't say anything, when I asked them about the parson. They were very secretive, including my mother and father and my maternal grandmother. They wanted to protect the parson from slander and therefore they didn't want to say anything about that time". This resulted in certain informants having heard fewer stories in their homes than others. Therefore, they have a smaller repertoire of narrative versions. Reticence of such individuals in conversational situations in the 1970s should not necessarily be linked to their deliberate withholding of information, but more likely to the fact of being less informed about this matter owing to their childhood situation.

On the other hand, informants who grew up in homes characterized by a more critical attitude stated that they encountered greater candor among older family members with respect to giving out information. These individuals were manifestly more spontaneous about telling stories to their children and grandchildren. Thus, a man born in 1917, commenting on his rich repertoire of critical stories, stated: "My father enjoyed telling stories". If individuals sharing a critical attitude were more willing to pass on information they had heard from others, the consequence would be that outsiders visiting Kåringön, such as summer residents, would mostly hear negative versions of the whole story.

When residents of Kåringön displayed restraint in conversational and interview situations in the 1970s, one could detect an underlying positive attitude to the parson. A primary intention behind the withholding of information often was an endeavor to protect the parson and his closest parishioners from the negative accounts circulating around. A fisherman born in 1891, for example, reported that he only heard positive accounts of the parson in his home. He also said that "I have, of course, also heard other things", but he viewed these as "thoughtless prattle" and would absolutely not pass on, saying: "A good man acquires many enemies". Likewise, a woman born in 1902 told that the parson "was a respectable man, performed many good deeds". There were also "many rumors going around about him, but those one might as well let be forgotten". To justify their unwillingness to speak about "rumors" that were in conflict with their own point of view, several of these individuals referred to the fact that in their homes an ideal of truth had been impressed upon them as a guideline for their conversation.

A corresponding ideal of truth was reinforced by confirmation instruction and, in individual cases, became an excuse for justifying reticence in conversations about the parson. For example, when interviewed in 1977, a woman born in 1901 explained her unwillingness to repeat the negative accounts she had heard about the parson's bathing together with women by saying that her confirmation teacher in 1916 had carefully impressed upon her the following passage: "If thou hearest something evil, repeat it not, for silence will not harm thee. Thou shalt not repeat it to friend or foe, nor disclose it, if thou canst not do so without a sore conscience". Her spontaneous comment concerning this was: "I have forgotten many other things, but I have given much thought to this proverb for all these years". This verse is found in Chapter 19 of the Old Testament Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus, where it cautions against passing of rumours of doubtful veracity.

## 2 Social Stratification and Latent Conflicts

What was the social situation like when accounts about the parson - of either a negative or a more positive slant - emerged and circulated? In my reasoning, it is possible

to understand how and why these accounts were differently formulated by different informants only through the analysis of the given social milieu and tensions existing there. Therefore, it is important to shed light on social stratification of Kåringön's population during the parson's time.

*1 "Overtly oppositional" parishioners*

If we consider a socially uppermost stratum in the parish, only a small percentage of families were on an economically equal footing with the parson. Property and income tax schedules indicate that only an occasional shipmaster, higher-ranking pilots, or customs and light house personnel could be compared with the parson in economic respects, while the numerically predominant fishing population was considerably worse off financially.

The numerically small social and economic upper strata beside the parson obviously competed with him for influence in the local community. When there was open opposition to him at local or church meetings, the minute books show that it mainly came from the socially uppermost strata outside the fishing population. At a church meeting in the 1890's, for example, only a chief pilot born in 1838 voiced open opposition against the parson who was granted a change in his salary which he had requested (GLA Morlanda 0 III:4, Kåringön K II: 1).

Because of this, I find it relevant to define this category of parishioners as "overtly oppositional". Diaries dated from the late 1800 evidence that individuals belonging to this category did violate the parson's prohibitions against alcohol, dancing and card-playing, as well as his edict to keep the Lord's Day holy. According to the registers of birth and baptisms, they departed from the parson's directives on selecting several godparents and more than a single Christian name for their new-born children. Instead, in these families there was a lower number of godparents than otherwise, generally only a single Christian name, and never any of the Biblical names which the parson had recommended.

Oral accounts from informants belonging to the fishing population also mention that several representatives of the higher social strata attended church less frequently. In fishermen's families, there were instances when children were cautioned by their parents against imitating the example of certain pilots and shipmasters. This agrees with a statement made by the succeeding clergyman on Kåringön in his official report to a pastoral meeting in 1909 that only a small number of parishioners did not attend church and that these individuals were not among the fishing population, but rather among pilots and customs officials (GLA GDA FX: 10). A lower rate of church attendance among these families meant that the parson did not have the same opportunities for reaching them with either his mediation of rules or public sanctions. The pulpit was his chief forum for spreading the pastoral message.

Moreover, a higher degree of mobility and more frequent contacts with the world at large provided the basis for acquiring new ideas and experiences from sources other than the parson. The fact that shipmasters were clearly more oriented toward the outside world than the fishing population is mentioned by a fisherman born in 1897 who stated that in his childhood it was chiefly the families of shipmasters who subscribed to a daily newspaper. Speaking of a couple of shipmasters born in the 1830's, he stated that "they had gone to navigation school and were a little more enlightened than people in general".

Thanks to such impulses from the outside world, the parson had competitors in his attempts to dominate the behavior of his parishioners. This may explain his scepticism attested in the oral material about outsiders, who began more and more frequently settling down on Käringsön at the end of the 19th century, or who visited the place as summer residents. The parson declared to a visiting American minister in 1887: "Yes, a few are probably moving in, but I am not too happy about it. They bring their vices with them" (Thomas 1893: 640f).

The afore-going discussion has pointed out that the socially higher and more mobile strata in the parish were characterized, first of all, by their openly critical views and deviating opinions of the parson, and secondly, by their markedly departing in their behavior from his recommendations for how to conduct their lives. In other words, they made use of open channels in order to display opposition to the parson's dominance.

## 2 "*Loyal*" parishioners

In a distinct contrast to the higher and more mobile social strata, the fishing population, which was characterized by a lower social and economic position, was a group that observed the parson's directives more faithfully. However, there were differing views of the parson as well. This could contribute to dissimilarities in accounts of him—both negative and more positive—which circulated within the fishermen's families.

To begin with, I will examine fishermen's families that had more intimate and personal relationships with the parson; they may be appropriately defined as "loyal" parishioners. These individuals not only observed the parson's instructions out of necessity, but they did so more or less voluntarily since they were in sympathy with him. A type of inner loyalty rather than a merely external one seems to be involved here.

The parson himself left evidence which indicates that there was a division among his parishioners. Some were said to have taken his instructions more to heart than others. In one sermon, he made a distinction between "the faithful" among his audience and those "who belong to God in name only" (GUB C. S.

Lindblad's collection). In 1887 he stated that some people in his parish showed their love for him "by visiting me and making use of me more often than the rest of my audience" (GLA Assize Court of Orust and Tjörn District F II).

A circle of "loyal" parishioners seems to have been crystallized already soon after the parson's arrival on Kåringön in 1849. This is suggested by the fact that representatives from several such families which later on in the 19th century were most careful observers of his directives served as godparents at the baptism of the parson's son in 1852. Moreover, from the 1850's on the parson himself, his wife or other persons from the parsonage were recorded as godparents only at the baptisms of children of these families.

In the records of church ceremonies performed it is possible to follow how carefully members of these families obeyed the directives given by the parson with respect to the selection of several godparents—up to 10-12 apiece—three Christian names, at least some of them Biblical. The communion rolls also suggest that individuals from so-called "loyal" families were among the most assiduous communicants as well. Members of the church council were nearly always recruited from these families; they also in many cases served as godparents to each other's children, but less frequently to the children of fishermen's families who had less intimate relations with the parson. Similarly, the registers of banns and marriages show that marriages were largely dependent upon the parties having a mutual proximity of relationship to the parson. For this reason, the so-called "loyal" families were united by numerous family ties, a fact that must have contributed to sustaining a positive view of the parson across generations.

### 3 *"Covertly oppositional" parishioners*

In contrast to the so-called "loyal" families, a second category within the fishing population, which might be best termed "covertly oppositional", had a less close personal relationship with the parson. These families may be said to have been farther out in his social network. These two categories of parishioners belonged to different families, and it is hardly possible to explain when and why some fishermen's families became more loyal and others more critical with respect to the parson. However, it is observable that these groupings did exist, and this fact had effects on differing viewpoints manifest in the oral narratives. Members of both categories belonged to the same boat crews, which might at times have led to conflicts of opinion during discussions on board ship concerning views on the parson and the extent to which one should allow his directives to govern one's conduct. This was reported by a man born in 1917, whose father had been a witness to such heated discussions out at sea. It is notable that marriages between these two groups were rarely contracted.

According to the income and property tax schedules, families of both groups had a similar financial situation during the last decades of the 19th century. Members of “covertly oppositional” families, however, tended to emphasize their own poverty, comparing it to the well-being of the parson and “loyal” families. This suggests a state of tension. On the surface, a relatively harmonious relationship might have existed between “covertly oppositional” families and the parson. In their external behavior, these families followed the pastoral instructions concerning the choice of godparents and Christian names, frequency of taking communion, and similar matters considerably more assiduously than did the higher social strata, although this happened not quite as frequently as it did among the “loyal” families. According to reports from latter-day descendants of “covertly oppositional” families, a point was made of regularly attending church in these families. This did not require as intimate a relationship with the parson as did participation in the devotional gatherings in the parsonage. Through their church attendance, these individuals were accessible to the parson’s indoctrination and his public sanctions in a completely different way than in the case of the upper strata parishioners.

“Covertly oppositional” families, in contrast to “loyal” ones, inwardly experienced discontent with the parson’s domination and endeavors of the “loyal” families to elevate their social status by means of intimate personal relationships with the parson. They observed his instructions out of a feeling of compulsion.

In order to understand how critical attitudes, which “covertly oppositional” individuals inwardly felt, could be prevented from being openly expressed, one should be aware of the sanctions, both a public and more private nature, which the parson used to apply. In church, he could reproach individual parishioners from the pulpit for their transgressions—a strategy which other contemporary clergymen were also known to employ. This was perceived as an event of public disgrace to which parishioners, according to several accounts in the oral data, feared falling victim. On such occasions there could be threats of divine punishment and the torment of Hell for those violating the precepts which the parson sought to inculcate. An example of such threats is found in a sermon which cautioned young people against dancing. The parson’s admonition to those who violated his prohibition was as follows: “For all eternity thou shalt not be free of dancing with devils in a blazing Hell”.

Reprimands from the pulpit of this kind were attested in several instances by descendants of visitors to Kåringön, who had heard them in church. On the same occasion, when certain parishioners were subjected to critical admonitions, the parson might address other listeners in terms of praise, promising them eternal reward after death as well as divine blessing in their earthly life. All this explains why members of “loyal” families were striving to be on an intimate footing with

the parson – a fact which critically minded parishioners emphasized in their accounts. A man born in 1900 in an agricultural region near Kåringön reported that his father had heard as a child how the parson on the island would address someone in a stern tone of voice: “Dost thou wish to go to Hell?” and then another person in a friendly tone: “Dost thou wish to go to Heaven?” The parson could turn to public reprimands as they were attributes of the officially sanctioned church discipline at that time. Although successive changes concerning this were made in laws, it still was a practice in many parts of the country during the late 19th century.

In addition to public reprimands, the oral accounts contain several concrete examples of how parishioners were called to the parsonage to receive further chastisement. This occurred in other western Swedish parishes in this period as well. This form of private reproof was also dreaded by parishioners. No one from the fishermen’s families dared to fail to respond to summons to appear at the parsonage. On the other hand, members of shipmasters’ or pilots’ families were reported to refrain from going to the parsonage when the parson had sent for them.

If the parson’s control and his sanctions were so effective, opportunities for departing from his precepts or any overt expression of critical attitudes were limited. This is at least true for fishermen’s families having a lower social status and less authority than the parson. This situation led to the precepts which were experienced by many individuals as a serious constraint on their life style. Thus, there are several accounts of how, despite the parson’s prohibition, young people residing on Kåringön tried to go dancing in secret. This could take place in isolated parts of the island; in other instances, young people sailed over to nearby fishing villages, where they hoped that neither the parson nor his female informers would discover them. A critically minded man born in 1904 reported that “my mother (born in 1877) said that in her youth whenever young people wanted to go out dancing, they had to slip away one by one to Rosengård toward the west, where there was a small hill behind a rock. They were quite afraid that the parson would find out about this”.

If critical views and desires for change cannot be expressed overtly, they are channeled in other ways. It is interesting to note that some informants from the fishing population referred to representatives of the higher social strata in the congregation who on certain occasions acted as spokespersons for the fishing population before the parson. This occurred in spite of the fact that these two social strata had no close relations with each other in other respects. Moreover, the oral material presents examples of younger men from the fishing population showing their protest against the the parson’s domination in the late 19th century by juggling the offerings made to him on church festival days. On such occa-



sions, they would place a coin of a lesser value in his plate in front of the sanctuary and one of a greater value in the plate belonging to the precentor, instead of vice-versa, as was otherwise customary.

In a social situation, characterized by the domination of the parson and a latent state of tension with respect to “loyal” parishioners, the primary outlet for the so-called “covertly oppositional” to vent their criticism was critical narratives. In a socially disadvantageous situation, oral accounts of this type were a way to express discontent and desires for change.

To judge from my data, the more dominant a socially superior individual is in his behavior, the more difficult it is for subordinate individuals to express their critical views openly; thereby the background is created for critical stories to arise as a means of protest. To exemplify this, I can refer to cases when other contemporary clergymen in western Sweden were reported to have behaved dominantly in their own parishes. On one of those who served in an agricultural parish from 1878-1904, a parishioner born in 1876 related: “The peasants feared him as much as they did something evil” (IFGH 6133). In a rhymed lampoon on this clergyman, it is stated that “at meetings X’s voice is heard ... and fearful peasants can be seen, huddling together like frightened children”.

To sum up, this analysis of various oral accounts reveals the influence of narrators’ social position on their attitude to the content of narratives. Also, vertical transmission between generations of both the story content and the narrator’s view of the parson, by and large, seems to have occurred within families or related groups of individuals. The dividing lines in views of the parson during the 1970s and 1980s, when the collection of oral narratives was performed, ran more between rather than within families. Thus, informants having either critical or more positive views, referred to the sources of their information as being largely what they heard from their parents or other older family members. To cite a typical example of this, a woman born in 1909 and positively inclined toward the parson used to say: “I don’t wish to say anything other than what my father (born in 1867) said, and he always spoke well of the parson”.

## 5 Narratives about Deceased Pets on Swedish and Norwegian Memorial Websites

In this section I present a study on narratives on memorial websites about deceased pet cats. The focus is on the ways in which pet owners express their emotions and beliefs when confronted with the reality of the animal’s death. Is the pet regarded as an integrated member of the family?



27. On 23 July 2013, the cat *Qaballero* died of kidney failure and went to cat heaven. Photo [www.turtlecats-birma.net](http://www.turtlecats-birma.net), 8 June 2016.

Swedish memorial websites for deceased pets began to appear at about the turn of the Millennium in 2000. Some of them were in the form of discussion forums on which people could post their contributions and responses in a guest book. The guest books became a form of meeting place where narratives could be expressed and shared without the participants being previously familiar with one another. In Sweden, the number of such memorial websites has increased noticeably since 2005.

During the 2000s they have also begun to appear in Norway even if not to the same extent as in Sweden. Examples of Norwegian websites are [www.hakrilas.no/tilminne](http://www.hakrilas.no/tilminne), [www.dyresonen.no](http://www.dyresonen.no) (no longer in use) and [www.turtlecats-birma.net](http://www.turtlecats-birma.net). The focus of this study is on Swedish websites; comparisons with Norwegian Internet sites are made with the aim to determine the specific nature of Swedish websites. It is observable, for instance, that in comparison to the discussion forums in Norway, Swedish websites are characterized by lengthier and more sentimental contributions.

Working as a scholar of cultural history, one cannot fail to be emotionally moved when reading the sorrow-filled and emotionally charged contributions. The scholar's capacity for sympathy and feelings of empathy with the grief-stricken should be seen as an important factor for understanding and interpretation of experiences expressing genuine despair. I feel that my personal interest in and love of cats since the earliest childhood helps me in achieving this form of empathy.

### 1 Retrospective descriptions of the cat's life

A photo or a drawing of the deceased cat is usually present in online messages, and a red heart is usually placed over the cat's name as a sign of the love felt for the

deceased animal. The cat's name, its birth year and death year are always included in the text and often the dates of its birth and death. Those who write and send greetings to the cat are not only its owners, referred to by the Swedish terms "matte" and "husse" [abbreviations for "matmor" (mistress) and "husbonde" (master)], but also the family's children. There are often greetings from other cats and even from the family's dogs. Interestingly, the home town is almost never mentioned, and photos of the people who write the contributions are not given. So, it is for the most part impossible to identify the writers.

In many cases in Swedish websites, and sometimes also in Norwegian, there are long descriptions of the cat's entire life and what it has meant to its owners over the years. A glorification of the cat is manifest in most cases. The cat has been a psychological support for its owners. "You (the cat) saw when I was sad and came and comforted me", noted the owner of the cat Tiger that lived between 1998 and 2002. Several of these accounts show that the cat usually lay purring on the owner's bed and slept with its owner. "You used to lie on my cover and purr until I fell asleep", reported the owner of the cat Martin. "Matte" wrote of her cat Lisa (1988-2001): "You lay against my hip night and day and purred for the king and the country". Such contributions imply so great a degree of intimacy between people and cats that cats assume human characteristics. Thus, one owner described her experience of intimacy with these words: "Your humaneness, your eyes always met mine". The cat's personality and its communication with its owner by means of sounds and vision are often mentioned. The cat Fòfoo that died in 2002 at the age of fourteen is described by its "matte" and "husse" as being "very intelligent and refined, a kind of a slightly serious personality. He was very talkative and always looked into our eyes and at our mouths when we talked to him. He noticed everything that was new".

The cat could provide a great deal of support to the human mind and body. An extreme closeness between the cat and its owner is shown in the cases when the cat is described as the "partner for life", being a real member of the family. The "husse" who owned the cat Jeppe for eleven years stressed his being "my constant companion and the one who made me happy again whenever I needed comforting". These examples show that it is difficult to distinguish between relationships to a human friend and a pet. Anthropomorphic characteristics are clearly apparent in the relationship to a cat as an intimate friend.

A detailed description of how the cat died is commonly included in the texts published in Swedish and Norwegian websites. In cases when the cat fell ill and its owners were forced to take a most painful decision of having the cat put down by the veterinarian, the period of illness and the emotions this aroused are usually described. Exhaustive descriptions of the situation at the time of death undoubtedly represent a way of adjusting to sorrow by allowing the cat's owner to describe the event itself and how it has been experienced.

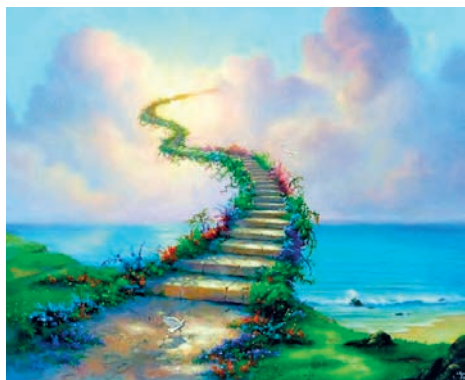
As a final detail in their descriptions the owners often mention the place where the cat has been buried, often quite near to the home, and that they later visit and beautify this site. Thus, the owner of the cat Gustav related how the animal was put down by the veterinarian and then taken home and buried “in a forest grove near our house”. He added, “I usually walk there a couple of times a week. ... Lay a bouquet of wild flowers on your grave”. The owners can set up pictures of the dead animal in their homes and place lighted candles nearby. The owner of the two-year-old cat Elza who had to be put down in 2006 because of a tumor writes, “I have hung up a lot of nice pictures of you that I took the day before you were due to leave this life on earth”.

Detailed descriptions of the circumstances relating to death obviously constitute a way for the owners to adjust to grief by expressing their feelings and writing down their memories. In recent years, especially in Sweden, such detailed descriptions are in line with the increasing openness in speaking of the death of one's nearest and dearest. This tendency became noticeable in the course of my field work in churchyards during the 2000s. It is also notable that contributions on the Internet can be repeated several times and can occur several years after the actual death. This evidences that a narrative tradition related to grief and loss has been arising on the Internet. It also indicates that recovering from the process of grief can take a long time, even though it is the death of well-loved pets. A contribution from the owner of the thirteen-year-old cat Snuttan who died in 2001 states, “Four years have now passed and I still miss you so terribly”. The fact that narratives on the net relieve the process of grief is even more obvious when people are open about their emotions in the memorial narratives.

## 2 Emotional expressions

Intense and grievous emotions are usually expressed in descriptions of the cat's illness and especially of the gruelling decision to have the veterinarian to put it down. The pain caused by the cat's sufferings is difficult to endure. Therefore, no alternative remains to putting the animal to sleep. “This was the toughest decision of our lives”, wrote somebody under the signature “Your family” addressing the cat Baloo that died in 2002. The actual act of having the cat put down at the veterinary clinic, while it still lies on “matte's” or “huse's” lap and draws its last breath, is described with deep emotions. The owner of the cat Humle that died in 2002 stated that the day it died “was and is the worst day of my entire life”. “You stopped breathing while I sang you (a lullaby)”, so wrote the owner of the cat “Fläckiz” (1999-2001).

The cat seeks bodily proximity to its owners after the lethal injection has been given; this fact is often mentioned with the feeling of deep grief. “You fought for a long time against going to sleep. You clung to my breast with your nose against my



28. The expression “rainbow bridge” is rather common in the memorial messages; it is believed that the deceased cat has passed on over the “rainbow bridge” and winds up towards the “Rainbow Country”, a paradise-like place. Photo [www.acreswaycats.com/rainbow-bridge.htm](http://www.acreswaycats.com/rainbow-bridge.htm).

neck until it was all over”, the owner of the kitten Daisy wrote after it was put down in 2001. In cases of traffic accidents, remorse is expressed since the cat itself wandered out into the road. This is the only situation in which criticism of any kind is addressed to the deceased pet.

The process of mourning appears to be extremely painful. It is long-lasting and tinged with despair. The owner of the cat Knut wrote shortly after it was killed in a traffic accident, “I want to shout out to the whole world that it should be stopped! The best part of my life has been taken away”. The signature “Mummy and Daddy” who lost two cats in the year 2000, follows the desperate exclamation: “How can we heal the wounds in our hearts?”

In their grief, the owners can also direct accusations towards themselves and even, in some cases, towards God. Thus, when the two-month-old kitten Rasmus died in 2002, its owner Frida wrote: “How could God allow this? A tiny, innocent creature that has never done any harm. Was it my fault? Could I have done anything more?” The owner of Nala (1999-2001) wondered: “Why has God chosen just you?” These expressions of grief imply that God should have shown more solicitude and protection to the animal loved so deeply. Noteworthy, such statements about God in relation to pets cannot be found in the Norwegian material. Here religion is kept separate from the animal’s death.

An emotion commonly expressed in both Swedish and Norwegian memorial websites is the sense of extreme loss experienced by the cat owners. In Sweden, this can be expressed for several years after the cat’s death. “It is now 6 years since you went to Heaven, but I miss you just as much as ever” - “Matte” wrote to her cat Smulan. “Two years have passed, but my loss feels just as great”, was written by the owner of the nineteen-year-old cat Maximilian that died in 2002. The sense of loss has not lessened, despite the fact that the “matte” now owns a new and much-loved cat; she continues as follows: “Your place can never be filled by anyone else. It is reserved for you”. Another woman expressed her despair with the words: “How will we ever

manage without you?” A little girl who was ten years of age when her sixteen-year-old cat died in 1998 wrote: “I wish I could go to Heaven and bring him home again, but I can’t do that”.

Grief and loss are often associated with countless tears. Thus, the owner of the cat Alice (2001-2002) wrote: “I can cry a flood of tears, but that won’t bring you back”. Crying can continue for a long time. “I cry myself to sleep every night, I’m crying while I write this, I’m going to cry myself to sleep tonight and tomorrow night and the next night ...”, wrote the owner of the cat Sippan that died in 2002. Sara, a Norwegian cat-owner from Trondheim wrote concerning her beloved cat Tilda in 2007: “... difficult to imagine that I will ever stop crying”.

*Remembering forever* is a highly recurrent theme in the memorial messages of Swedish and Norwegian owners. “I will never forget you! You will always be in my heart!”, one owner wrote after her five-month-old kitten died in 2001.

At times, the memory is expressed as being “eternal”, which is to say never-ending. The memory can live on over time through a photograph hung on the wall. The owner of the cats Nicke and Lina that died in 1998 and 2001 wrote: “Will never forget the two of you, see your photographs on my wall every day and feel that you are here with me”. The customary lighting of a candle also contributes to keeping the memory fresh. “We light a candle in your memory every evening”, was emphasized by the owners of the one-year-old cat Sheila that died in 2003.

*Love* for the dead cat is expressed in many and deep-felt ways in the textual messages. Thus, the owner of the cat Tarzan (1986-1996) stated soon after its death that “I loved and will love you more than life itself”. Nearness to the deceased animal is also shown by being associated with the owner’s own heart. In such experiences of loss there is no difference between humans and animals; it is obliterated. The “matte” of the six-year-old cat Claudius that was killed in an accident in 2005 wrote, “It feels as if I have buried my heart, because that’s just what you were”.

There are also expressions of *gratitude* for the period of time which the owners enjoyed with the dead cat. “I am so happy that I was able to share my life with you”, the owner of the eight-year-old cat Simon wrote after its death in 2001. The “matte” of the cat Lina (1985-1997) expressed her “thanks for the years you looked after me”. This feeling of the cat taking care of its “matte” and “husse” instead of the opposite is something that is often expressed. In some cases the owners express their gratitude for having had the loan of the cat as long as it lived. “Matte” Susanne wrote a poem about her cat Kesella (2005-2006) in which she says, “An angel that spread light in my life was loaned to me. ... I had the loan of an angel, for a while”. Such messages speak of a supernatural dimension depicted in the form of an angel. On Swedish websites, not only humans can be regarded as angels but also pets. Sometimes, the angel status can be manifest already in the life time but it clearly reveals

itself especially after death. This belief is very similar concerning dead humans and pets.

There are some instances of *poems* being written to the cat; they express reflections on parting, loss and memory. The following poem in memory of the thirteen-year-old cat Lillis that died in 1999 was written several years later:

An autumn wind blew softly  
 And gently brushed your tired cheek  
 Just as a candle is blown out  
 Your days of life were ended

A poem of this kind shows that the distinction between humans and pets is tangibly lessened in cat owners' consciousness. When the fifteen-year-old cat Blixen died in 2001, it was commemorated by its "matte" with an especially long poem consisting of eight verses with five lines each. This indicates an intense closeness to the cat.

Generally speaking, it appears that pets are integrated members of the families of those who choose to publish a memorial message on the Internet. These people have a great need for expressing their grief and for sharing it with others, and the Internet provides an opportunity for expressing their grief and accompanying emotions concerning the deceased pet in a public sphere.

In the present dynamically developing modern social climate, no need is felt for concealing grief from others' observation. It may even be less painful to tell about one's experiences than to express them among the nearest and dearest. The discussion forums on the Internet can in this way be of genuine assistance during a lengthy process of mourning by sharing it with others. In the midst of a difficult situation of grief, it may be of great help to realize that other persons can publish contributions that will offer consolation and in which they can share their own experiences of endured grief. Traumatic emotions can be relieved through weeping and also, as the surveyed memorial websites show, by written messages instead of being concealed in secrecy. Moreover, people in mourning can receive responses that can aid in a release of feelings in the grief-stricken situation. For example, the message from November 2007 signed by "Tazchaos" responded to a cat owner who had lost a cat:

I think you should have a good cry if that's what you want and feel for. I cried for several days after my own dear cat died. But things did get better afterwards. Of course, I know that my cat will never come back, but after having lived through that stage, I could think about her and talk about her without having my tears start to flow again. Instead I began to smile every time I remembered her. You were lucky that your cat lived so long! Just try thinking as positively as you can! (www.flashback.info).

The noticeably advanced reduction of the borderline between humans and pets that has become evident in Swedish messages does not appear in the same obvious manner in the comparable Norwegian material. This difference is difficult to explain in any general way. At the same time, it is obvious that openness with regard to deep sentiments relating to pets which is more explicitly shown in the Swedish material appears to satisfy a widespread growing need for emotional release.

### 3 Concluding remarks

The written messages on the Internet have become a way of coping with grief and the sense of loss that can persist for several years. Such expressions of grief in Sweden have begun to assume forms that increasingly resemble the texts that are used when humans die. This tendency reveals the emotional proximity between humans and pets and indicates that boundaries between humans and pets, especially in Sweden, are in the process of being wiped out. Memorial messages of this type demonstrate a distinct contrast with previously maintained distinctions that held animals outside the spiritual and religious sphere.

Even if the reader of these internet messages cannot learn much about the writers' external circumstances, he or she receives all the more insights into their personal experiences. One receives considerably more tangible information about the deceased cats than about the humans who have written the contributions. This relates to the story of the cats' lives, their personalities, age, sex and the circumstances of their deaths.

A process of grief must be allowed to be shared with others even if this is not done verbally within one's immediate circle of friends and relatives. It is not unproblematic to converse with just anyone at all about one's innermost feelings and traumatic experiences. Here the Internet can serve as a public sphere providing welcome relief when struggling to endure the difficulties of grief processes. Mourners can sit at their PCs in the privacy of their homes and express their innermost feelings and beliefs, and communicate these to a large number of mostly unknown people. The writers do not need to meet them physically, but can receive responses and sympathy from others who have lived through similar difficult experiences. This contact with the outer world is established without any threats to personal integrity. The words "matte" and "husse" serve as excellent substitutions for the owners' names. Anonymity and collective accessibility can, in other words, exist side by side.



## 6 Not telling in and after war situations

### Second World War tensions at the Swedish-Norwegian national border

To remain silent and not to tell what one knows or feels, may be a way of tackling a power related situation where one experiences a powerful dominance from above. Those in power might easily use legal or social retributions against people from local communities. In such cases it could be better to keep silent when it concerns telling things to other people in the neighbourhood (Gustavsson 1998b).

During the Second World War the customs officials around the Swedish-Norwegian border had to deal with the compassion towards the refugees from Norway who fled from violence and repression during the Nazi occupation. The Norwegian customs officers faced the dilemma of being loyal to the German occupational authorities and the Norwegian satellite government. The Swedish border guards could handle the situation by avoiding inspection trips along the border or pretending that one had observed nothing. There developed a saying among the customs officials and border police: "What I haven't seen, I haven't seen, and what I haven't heard I haven't heard". In this way there was nothing to report to the authorities and no need to intervene. This liberal view among the border controllers was compatible with the views of the borderers and raised the status of the customs officials and border police in the eyes of the local population.

The strategy of closing one's eyes or being lenient when people suffered, continued during the time shortly after the war when the Norwegians were impoverished and needed to get hold of clothes among other things. In this case the aim was not to gain financial profit through trade, but to obtain the most necessary items for one's subsistence. In this situation the customs officials could come to terms with their conscience even if they in that case actually were disloyal to their employers. If they abstained from reporting, and if all the customs officials agreed on this, there was no risk for accusations of the customs officers being too lenient in the exercising of their duties.

Under political dictatorships it may be dangerous for individuals and groups to express criticism of the prevalent regime. It is interesting to study the Nazi occupation of Norway from that aspect, how one avoided relating to what one had seen or gained knowledge about. Silence was sanctioned both by the State, by not accepting opposition, and by the national opposition, the Home Front. Lack of information was a way for the State to repress the resistance. Therefore information channels like radio, newspapers as well as crowds of people were seen as particularly dangerous. The oral communication and the secretly distributed written word constitute a danger for totalitarian regimes. The aim from above is therefore to frighten people into silence. In spite of sanctions in the form of imprisonment, death penalties etc. there



29. Two Swedish customs officers near the Norwegian-Swedish border at Vassbotten in 1946. The sign above is a reminder to drive on the right hand side of the road in Norway. Photo Bohuslän museum 53671: 105.

were members of the resistance who secretly distributed illegal newspapers that came from London via Sweden. Thus, a man born in 1922 in the Norwegian border parish Idd, stated in an interview in 1994:

I was such a contact, who used to spread news. ... Well, no one knew about the others. I didn't know from whom I got the papers and the person I delivered them to didn't know to whom else I delivered them to.

The information across the border from Sweden to Norway posed a threat. It was therefore important for the authorities to keep the border completely closed, so that no information could leak through. During field works within the Swedish-Norwegian Border Project, we have, however, come across several examples showing how forbidden across-the-border contacts occurred under the cover of darkness and rough terrain.

In a totalitarian situation, the spoken word between individuals becomes more significant. It may convey a hidden message in a secret communication between the like-minded, while silence prevails outside. If you were not careful with what you

said, you yourself or others could suffer grave consequences. A man from the Norwegian island of Hvaler in the coastal region at the Swedish border wrote the following as an answer to a questionnaire about the "*Tradition of war*" edited by Norwegian Ethnological examination, NEG, Oslo:

The parish priest and two fishermen were arrested and sent to the prison Grini, on account of someone talking too much without actually wanting to do any harm. The fishermen took refugees to Sweden and the parish priest had been their contact. This happened in 1944. As in other places we had some Nazis and unreliable people here in Hvaler, but we learned gradually to be careful.

Interviews that were carried out in the border regions between Sweden and Norway in the 1990s, show that Norwegian people during the Second World War lived under a constant fear of being discovered or arrested. At the same time the fooling of Germans became systematic. Thus, the silent resistance could be communicated through material symbols instead of words, for instance, by carrying paper-clips on the coat lapels or a pixie cap (Eriksen 1995).

The silence during the war became an established pattern of behaviour, which has lingered on long past the war when the risk of reprisals no longer existed. A man born in 1922 in the Norwegian border parish of Idd, told in an interview in 1994 about his activities in the resistance movement the Home Front during the war. He lived under the constant fear of being discovered and arrested. After the interview he said:

Now I have told you that I had English newspapers and similar items. There are things which I have not told you. When at war, we did what was natural. We had no other way. There is nothing more to say about it. Now I have told you, and maybe ... I don't think I have told anyone else about that traffic. Not even my own brothers and sisters knew.

This confession shows how an established pattern of keeping silent may live on. In this case the emotional life had also been seriously traumatized by the horrible experiences and threats during the war. I met similar experiences in 1985, when I collected war memories in western Norway in connection with the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war. There was an apparent reluctance to tell about the time of the occupation. The field workers were told that many people had not said anything about this time during the forty years that had passed. The interviewer entered an area where old wounds were easily opened. Informants could cry, stating that they had not told about their traumatic memories of the war years until this interview. In such situations field workers had to be careful when listening and empathizing. It was important not only to be engaged in collecting information for the investigation, but also to act as



30. Two men belonging to the national opposition, the Home Front, on a secret boat trip near the Swedish border in 1944. Photo Strömstad Museum.

a human being showing feelings that could provide psychological support to the traumatized informants. The informants should not experience coercion or risk of getting upset during the interview. Sometimes, I was contacted after the field work in Norway in 1985 and the informants told more about difficult experiences that had been concealed in their consciousness for many years. I had an experience of interview situations which actually contributed to the informants' work on negative emotions and experiences as they told about them to an interested and engaged listener.

I came across similarly traumatic reactions during interviews with coastal women in Bohuslän, who during the Second World War had received permission after thorough investigations to move to Sweden and marry fishermen they had met before the war (Gustavsson 2012: 83ff). Also in Germany in the 1980s the researchers experienced such concealment characterized by strong feelings during the war. This phenomenon was first brought in the light at the Ethnology and Folklore Congress in Göttingen, Germany in 1989. Andreas Kuntz from Hamburg spoke about ritualized silence concerning painful memoirs about the Nazi-period (Kuntz 1991).



31. This male informant, born in 1922, was active in the Home Front during the Second World War, as shown by the diploma he received from the Norwegian king after the end of the war. Photo 1994 Anders Gustavsson.



## 2 Rituals

Ritual presupposes a recurrent performance of actions which have a deeper symbolic meaning for their participants in a certain public social context (Klein 1995: 7ff, Amundsen 2006: 7ff).

My field of study include rituals concerning the life cycle from birth to death and the ritual year. The analytic aspects are continuity and change, disappearance or regression, revitalization, new collective rituals or innovations, the use of rituals among ethnic minorities and national rituals in a Norwegian-Swedish border perspective.

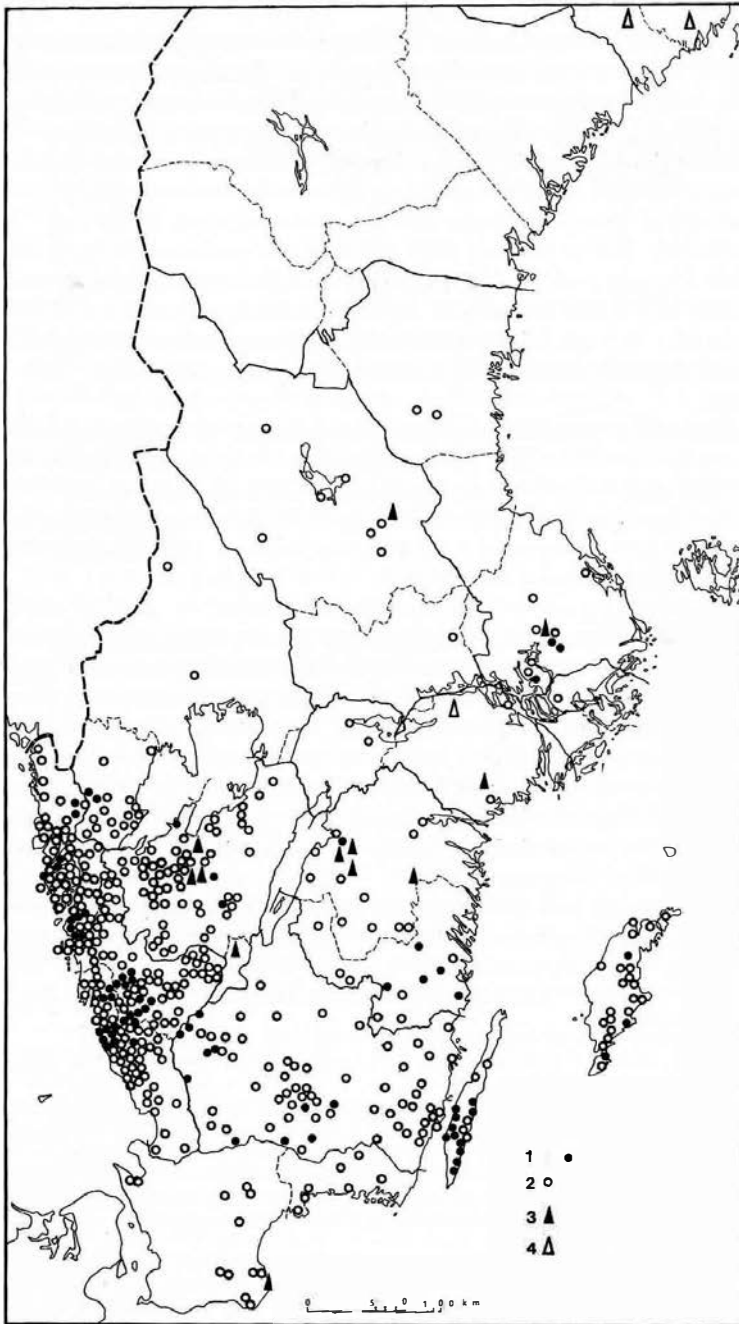
### 1 Old rituals disappearing

Studies on rituals regression analyse how and why rituals disappear. Their primary aim is to follow the successive course of disappearance over time and to analyse its causes.

#### 1 Churching of women after childbirth

In the early 1970s I wrote my doctoral thesis on the old ritual known as churching of women who had recently given birth. This ritual took place in the church six weeks after the child was born. The mother was received again into the community of the church after having been in isolation for six weeks after the birth of the child. The focus of my study was on the regression of this ritual, and for this purpose charting was a useful method. With the help of chart sequences it was possible to illustrate that mothers in certain parts of Sweden began to abandon this ritual during the last part of the nineteenth century, while in other parts of the country this ritual retained its hold far into the 1900s, especially in the western part of Sweden which is the same as the diocese of Gothenburg.

To have an adequate picture of the ritual regression, it was also necessary to relate the study to individual cases, therefore the macro-studies using chart sequences were combined with local in-depth studies. These micro-studies were strategically selected to represent regions in which women were early to abandon the churching and those in which women continued churching for many years.



32. Churching of women in Sweden 1944-1948. 1. Common/rather common. 2. Not common/unusual 3. Prayer for the mother often together with the christening ceremony. 4. Sometimes prayer for the mother together with the christening ceremony.





33. *The vicar of the church in Varberg in the province of Halland taking a new mother by the hand after having read the prayer "A Mother's Thanksgiving" for her in 1971. Photo Hallandsbild, Tony Malmqvist.*

The factors which have encouraged or counteracted the decline may be divided into religious and social ones. It cannot be said that one of these factors has been more important than the other.

Amongst religious factors the traditional attachment to the church appears as the factor of great importance. This certainly contributed to the situation that the ritual was preserved much longer in the diocese of Gothenburg than in other dioceses. From the last part of the nineteenth century and on, the diocese of Gothenburg experienced a strong intra-church revival movement, called Schartauanism. In the wake of Schartauanism, conservative lifestyles developed, defending old rituals that had been previously common throughout Sweden. Continuity of old customs became a matter of great importance.

By contrast, in areas that were early to become less strict in using the ritual of churching, the non-conformist churches, which did not adhere to the Swedish State Church, had a relatively prominent standing.

The decline in the churching ritual has followed the same pattern as the decline of church life as a whole. In parishes with low service attendance churching died out early. The parishes in which churching persisted longest had high service and communion attendance. Because the ritual of churching was subject to the same levelling off as services and communions, it differed from other church ceremonies such as baptism, the marriage service and burials which retained their positions to a much greater degree.

Social factors, social heterogeneity and increasing mobility are decisive in the process of ritual regression. The ritual of churching declined much earlier in towns than in the rural districts. The decline began more or less simultaneously in small towns and large towns. Industrial built-up areas characterized by migration also showed an earlier decline than the surrounding rural districts. Besides the working class, the so-called persons of standing were the first to abandon churching in places characterized by social heterogeneity. When the more respected families no longer continued the ritual of churching, this meant indirectly that the earlier function of churching, that is honouring the fertility of the mother, became less significant.

The area of parishes also played its part in recession processes. Large parishes as well as small parishes in which the church was at a long distance from peoples' homes tended not to preserve the ritual of churching. The smaller the population was, the more effective the control was both from the priest and from the neighbourhood.

When older folk beliefs began to recede during the later part of the nineteenth century, this could also contribute to the decline of the ritual of churching. According to old folk beliefs, a woman who had recently given birth but had not yet undergone her churching might be dangerous to others in a supernatural way. Therefore, she was bestowed by several rules of conduct, which were controlled by the people around her (Gustavsson 1979b). The ritual of churching released her from these rules. The abandonment of these rules appears to have been a gradual process, varying in different parts of the country.

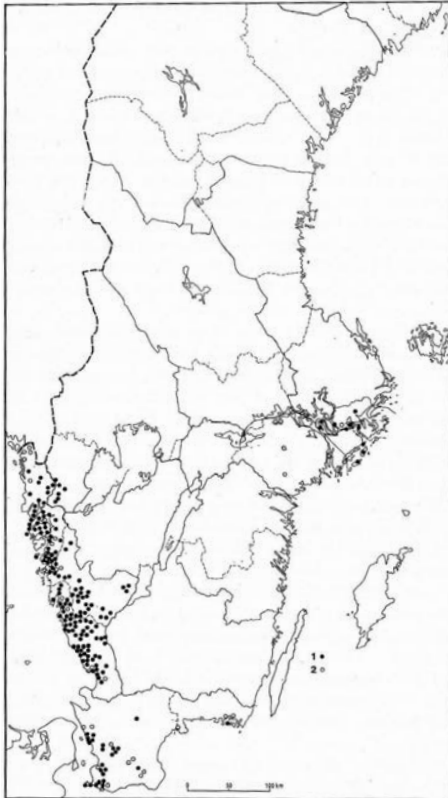
## 2 Memorial drinking at funerals

At the ancient ritual that has vanished during the twentieth century mourners at a funeral used to drink a glass of wine just before the coffin was taken to the church and then to the cemetery. The deceased thus parted from their old social connections. At the same time, the funeral guests showed their compassion with the nearest mourners. The idea of leave-taking clearly marks that the toast is part of the complex of rites de passage connected with death and funerals.

After the reformation, this drinking ritual lost its previous religious motive. Instead it was practiced in memory of the deceased in contrast to medieval times,



34. A glass of wine is drunk in memory of the deceased in her home at a funeral in western Sweden in 1973. Photo Anders Gustavsson.



35. Drinking a glass of wine to the memory of the deceased in Sweden in 1968: 1 the ritual exists 2. the ritual occurs seldom or sometimes. The map is based on a questionnaire sent out to all the parishes of Sweden in 1968.

when toasts with beer had a religious meaning and were drunk in honor of God, Christ, Mary and the saints. After the reformation, the vicar or a layman proposed a toast with the words “We drink this wine to honor the memory” or “We raise our glasses in memory of the deceased” (Gustavsson 1980). The basic structure has remained unchanged as a rite of transition at the end of life when the living take leave of the deceased. A memorial toast, to use the latter-day phrase, implies continuity with pre-Christian and medieval Catholic memorial drinking. My aim is to reveal the mechanisms which have influenced the retention as well as disappearance of this ritual.

The memorial drinking lived on until the 1960s, primarily in those districts of western Sweden in the diocese of Gothenburg which since the last part of the nineteenth century were characterized by the intra-church revival movement known as Schartauanism since the last part of the nineteenth century. The fact that the ceremony of memorial drinking was most long-lived in the districts where Schartauanism was predominant must be considered in the light of the conservative lifestyles that developed in the wake of Schartauanism. Older rituals that were previously common throughout Sweden were thus maintained. Several of the parishes in the diocese of Gothenburg, where the ritual of memorial drinking was kept up in 1968, belonged to districts with the highest frequency of participants to church service and communion during the 1950s (Giertz 1957). Moreover, these were the districts where churching of women continued longest, into the 1930s and 1940s (picture 32).

Contrary to leaders within the non-conformist revival movements and the temperance movements during the twentieth century, ministers influenced by Schartauanism did not seek total abstinence from alcohol (Lewis 1993). Instead, they promoted moderation in the consumption of alcohol in accordance with older Lutheran tradition (Alkohol 1987). Consequently, criticism of the memorial toast did not arise for the sole reason that it implied alcohol consumption. In the diocese of Gothenburg, the non-conformist churches were less prominent.

While Schartauanism was a significant factor in keeping up the ritual of memorial drinking during the twentieth century, other aspects appear to have contributed to the decline and discontinuation of this ritual after the 1960s. Funeral customs as a whole were simplified. A gathering for coffee after the funeral became more common, usually without wine, instead of the earlier custom of having a full-scale dinner. In 1968, the pastor of the parish of Dalstorp in the diocese of Gothenburg reported the following: “Nowadays, memorial toasts only occur if the gathering is in the form of a funeral dinner, but not always. They are always omitted if coffee, sandwiches and cream cake are served, which is the usual procedure now”.

Sometimes, the dying out of the memorial drinking ritual might be connected with the appointment of a new clergyman in the parish. Undertakers could also be

opposed to memorial drinking. “I do not consider this memorial toast particularly suitable and I usually say so to the relatives when they mention it”, one undertaker from Gothenburg stated. A few of the accounts from parishes in 1968 mentioned that this ritual was kept up longest at the funerals of older people. There are also reports saying that families that had recently moved to the parish were the first to abandon this ritual. Abstaining from alcohol does not seem to have been a motive for abandoning this ritual. In later years, non-alcoholic wine was often used as an alternative.

## 2 Revitalization of old culture through new rituals

### 1 The Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days. Attempts to retain ethnic minority identity in Norway

Finnish settlers, who moved to the forests in the central parts of Sweden and nearby areas on the Norwegian side of the border, were called Forest Finns. They came from the county of Savolax in Finland, particularly during the first half of the seventeenth century. The Finnish immigration of that period was caused by the need for new forest land to clear by the burn-beating method for cultivating rye (Broberg 1988). In 1998, the Forest Finns were officially declared a national minority in Norway.

The Forest Finns lived, isolated from the Swedish and Norwegian population, between the Norwegian river Glomma in the province of Hedmark and the Swedish river Klarälven in the province of Värmland. This was the reason why the old Forest



36. Map of the Nordic countries.  
G=Grue parish, Norway. R=  
Rautalampi parish, Finland.

Finnish culture and language lived on into the nineteenth century. However, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, as a result of uniformization processes the Finnish language was no longer used. The fact that children of the Forest Finns were forbidden to speak their home language because of the Norwegian school politics was a contributing factor to language disappearance. Schoolchildren were supposed to speak Norwegian which meant that they were no longer taught Finnish by their parents.



*37. On the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days in 1977 this man weaving a basket of pine sticks, a common craft in the Finn Forest in earlier days, was to be found under the sign "Everyday Life". Photo Birger Nesholen, Museum for Forest Finn Culture in Norway, Svullrya.*

The focus of my study within the Nordic Finn Forest project 1986-1990 (Gustavsson 1993) was on the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days, which have been celebrated for three days in July every year since 1970. This festival takes place in the rural district of Grue, in the province of Hedmark in eastern Norway, close to the Swedish border. Several hundred visitors have attended these festivities, in some years even up to thousands, from Norway, Sweden, Finland and the USA.

The Forest Finnish Settlers' Days were initiated by, among others, the Forest Finnish writer Åsta Holth (1904-1999). During these three days in July the "Forest Finn Republic" is declared with her as its chosen symbolic president as long as she lived. The purpose of the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days was to manifest the old Forest Finnish culture in various ways and to express its renewed appreciation. All this happened after this culture had largely disappeared as a living praxis. It lived on in the oral narratives about living conditions in the old days, in craft traditions, and in material cultural heritage.

My research question within the Nordic Finn Forest project was: what do the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days express among the people of the "Finn Forest", and



38. The couple chosen to act as the bride and groom on the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days in 1975 are seen riding through the village of Svullrya accompanied by two fiddlers. Photo Birger Nesholen, Museum for Finn Forest Culture in Norway, Svullrya.

what have these days meant to them? As festivities during these days are part of a revitalization process, it is important to understand the driving forces behind them as well as their effects on the community.

To begin with, the simplicity of everyday life in old times is the most conspicuous feature of exhibits at *Museum for Forest Finn Culture in Norway*, in the largest settlement in the Finn Forest, the village of Svullrya. Visitors to the museum are able to acquaint themselves with various practical skills such as birch bark handicraft.

It is easy to recognize the Finnish background in activities that take place during these three days. Women are dressed in the traditional Finn Forest costume. Finnish dishes are served, such as “motti”, a kind of porridge made of flour, salt and water, “silppu” made of diced pork, potato and milk, and the dessert “hillo” of crushed raw bilberries or lingonberries and flour. During the Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days, the visitors are able to watch these dishes being prepared and to taste them, since they are also for sale.

The celebration of festivals in the Finn Forest in former days is usually demonstrated in the wedding festivities arranged for an imaginary bridal couple. The traditional Forest Finn music plays an important role at such festivals. Celebrations on



39. *The flag is flying for the opening of the Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days in 2015. Photo Birger Nesholen, Museum for Finn Forest Finn Culture in Norway, Svullrya.*





40. The writer Åsta Holth, left, dressed in the Forest Finn costume on the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days in 1975. She is standing beside the monument to Carl Axel Gottlund (1796-1875) who documented the Forest Finnish culture in Norway and Sweden during the nineteenth century. Photo Birger Nesholen, Museum for Forest Finn Culture in Norway, Svullrya.

the Sunday begin with a service of music in the church, where old hymns from the Finn Forest are sung. Then the bridal couple, accompanied by fiddlers, ride in a horse-drawn carriage or on horseback to the Museum for Forest Finn Culture in Norway. The feast laid on for the wedding guests consists of Finnish dishes. After the meal in the smoke house (the dwelling house) at the museum the bridal couple present themselves for inspection by all the visitors at "brudstaben" (a tree stump used as a platform). Under the supervision of Åsta Holth, the visitors look for omens to discover whether the bride or the groom would be the dominant part in the marriage.

A special flag for the Forest Finnish Settlers' Day was created during the late 1970s. This was just before the ethnic flag of the Sami of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia was officially accepted in 1986. In part, the flag of the Forest Finnish Settlers' Day resembles the Norwegian flag but the colours are different and the size too. The main panels are green symbolising the forest, while the black cross signi-

fies the ashes that were left after burn-beating clearance of the forest. The flag is flown every year at the opening of the Forest Finnish Settlers' Day.

During the 1980s, the interest in the old Forest Finnish culture had grown to such an extent that some of the people in the Finn Forest who were most active in preparing and arranging the activities on the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days, attended a newly started course of Finnish. The ability to speak Finnish had vanished with their grandparents or even earlier.

The interest in searching into and safeguarding the old Finnish culture dates back at earliest to the late 1960s when genealogical societies were set up and

arranged bus trips to Savolax in Finland, in particular to the parish of Rautalampi whence the people of the Finn Forest originated. The participants had never been in contact with Finland before nor heard of any distant relatives in Finland through their parents or older family members. A new interest was aroused by visiting the area, seeing the landscape and meeting the people from whom they had come. Our interviews showed that the visitors felt at home in the Finnish culture in Savolax and found it similar to theirs in the Finn Forest. They were delighted with the way they were received in Finland, where large parties were held for them, even though the language was a hindrance when they wanted to communicate with one another. These family reunions led to the founding of a music society in 1965. This society documented the old Forest Finn music and sometimes invited people from Rautalampi to attend the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days. These guests played Finnish music on such occasions. A child's folk costume bought during the visit to Savolax served as a model for the costume adopted by the music society. The men were keen on wearing the costume of the same pattern.

People who have moved out to other parts of Norway or to the USA also visited the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days. Afterwards they were asked to relate their own experiences from the Finn Forest at one of the annual "utflytterstevne" (emigrants meetings). In 1976, the organizers declared that "the idea was to make the Forest Finn area known and, at the same time, to make it a place attracting the emigrants home for an enjoyable get-together" (the newspaper *Østlendingen* July 6, 1976).

The people who were most actively engaged in the preparations for and the activities during the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days in the 1970s and 1980s belonged to a middle generation (they were in their 30-50 years); they also inspired their children. Those born during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did not show the same interest and did not take part in the celebrations. This can be explained by the fact that, in their adolescence, the older generation had negative experiences in their contacts with the Norwegian population from the surrounding farming areas. For this reason, the parents and grandparents of those who took an active part in the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days were determined that their children should not learn Finnish. They were told, namely, that Finnish was a language used only for spells. In the 1980s, our older informants also related that during the early twentieth century they often met with disparaging remarks about their Finnish origins. This took place at parties for young people or other visits to the main centre at Kirkenær. The people from the Finn Forest were called "Finn devils". They were also told that they smelt of smoke from the smoke houses.

The people of middle age and younger had not experienced such critical attitude and thus had no similar problematic relationship with their Finnish origin. In quite

another way than the middle-aged and younger people, the elderly had to work hard and suffer deprivations, especially in those places where there were many small-holdings. Such memories and experiences could not inspire them to return to their earlier life in the way it was the case with the younger people for whom it was a means of distinguishing themselves from the Norwegian population.

While the older generation who had lived in the Finn Forest all their lives did not show any real interest in safeguarding the old Finnish culture, it was quite another matter for those who had moved out and returned after a number of years on a visit or in order to resettle in the area. These people exhibited a new and appreciative view of their Finnish origins and wanted to do something about preserving the old cultural heritage. One of the informants described the Forest Finn people who moved away during the Second World War as follows: “by the time they came back, they had become proud of being Finns”.

The most striking example of the role played by the emigrants is that of Åsta Holth who from 1928 and onwards lived for many years in Oslo before she came back to the Finn Forest after the end of the Second World War. By then she was tired of life in a big city. She described this in the children’s book “Fem år på Nuttilla” (Five Years at Nuttilla) in 1957, the autobiographical novel “Piga” (Servant-girl) in 1979, and “Fattigmanns kokebok” (Poor Man’s Cookery Book) in 1984. After the return to her home tract the writer’s eyes opened to the values in the old Forest Finnish culture. She had been sympathetic towards the communists since 1917 and now took an active part in the local district council. Her intention was to safeguard the Forest Finnish culture.

According to Åsta Holth, if the Forest Finnish culture was to survive, it was necessary to create among the Forest Finn inhabitants, both at home and away, a new attitude to this culture so that they would work for its continuance. The Forest Finnish culture, previously despised in the Norwegian community, was to be redefined so that it was given a higher status. One way to accentuate the Finnish origins was to study family histories, which Åsta Holth began in the 1950s. About 1970 she reconstructed the old Forest Finn costume with the help of oral tradition, material remnants and photographs in museums and in the Norwegian and Swedish Forest Finn areas. The apron, for example, was made after a pattern from Rautalampi. “Every woman wore the red and white shawl when I was a child”, remembered Åsta Holth, but with times the old Forest Finn costume disappeared. It was of a simple type lacking, among other things, silver ornaments. Åsta Holth organized courses for sewing folk costumes and arranged them so that costumes were sewn up and sold as cheaply as possible and, thanks to this, spread as widely as possible.

From the 1940s onwards, Åsta Holth began to write novels specifically dealing with the life of the Finnish population in the Forest Finn area, from the time of the

first settlers in the early seventeenth century up to the nineteenth century; among these novels are “Kornet og freden” (Corn and Freedom) 1955, “Steinen blømer” (The stone is flowering) 1963 and “Kapellet” (The Chapel) 1967. The oral narrative tradition about the immigration and the time that followed provided important sources for these literary works. This applies particularly to the oral stories passed down by Åsta Holth’s father, who was a shoemaker. These novels depict conflicts between the Finns and Norwegians. The author also emphasized the hard economic conditions under which the Forest Finns had lived, especially after burn-beating was forbidden in the eighteenth century. The novels aimed at heightening the interest in Forest Finnish culture among the Finns and creating respect and understanding for it among the neighbouring Norwegian community. The women, in particular, were portrayed as strong characters. In “Five Years at Nuttila”, 1957, Åsta Holth urged those who had moved out to return to the earth and forest in the Forest Finn area. Many people in other parts of Norway outside the area also appreciated her novels.

Yet another way to further Åsta Holth’s efforts was to start the Forest Finnish



41. The play about the history of the immigrants is performed in 2013 on the Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days. Photo Birger Nesholen, Museum for Forest Finn Culture in Norway, Svullrya.

Settlers' Days. She wrote a play about the history of the Forest Finn settlers. The newspaper *Aftenposten* July 13, 1976 reported that the play performed on the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days that year "was probably the most important event of the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days". The play about the history of the immigrants is still performed at the Forest Finnish Settlers' Day every year even in the 2010s. The deep involvement of the authoress inspired younger members of the Forest Finn community who always lived in the area. For instance, Else Waalberg, a farmer's wife born in 1938, who grew up on a croft, declared that "Åsta Holth has been our spokesman on behalf of keeping up our forefathers' customs. She has always been proud of being a Finn".

Interest in the Finnish origins was awakened just when the old Forest Finnish culture was on the point of being assimilated, that is, wiped out by the Norwegian culture. This development was reinforced by the considerable movement of people to other places in Norway, as a result of the growing centralization and the economic impoverishment in the Forest Finn area. If the reaction had not occurred during the late 1960s and during the 1970s, it seems very likely that the old Forest Finnish culture would have vanished.

The strong impact made by the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days must not only be seen as expressing the general upsurge of nostalgia that was manifest in many other parts of the Nordic countries around 1970. This phenomenon should be considered in the context of the developing social situation. Thus, the Forest Finn people felt more and more neglected compared with those living in the main centre of the district, Kirkenær. They felt that possibilities of preserving the Finn Forest as a distinctive, functioning unit were under a serious threat. Because of the reduction of services and opportunities for employment, the prerequisites for remaining in the area were reduced, and the young people had to move elsewhere. In this situation, the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days could be used to draw attention to the old Finnish culture as a special feature of the Forest Finn area; this could be a kind of counteractive protest against the increasing impoverishment. One informant said that the emphasis on the Finnish culture on the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days was "a dig at Grue council ... we use the fact that we are Finns as a weapon". The validity of this statement can be verified by detailed reports in newspapers from the 1970s. According to one report in the newspaper *Glåmdalen*, July 12, 1975, "the Forest Finn Republic" wished to use the celebrations to promote the decentralization of schools and stem the stream of commuters to Grue by creating employment opportunities in the Finn Forest. This endeavour to bring about changes continued during the 1980s and was even manifested in the performances of plays containing criticism of the local council. In the summer of 1986 the amateurs from the Finn Forest, who had taken an active part in the Forest Finnish Settlers' Days, performed Ludvig Holberg's play "Den stunn-

desløse” (The man who couldn’t stay still) as a satire on a local government. Its main character was eager to carry out many tasks at the same time but was in actual fact so restless that nothing got done.

Further support for interpreting the activities on the Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days as being prompted essentially by the feeling of the local population that they had been neglected by the local council is manifest in the fact that no aversion has been shown to the people on the Swedish side of the border. The Swedes were as close as those who lived in the central part of the district, Kirkenær. However, on the Swedish side there were many families of Finnish origin to whom the Forest Finn inhabitants were related and with whom they had contact. Furthermore, Swedes could not marginalize the Norwegian Forest Finn area since they had neither political nor economic influence there. One informant in the Finn Forest said: “We have never experienced any national boundary or distinction as regards Sweden. If we are forgotten, it is the Norwegian state that has forgotten us. We have family connections with the Forest Finns on the Swedish side”.

The Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days had also effected the attitude to the local Forest Finnish culture on the part of the neighbouring communities. One of the first effects, traceable at the interviews in the 1980s, was that many Finns no longer felt inferior to those Norwegians who lived in the central part of the district, Kirkenær. One woman who for a long time took an active part in the Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days claimed that “nowadays we don’t at all feel inferior to the people living in the centre of the district”. Instead, the population of Kirkenær became aware of the unity and activity that developed in the Forest Finn area. It became noticeable even in club activities. One woman who was interviewed remarked proudly that she had heard people in Kirkenær saying: “Oh, it’s nothing for you who are in the Forest Finn area, you can manage it there, but here we wouldn’t be able to manage it if we were to start up a society”.

The Forest Finn inhabitants maintained in the 1980s that they noticed a gradual increase in understanding on the part of the local council. The local centre of Svullrya had been provided with new social and cultural services. A new school was put up in 1973. Furthermore, the district council built a sewage disposal system in Svullrya. The Forest Finn inhabitants were even given a branch library there so that they no longer needed travelling into Kirkenær to borrow books. These measures helped to reduce the antipathy towards the main centre. Those who took an active part in the Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days, including one informant born in 1957, ascribed these changes to the Forest Finn people’s actions against the council. The changes, in their turn, helped to increase the faith of the young people in the prospects of the Forest Finn area, especially Svullrya, to continue functioning as a unit in the district. After the school was built, several young

families returned and settled in Svullrya. One young informant who had always lived in the Finn Forest stated that “it came to our rescue”. About twenty houses were put up at the time.

It is obvious that the chief aims of the people of the Forest Finns were on the way of being fulfilled. They had achieved respect and understanding for the Finnish culture even outside their own circles and they had received a better social and cultural service. Therefore, in the 1980s they no longer felt forced by external circumstances to move away from the area, as was the case a few decades ago.

In conclusion, this study shows that the Forest Finnish Settlers’ Days festivals have brought about significant consequences. Former inhabitants who returned to the Forest Finn area have made an invaluable contribution towards the recognition of the Finnish culture values. They were important driving forces of cultural revitalization. Through her novels and personal endeavour regarding, for example, the Forest Finn costume, Åsta Holth helped to create a positive opinion of this culture among the people of the Forest Finns themselves and to gain respect and understanding beyond this group. This shows that a single individual can play, as one of the driving forces, a central role in the process of cultural revitalization. The redefinition of the old culture in a new situation was not an end in itself or a nostalgic yearning for bygone days. Instead, it came to be an active weapon in the struggle, especially against the district council in the main centre, to provide the Finn Forest with the chance to survive as a functioning community.

One important reason why the “expatriots”, and Åsta Holth in particular, succeeded in their designs to change the attitude towards the old Finnish culture was the centralization of local government in Grue and the economic impoverishment of the Forest Finn area. This is a clear example of how social and economic factors concur with individual initiatives to kindle revitalization. The effects of revitalization were clearly felt in the community surrounding the threatened Forest Finnish minority. In particular, the district council became more accommodating. An important prerequisite for the continuing existence of the Finnish culture was that the young people should be given the opportunity to go on living there and not be forced to move away because of, among other things, lack of service and opportunities for employment.

## 2 Rediscovery and Transformation of Traditional Rituals within a New Religious Movement in Sweden: The Oasis Movement

The Swedish Oasis Movement, which considers itself to be part of the worldwide charismatic religious movement, was started in 1984 as the Reference Group for Spiritual Renewal in the Swedish Church (RAF), re-named Oasis in 1989. Until 2000 the

Swedish Lutheran Church was the established state church of Sweden but has since become independent. The Oasis Movement has successively acquired a more ecumenical emphasis and is no longer related solely to the Swedish Church as at its start. Representatives for the free churches, especially for the Pentecostal Movement, are now attenders as well. The movement has also relations with the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

The Oasis Movement deliberately addresses all age groups and social classes. Hierarchy is not allowed. In order to maintain equality regardless of age, a children's group up to the age of confirmation was established in 1999. It was first called Children's Oasis and later the Youngsters. Young people in the years after confirmation belong to Youth Oasis which arranges summer and New Year's camps. The economy of the Oasis Movement is based exclusively on voluntary donations. There are no registred members in this movement.

The concept "Oasis" implies an association with a fresh-water spring in the desert, thus referring to the biblical oases in desert areas. The Oasis Movement stresses a "sound spiritual revival" as its goal. "Sound" in this context means non-extreme.

A charismatic movement emphasizes the presence of the Holy Ghost and the so-called spiritual gifts of grace (from the Greek *charisma*), which refer to the prophecies, speaking in tongues (glossolalia) and the gift of curing the sick with reference to Paul's words in Rome 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (<https://www.ne.se>, Karismatisk rörelse). A movement of this kind does not advocate the creation of new churches but wishes to influence existing churches.

The reintroduced liturgical rituals include the rediscovery of communion, confession, dance, flags, intercessional prayers including the laying on of hands and anointment with oils, healing services, speaking in tongues (glossolalia), and songs of praise. This in many cases takes place in combination with lifted hands, personal testimony, prophetic messages and music played on modern instruments.

The Oasis Movement is not a static organisation, but one in continuous change. Some new rituals have arisen suddenly and spontaneously, but their roots are firmly planted in biblical examples. There is an obvious continuity in this regard. If something new begins, it is willingly accepted as a sign of the Holy Spirit guidance. A basic principle manifest in the Oasis Movement is the idea of renewal on a historical basis. This concerns transforming history for a new age: adhering to the basic fundamentals of the Bible (and of Luther) and bringing them into a new age (Gustavsson 2016: 55ff).

This study of the Oasis Movement aims at answering the following research questions:

*Which historical background provides the basis for whatever is to be renewed or rediscovered? How does adaptation to the modern time proceed?*



In the context of these questions, new liturgical rituals acquire a special interest. The concept of oscillation between continuity and change is basic in this study which intends to examine the Oasis Movement from the inside and to follow its development and changes across time. The argumentation and discourse (i.e. concepts of the ideal) within the Oasis Movement concerning innovation and retention will be tackled here as well.

Primary sources for this study are the newsletter *RAF Blad* for 1984-1989 and *Oasblad* from 1990 on. These newsletters contain information about the spiritual message and discourse conducted in the movement. In some cases participants write about their experiences at Oasis meetings. The Oasis Movement diligently uses digital media to spread its spiritual message and information. It has a comprehensive and always up-dated website <https://www.oasrorelsen.se>. This study is also based on my own observer's experiences at the large summer meetings held between 2011 and 2017 and at some smaller meetings held in the autumn and spring every year in various parts of Sweden. I have also interviewed leading persons in the Oasis Movement, among them the dance leaders Kristina and John Egil Rage and Lena Lagerqvist.



42. *The Oasis Leadership sitting to the left on the platform. A hymn-singing dance group performs in the centre with a vocal group to the right at the summer Oasis meeting in Jönköping, 2015. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.*

### *1 Liturgical Dance*

Among the reintroduced liturgical rituals I will concentrate on liturgical dance. Songs of Praise expressing joy in the presence of God and optimism for the future are established fixtures at all Oasis meetings. While singing Songs of Praise, many participants wave large flags fastened to long poles. The dance leader Kristina Andersson (married Rage in 2004) wrote about the use of flags in “the rehabilitation of dancing” (*Oasblad* 2001/1); she enlarged on flags and dancing in an issue of *Oasblad*, 2009, referring to Psalm 20: 6 where the raising of a banner as a symbol of victory from God is mentioned (*Oasblad* 2009/2). Thus, waving flags is seen as not a recent idea, but as an action firmly established on biblical examples.

Dance, waving with flags and Songs of Praise are closely interlinked. The first Oasis leader, the clergyman Carl Gustaf Stenbäck wrote in the first *RAF Blad* about the two-week-long visit of Dawid Watson’s dance team from England in the spring of 1984: “This team presents the Christian message in song, drama and dance. It is neither a performance nor an appearance. The team leads the congregation in song. The dance is like the soprano voice in a choir. It lifts the Song of Praise and makes it richer and more beautiful” (*RAF Blad* 1984/1). This quotation makes it clear that dance is not a performance for an audience, as has always been declared by the Oasis Movement. Instead, dance is related to the glory of God and inspiration from the Holy Ghost.

A choir from York in England which congregation had experienced revival and renewal during the previous fifteen years visited Sweden in the fall of 1984, and dance was included as an element in Songs of Praise. A partaker in Gothenburg described his meeting with the English choir thus: “The seminar I attended worked with dance. We learned how to prepare a sacred dance. Dance, like all other congregational meetings in York, was combined with prayers and phrases from the Bible. We began by praying together”. Each partaker was given a biblical text from the Book of Psalms and then assisted in expressing its content in movements. “Praising God in movement was a fantastic experience” (*RAF Blad* 1984/3).

After 1984, dance was not discussed again until 1994 when dance pedagogue and deacon Mia Rydberg from Gothenburg wrote an article entitled “Dancing to the glory of God”. She showed there that dance was not unknown in the Old or the New Testament. Several biblical texts were quoted as proof, such as Exodus 15:19-20 and several texts in Psalms; Luke 6: 23 was also quoted. Referring to her own experience of different forms of dance in the church since 1987, Rydberg maintained that “the movement begins in my heart, within me, and is expressed by the body in order to praise the Lord. Movement and dance can also help me to open up my inner being and take part with the whole of myself in Songs of Praise and worship” (*Oasblad* 1994/4). In 1993, the Christian Dance Fellowship of Sweden was formed, later called Psalto ([www.psalto.se](http://www.psalto.se)); it is in contact with the Oasis Movement (*Oasblad* 1997/4, Lagerqvist 2013).



43. Dancing, singing and waving hands on the platform at the summer Oasis meeting in Jönköping, 2015. Photo Johan Semby.



44. Dancing collectively hand-in-hand in a long ring and singing at the summer Oasis meeting in Jönköping, 2015. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.

In 2001, the dance leader Kristina Andersson (married Rage in 2004) wrote a lengthy article entitled “The rehabilitation of dance”. There she argued that dance is not about “adding something new to make the church more attractive and gain new members”. The Oasis dance leader regrets that “dance has been neglected in Western worship services for nearly the past 500 years” and points up the positive statement by the Church Father Augustinus (354-430) about dance in a spiritual perspective. This was affirmed by the dance historian Eva Helen Ulvros who, however, mentioned that Augustinus also described degenerated versions of dance. The Church Fathers in the ancient church saw dance during worship services as an expression of the adoration of God, referring to angels’ dance in Heaven (Ulvros 2004: 52ff). King David also often spoke about dance in Psalms (*Oasblad* 2001/1). These references to the old tradition of sacred dancing expressed by Kristina Andersson/Rage are typical for the Oasis Movement. Something new is never created for its own sake. Instead, there is a wish to return to and rehabilitate rituals that are deeply established within older biblical and church tradition.

In 2009 and 2010 Kristina Rage wrote two detailed articles on the liturgical dance to the glory of God where she referred to the “dances of praise” mentioned in the Old and New Testaments, although most of her examples were taken from the Old Testament. Thus, she states: “Approval of songs of praise, music and dance is found in Psalms 149 and 150. [...] When we dance before the Lord at an Oasis meeting, it is in answer to his summons to honour and worship him with our whole being in song, music and dance”. John Egil Rage has told that he gets spiritual inspiration from the Lord how to dance accompanying songs of praise and music.

According to Kristina Rage, all forms of dancing should be free and unregulated in order to suit different people who wish to dance. “When we dance before the Lord, we can use all the steps, hops and movements we know or can be inspired to” (*Oasblad* 2009/2, 2010/2). This agrees with the Oasis Movement’s often expressed ideal of independence. A distinctive feature of the Oasis Movement is its insistence on the expression of liturgical independence. No regulation is advised; in their liturgical behaviour people should be guided by their own individual decisions and choices. In 2003, the Oasis inspirator Berit Simonsson, who has been an active member of the movement since the 1980s, wrote the article “Independence is the best feature” where references to biblical sources are a vital part of historical validation: “The Bible is unusually fresh and innovative about such matters too. Independence means belonging to Jesus, and yes, independence is won by being His slave” (*Oasblad* 2003/3).

As an observer at many meetings I have not noticed any couple dancing with embraces. Instead, the outstretched hands are a prominent feature, which clearly highlights the idea of worship upward toward heaven, and not other people around. The

social feature is found instead in the long dance that usually follows after worship dance. The long dance covers all ages and extends around the whole hall and continues several rounds.

### *2 Oscillation between continuity and change*

The Oasis Movement refers to the historical background of the rituals that have been rediscovered and reintroduced at the movement meetings. This history of these rituals goes back to biblical texts. At the same time, there is openness and willingness to adjust the old rituals to the aesthetics of modern society. Willingness to change external details in the spirit of a new age is appropriate when the inner spiritual core remains unaltered. In this way an oscillation between continuity and change is manifest in the revitalization and adaptation of earlier ritualistic forms.

For spreading the spiritual message the Oasis Movement extensively applies modern technology in tact with the continuous emergence of new media. The movement is characterized by the wide-ranging use of modern musical instruments, the Internet, web-radio, web-TV, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and Swipe for collection payment. The new technology helps create networks and contacts between the meetings.

The Oasis movement has revived older rituals, now disregarded within the Swedish Church, whose roots are traced back in the Old and New Testaments. This revitalization, on the other hand, goes together with the emphasis by the Oasis Movement on the liturgical independence, and this agrees with the spirit of contemporary individualism resisting any form of conformity.

## 3 New collective rituals around sudden death in Norway and Sweden

Commemoration of deaths in traffic accidents have assumed similar features in Norway and Sweden. In Sweden, it is not common to mark individual traits in rapid sorrow situations but instead to emphasize collective manifestations which also accords with Norwegian traditions.

In the early 2000s, a research project on rituals was started at the Department of Cultural Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo (*Ritualer* 2006). My topic in this project was to study new collective rituals on the occasion of sudden death. How do the nearest family, friends and acquaintances of the deceased cope with a sudden and unexpected death? How and why are new rituals created, how are they spread, and what meaning do they have for those people who are thrust into difficult situations? These are questions that will be discussed in this section with focus on traffic accidents.

The field work, consisting of interviews, observations and photographs, was carried out in southeastern Norway and in the adjacent province of Bohuslän in western Sweden. Articles with reports in Norwegian and Swedish newspapers have also been important sources.

A lot of traffic accidents occur on highways because of the marked growth in automotive traffic in the 1900s. The German ethnologists Konrad Köstlin and Christine Aka have separately studied the increasing number of roadside memorials – crosses placed along German highways – at the scenes of fatal accidents during the 1990s and 2000s (Köstlin 1999, Aka 2007). In Romania too, in the 1990s and early 2000s, it became common to raise crosses alongside roads where fatal traffic accidents had occurred. The sociologist Irina Stahl calls them “Sudden Death Memorials” (Stahl 2013).

The site has a kind of sacred meaning for passers-by because a fatal accident has taken place there, and it also serves as a reminder to drive safely. Thus, crosses may have a preventive function as well which shows how the religious and the secular can go hand-in-hand in contemporary society.

Roadside memorials of this kind have also begun emerging in Norway and Sweden and nearly at the same time in both of the countries. Similar to continental patterns (*Grassroots Memorials* 2011), increasing numbers of collective memorial observations and gatherings have been held at the actual sites of traffic accidents. A cross decorated with flowers can be placed at a spot alongside the road where an accident has occurred. Such sites of death having a prominent element of spontaneity obtain a symbolic meaning (cf. Petersson 2010). For example, a wooden cross photographed after an accident in Hälleviksstrand in Orust Municipality, Bohuslän in January 1998, disappeared after a period of about three months. By contrast, another cross in Stala, in Orust, that was set up after an accident at a sharp bend in the road in October 1997 was regularly decorated with plastic flowers during ten years. This cross was very conspicuous and easily observable. The memory of a fatal accident and a warning of the dangers in traffic were combined in this roadside memorial. The cross therefore will retain its significance for wayfarers in years to come, not just in the months immediately following the accident.

The fact that a memorial site can remain to be cared for over a long period of time may be of actual benefit to the next of kin. This was confirmed by a married couple in a newspaper interview in 2003. They lost their son in 1995 when he was run down by an inebriated driver. The parents created a bed of plants encircled by stones at the scene of the accident. The father stated: “visiting the grave is just too sorrowful, so I do not do that more often than twice a year. This memorial does not arouse the same feelings but I also feel I am doing something meaningful about drunk driving” (*Kyrkans Tidning*, 30 October to 5 November 2003).



45. *A wooden cross in Stala that was put up after an accident at a sharp bend in the road in 1997. Photo Anders Gustavsson 2004.*

The accident site is here experienced as being less personal than the grave but, at the same time, as giving society at large, not only a private circle, an opportunity for action, in this case, warning against drunk driving. This effort is made to save others from suffering the same kind of tragedy.

A memorial made of stone cannot be placed as close to the road itself and thus is not as visible as a wooden cross, but it is, on the other hand, far more durable than a cross of wood. After the comedian Lasse Lindroth was killed in 1999 in an accident at a very sharp curve in Bohuslän when driving home from Oslo to Gothenburg, his relatives placed a memorial stone on the site. The inscription on the stone reads, "Lasse Lindroth died here on 11 July 1999". The use of the personal name ensures that the victim will remain an individual for all time - in contrast to anonymous wooden crosses. Many friends and acquaintances tend to participate in the consecration ceremonies of such memorial stones, especially when the victim lived near the accident site. The ceremony thus becomes a local manifestation of memory and solidarity.

The National Association for the Victims of Traffic Accidents, Hordaland in Norway planned to place signs marked with crosses at sites of fatal accidents along highways throughout Norway. These white crosses against a black background were meant to symbolize death. According to the association, they would warn about the continuously rising number of fatal traffic accidents and thus help to save lives. The cross as a symbol of death would, in this case, act as a deterrent. The Norwegian transport authorities did not, however, give permission for the plan. Instead, they saw

the crosses as a danger for traffic safety because of their distracting drivers' attention (*Aftenposten*, 12 August 2000). Individuals and associations cannot act freely as far as public places are concerned. There are official, legal limits as to what can be realized as a collective memorial action.

An illegal action was carried out in Norway in the autumn of 2003 when 58 wooden crosses were set up along highway E6 in the province of Østfold as a reminder of the 58 persons who had been killed on this highway since 1990. After an hour, the activists were forced by the police to remove the crosses (*Halden Arbeiderblad*, 25 November 2003). The 58 victims were not regarded as individuals, but were remembered as a collective unit. The reason for setting up the crosses was once again to warn against the danger of new accidents. The activists also hoped that their demonstration would help to hasten the building of a new four-lane highway. In this way, the action involved a criticism of the Norwegian transport authorities, and of the state as well.

A new form of remembrance has rapidly gained popularity, especially in Sweden – crosses are replaced at accident sites by brighter symbols, such as flowers, lighted candles, poems, and photos of a victim or victims. Such items are too far from being as durable as wooden crosses or stones. The new symbols have a more spontaneous character as an expression of sudden grief and bereavement brought on by an accident. These brighter symbols might help to lighten the bleakness of the heavy shock that has been experienced. The cross is more linked with death and sorrow in modern Swedish society, and to the darker side of existence in general but not so evident in Norway. Brighter symbols may fill a need for support in the severe situation of grief. Also, to replace wilted flowers and extinguished candles may be of help when in grief.

Friends of the victim(s), both in Norway and Sweden, have also started to assemble in person at the scene of an accident shortly after it has taken place in order to give a silent and collective testimony of their grief and bereavement. The disaster will be experienced as being particularly tangible on the very site of the accident. Several instances of this new custom have been reported in articles and photographs in both Norwegian and Swedish newspapers. In 2003, a newspaper reporter from Oslo told of having been sent out to photograph several such incidents during the last years. These gatherings are mostly arranged by young people who place flowers, pieces of papers with written messages, and lighted candles on the site.

Here is one example of this from my data. A seventeen-year-old boy from Västra Frölunda, a suburb of Gothenburg, crashed his car one night in September 2000 on a rocky cliff in the island of Orust and was killed instantly. The next evening a large group of dark-clad young people assembled at the scene of the accident about 80 kilometres from Gothenburg. There, the young people lit candles and set out flowers and



several enlarged photographs of the victim. The photos strengthened the impression that the victim could be felt as being present. The young people remained at the site in heartfelt silence for a long time. I observed all of this at a tactful distance and later photographed the richly adorned site. However, within a few weeks this memorial had disappeared; the flowers had withered and the candles burned out. The idea of using the site as a symbol of warning had not been the objective here, as it had been in previous instances of wooden crosses being placed alongside highways. After the funeral, the next of kin and the young friends could visit the grave whenever they wished to commemorate the victim, and had no need to drive to an accident site a long distance away.



46. A 17-year-old boy from Västra Frölunda in Gothenburg lost his life after crashing his car in this mountainside in September 2000. The next evening his young friends gathered at the site and placed there several photographs of the victim, flowers and numerous lighted candles and torches. Photo Anders Gustavsson.



47. *Flowers and lighted candles placed at the accident site where a fifteen year old boy was killed on his moped 6 December 2015. Note the crushed parts of the moped in the forefront. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.*

Traffic authorities in Sweden, however, have reacted with unease to the new custom of large groups of people gathering at accident sites. A representative for the Highway Department in western Sweden stated in 1999 “when these people come together after an incident like this, they just don’t consider their own safety. We have had several close calls recently and fear that this may lead to a serious accident” (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 17 January 1999). Similar warnings from the police and the traffic authorities related to people gathered beside the road and standing on the road continued in the early 2000s. After a fatal moped accident on the island of Orust, 6 December 2015, the traffic authorities put up warning signs with a speed restriction and speed bumps along the narrow road past the site of the accident (*Göteborgs Tidningen* 7 December 2015). There was a serious danger for new accidents when a large number of youngsters gathered in the winter darkness to silently remember and honour the fifteen-year-old boy who died in the accident. This occasion was the first time I observed the placement of crushed parts of the vehicle together with flowers and lighted candles on the accident site. Earlier this occurred in Germany (Aka 2007).

The same traffic accident may often involve deaths of several young people. Quite a number of newspaper reports, especially from Norway, showed how the entire community was stricken when the young victims came from the same area. Such accidents make the entire community feel desperate. Thus, after a traffic accident in February 2000 in Norway in which three young people were killed, a man who lives in the community of some 500 people said, “in a tiny village like ours, we all feel like the next of kin” (*VG*, 8 February 2000). The scenes of such traffic accidents and the young people’s homes are usually located close to each other, since the victims were on their way to or from some social gathering nearby. In such cases grief can be expressed by coming together at the place of the accident and in available meeting places such as the village church, community centre or clubhouse. Gatherings of this kind are held immediately after the accident and may entail talks, candle lighting, and, occasionally, a display of photographs of the victims. Crowds of people show their sympathy at such moments of grief by coming together outdoors and indoors. Solidarity of the local community is very strong in such critical situations and is experienced as being communal. A collective sorrow is often manifested in a local church. Over 500 young people took part in a memorial service in Randaberg Church in Norway in 2000 when three local young



48. About 150 young people assembled at the scene of a traffic accident in 2003 near Oslo on the day after three local youngsters died after colliding with a bus. Photo Jon Terje H. Hansen, *Dagbladet*, Oslo.

people were killed due to crashing into a tunnel wall. Photographs of the victims and lighted candles were placed at the entrance of the church (*Aftenposten*, 26 March 2000). “It helped us all when we saw that almost the entire community was present”, said the local sheriff when nearly 300 people gathered in Eggedal’s community centre in Buskerud county after two young men were killed in 2002 when their car crashed into a building (*Dagbladet*, 12 August 2002). Naturally enough, a huge crowd of people cannot come together after a fatal accident on a highway of heavy traffic, but must find some other and larger venue for holding the memorial ceremony.

It is also notable that young people in Norway and Sweden have been adopting a new way of expressing their grief and sense of loss when close friends have lost their lives – they publish written messages on the Internet. This method tends to supplement visits to the place of accident. When a fifteen-year-old girl from Bærum near Oslo was killed while riding her bicycle in October of 2004, her close friends immediately established a website entitled Guestbook at [www.johannerip.com](http://www.johannerip.com). The site features not only messages written by friends and relatives, but also messages from many people from outside the closest circle of friends. “This is our way of showing our grief. We think it’s just fine that anyone can know what we feel. We are also happy that people we don’t know show that they care about this”, said a couple of close girlfriends who were responsible for the website. Parents of the deceased also derive comfort from acquainting themselves with the messages posted on the website. As the father of a deceased has put it, “I feel that taking part in the website helps me keep going” (*Aftenposten*, 10 November 2001). Another website was set up by a young man from the town of Bergen whose best friend was killed in a traffic accident. According to him, the purpose of this site was “to help others who mourn the loss of a young person they loved” ([www.viminner.no](http://www.viminner.no)).

Through the medium of Internet, young people can sit in their own rooms and write down their innermost thoughts without having to move physically to a particular place. This encourages individual expressions of mourning. The collective and official aspect is invoked when both the close circle of friends and the general public are able to read the messages that have been published at the website. Young people can express their feelings repeatedly as if they were carrying on a dialogue with the deceased friend. All this indicates that we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of ritual behaviour. Intense emotions can be more easily conveyed by young people in written form when sitting alone in front of their PCs rather than orally when actually confronted by a gathering of friends and acquaintances at the location of a memorial. However, the use of the Internet and coming together at such memorial places do not exclude one another, but have different functions for the mourners.

Commemoration of deaths in traffic accidents seems to have assumed similar features in Norway and Sweden. A new behavioural pattern, mostly related to young

people who have perished or been killed, has been spread and cultivated fairly rapidly. Compared to previous years, this development is manifest. Young people have seized the initiative in these new rituals, and a generational gap is obvious in this pattern of mourning. The tragedy of loss is experienced as being extra tragic when children and young people are the victims. Memorial commemorations of the above-described type are conducted by those belonging to the same age group as the deceased. Young people, being most active and inventive, become the main actors in the event. They express their feelings of grief, loss and solidarity through the actions characteristic of their age and by using the Internet. They utilize visual symbolic expressions such as placing flowers, writing letters or lighting candles. For the young it is appropriate to perform these activities in the company of others. This way much of the anguish connected with a sudden death is alleviated by replacing it with brighter experiences. At the same time, the young mourners demonstrate their solidarity with those who have been hit the hardest – the closest family and relatives.

Through the medium of Internet, young people can sit in their own rooms and write down their innermost thoughts without having to move physically to a particular place. This encourages individual expression of mourning. The collective and official aspect is invoked when both the close circle of friends and the general public are able to read the messages that have been published at the website. The young people are able to express them repeatedly as if they were carrying on a dialogue with the deceased friend. All of this indicates our witnessing a form of ritual behaviour. Intense emotions can be more easily expressed by young people in written form when sitting alone in front of their PCs rather than orally when confronted by a gathering of friends and acquaintances at the location of a physical memorial. The use of the Internet and gathering together at such memorial places do not exclude one another, but serve different functions for the mourners.

There is no doubt that newspapers, especially tabloids, with their articles and photographs from the scenes of traffic accidents have been instrumental in the spread of these new rituals commemorating young victims. Newspaper readers receive impulses that may be acted upon when similar accidents are experienced in the future. Newspaper journalists have themselves witnessed the growth of new rituals in which young people have taken the initiative. Such collective actions are then repeated on later occasions, becoming behavioural patterns which can be adjusted to suit new situations. Newspapers seek to publish such episodes even if journalists are met with reactions of ethical nature from the young people, such as "Can't you understand that we're holding a memorial" (*Dagbladet*, 25 July 2005). The journalists, however, are not deterred; they take pictures even of the scenes that are emotionally charged. As a journalist wrote in *Dagbladet* on 25 July 2005, "the photographers just wait until

groups of the bereaved come together so they can get a shot of ‘collective sorrow’”. Nothing of this kind has been experienced in former times. The boundaries of journalistic ethics have evidently been extended. Through the intrusive activities of the press, an observance of a grief-stricken closed circle of family and friends becomes exposed to the general public in far-distant localities.

Newspapers do not create new rituals, but their immediate reports on them contribute to their spread. The newspapers’ clearly increasing interest in life’s tragic occurrences has led to a noticeable change in attitudes to tragedies that no longer must be kept secret but commemorated openly in public and in company of one’s social group. This change in attitudes leads to the creation of new rituals practised on similar occasions. Such manifestations of interdependence and collectivity can be reproduced later in analogous situations. All this helps the family and friends of the deceased to cope with their sorrow by showing that they are not left alone in their sudden grief as they have a visible network of social support.

It is notable that collective feelings of grief and shock affecting young people are expressed more openly both in Norway and Sweden in a manner that was never observed before the 1990s. The private sphere has become increasingly public, and newspapers are becoming important actors in this process. Solidarity and collective feelings have become important key words in the new approach to traumatic situations at the expense of individuality and privacy. This is a precondition for the formation and further development of collective and public patterns of behaviour. In Norway, you have no earlier traditions of this type; in Sweden, young people have come to learn to manifest collective feelings - instead of marking individual expressions related to death and grief.

The above-said demonstrates that ritual expression is a subject to continuous revision. Culture is not static but acquires new forms of expression and adapts itself to new situations. Tradition and renewal thus supplement each other.

#### 4 Rituals of national holidays in a Norwegian-Swedish border perspective

The focus of this section is on rituals related to cultural meetings and national celebrations which were studied within the Scandinavian national border project “The Cultural Meetings of the Border” from the 1990s on. The area under study was the southern part of the Norwegian-Swedish border in the north of the province of Bohuslän, the west of Dalsland in Sweden and Østfold county in Norway (*Gränsmöten* 1999). Here I will concentrate on the period from 1990 and to the early 2000s

as this period has witnessed the arrival of increasing numbers of Norwegians in Bohuslän which used to be part of Norway until 1658 (Gustavsson 2013).

In Norway, feelings of national pride increased markedly in the latter half of the 1800s while the country was in a Union with Sweden since 1814. The increase in national sentiments intensified the efforts of Norwegians to establish an independent state. Independence came about in 1905 with the dissolution of the Union. 17 May, the date in 1814 on which Norway had adopted its own constitution after having been subject to Danish rule since the late 1300s, then became the key symbol of national sentiment. The issues of the flag and the celebration of the national holiday represent a significant difference between Norway and Sweden as Sweden has always been sovereign and Swedish inhabitants have not felt the same need as Norwegians to mark their nationality by means of a national flag.

It is of particular interest for me to examine how Norwegians demonstrate their national sentiments while they are on the other side of the national border in the neighbouring country, namely in Sweden. The significance of the national flag is an important factor in the context of the two countries' history. Thus, the following questions arise:

*How does the national holiday celebration affect relations with natives of Bohuslän, and how much consideration do Norwegians display on such occasions when they are not in Norway? Do they use the Swedish flag at their purchased or rented summer cottages? Do mixed Norwegian-Swedish marriages have any effect in this regard?*

*Can Norwegians help Swedes to learn to celebrate their new national holiday of 6 June? How and why have the people of Bohuslän shown their historical solidarity with Norway and Norwegians by using the regional flag of Bohuslän? Why have people in Bohuslän begun celebrating the Norwegian national holiday of 17 May?*

The revival of the old Union flag in Sweden one hundred years after the dissolution of the Union during the summer of 2005 has also proved interesting to study. What were the reactions of Norwegian tourists to the use of this flag? The revival of the Union flag has made studies of mixed marriages between Norwegians and Swedes especially interesting.

The material discussed here is based on observations and interviews obtained during the field work. Norwegian and Swedish newspaper articles also provided important source material.

## 1 Celebrations of Norwegian national holidays in Bohuslän prior to 1990

Before the extensive immigration of Norwegians as tourists or permanent residents to Bohuslän from the 1990s on, a considerable number of Norwegian women married

Swedish men living on the other side of the inland border and along the coast. This movement of Norwegian women was especially noticeable during and after the Second World War. Fishermen from Bohuslän became acquainted with women in various Norwegian ports. Celebrations of 17 May were of special importance to them when they moved to Bohuslän. In coastal villages they often got together for a joint celebration of 17 May. Norwegian flags waving from the hands of these women and their children were important elements in the celebrations. The women also sang Norwegian national songs which they taught their children. The women decorated tables and cakes with little Norwegian flags.

During the inter-war years, the mackerel fisheries in May gave fishermen from Bohuslän an opportunity to become acquainted with the impressive activities taking place on 17 May when they visited Norwegian harbours. A fish-buyer from the coastal village of Smögen who bought catches of mackerel in Norway, has handed down a large number of photographs of 17 May celebrations in the coastal town of Kristiansand in southern Norway.

After 8 May 1945, when the occupation of the Nazi forces was over in Norway, flying the Norwegian flag once again became possible on 17 May after having been forbidden since the beginning of the occupation in 1940. During the War many Swedish border residents used to send legal food parcels to Norway. It is noteworthy that the first letter sent by a Norwegian woman to her Swedish contact after the War



49. Norwegian-born women and their children celebrating 17 May on the Swedish island of Dyrön during the 1950s. Photo privately own.





50. 17 May celebrations in the Norwegian coastal town of Kristiansand in 1934. Photo a fish-buyer from Bohuslän.



51. 17 May celebrations in the Norwegian town of Fredrikstad in 1945. Photo privately own.



52. Schoolchildren from Bohuslän on a trip to the Norwegian border town of Halden, 17 May 1954. The children are waving Norwegian flags. Photo privately own.

contained just a photograph showing her during the 17 May celebrations in the border town of Fredrikstad in 1945.

Swedish people from all along the border and even many miles inland from it became acquainted with the festive Norwegian celebrations of their national holiday on 17 May during their school excursions which were arranged to the Norwegian border town of Halden. These school excursions continued throughout the entire post-war period and even up to the present day.

## 2 Norwegians' celebrations of 17 May in Bohuslän starting in the 1990s

One should be aware of the great significance that the national flag has for Norwegians. They have flags with them and fly them on all festive occasions. The national holiday 17 May has a unique position in this context. The number of Norwegians in Bohuslän has increased greatly from the early 1990s. During my field works on 17 May celebration, I have observed Norwegian flags flown by resident Norwegians who work in Sweden or commute to job in Norway, by Norwegian owners of holiday cottages, by old-age pensioners who live in Norwegian cooperative flats, and by Norwegians who live in mixed marriages with a Swedish partner.



53. *A Norwegian couple from Oslo wearing their national costumes and standing alongside the Norwegian flag outside their holiday cottage in Bohuslän on 17 May 2012. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.*

Some Norwegians choose to leave Norway on 17 May and some of them travel to Bohuslän. Some adult informants explained this by the fact that they no longer have children living at home, and 17 May is to a great extent associated with children (cf. Blehr 2000). Another explanation is that they wish to get away from all the noise which is part of the national holiday.

*Old-age Norwegian pensioners* who have become year-round residents during the early 2000s have a certain feeling, however, that they ought to show more concern in their use of the Norwegian flag. They feel no restrictions on flying it on national holidays or on festive days in the family, but in everyday life, they use both the Norwegian and the Swedish flags alongside each other or on the same flagpole.



54. *A retired Norwegian couple from Oslo are flying the Norwegian flag from the balcony in the Swedish coastal town of Lysekil on 17 May 2004. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.*

### 3 Bohuslän people and the Norwegian flag

With the arrival of so many Norwegians in Bohuslän since the 1990s, the increasing use of the Norwegian flag has been observed on public buildings and means of transport. On 17 May 2005, Norwegian flags were the only ones flying from the five flagpoles outside the regional Bohuslän Museum in Uddevalla. Observance of the Norwegian national holiday can even include commercial elements as shops and restaurants have begun flying the Norwegian flag.

During the 2000s some Bohuslän municipalities began arranging official celebrations with the Norwegian flag on 17 May. For example, I documented such a celebration in Tanum in the northern part of Bohuslän in 2006 when many Bohuslän people participated in it, listening to Norwegian national songs and trying Norwegian food.



55. Five Norwegian flags in front of the Bohuslän Museum on 17 May 2005. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

A factor that brings together the Norwegian and Swedish flags and thus contributes to a better understanding of the Norwegian flag significance among the people of Bohuslän is the *regional flag of Bohuslän*. It appeared in 1996 after the referendum concerning membership in the European Union when Sweden became a member while Norway did not. The flag may thus be considered as an element of criticism of



56. A Norwegian-born woman married to a man from Tanum in Bohuslän had baked Norwegian cookies, *krumkaker*, during the municipal celebration of Norway's national holiday in Kville on 17 May 2006. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.

the EU. Designed by the fisher merchant Bertil Engdahl from Grebbestad, it has elements from the Norwegian and Swedish flags. An article in the newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten* from 10 January 2000 wrote about “the combined Norwegian-Swedish flag”. The red cross in the middle and the dark-blue lower portions associate it with the Norwegian flag, while the light-blue upper sections are reminiscent of the Swedish flag. Two-thirds resemble the Norwegian flag and one-third the Swedish flag. The designer’s intention has been to indicate that Bohuslän belonged to Norway for two-thirds of the past thousand years and to Sweden for the remaining one-third of that period, that is after 1658.

By 2000, about 500 copies of this regional flag had been sold. During the 2000s the flag began appearing farther south in Bohuslän and many more copies were sold. It is manufactured by the National flag company in Gothenburg and is usually mounted on houses, on free-standing flagpoles, and on boats. I observed more and more of these flags between the summers of 2003 and 2004. One important source of



57. A man from the island of Orust with a Bohuslän flag fastened to his caravan in Malön's caravan site in the summer of 2004. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

inspiration for such increasing usage among residents in Bohuslän can be found in the articles about the flag in the newspaper *Göteborgs Tidningen* from 3 and 4 July 2004. During the summer of 2004, I observed the Bohuslän flag used for the first time on Swedish-owned caravans at campsites. It is obvious that the use of the Bohuslän flag tends to lessen the emotional tension in attitudes to the Norwegian flag as it indicates Bohuslän's historical ties to Norway and strenghtens Bohuslän's status as a border region next door to Norway.

#### 4 Norwegian reactions to the new Swedish national holiday established on 6 June 2005

When 6 June was first celebrated in 2005 as the official national holiday in Sweden, this aroused a noticeable interest not only among Norwegians in Bohuslän, but also in districts on the Norwegian side of the border. Norwegian journalists representing newspapers from these districts crossed the border in order to see how popular this new

celebration might be, and how it could be compared to the Norwegian celebrations on 17 May. There was, however, great disappointment when it appeared that almost no Swedish flags were to be seen, nor any organised programme had been arranged for this national celebration that had finally become a public holiday. The newspaper *Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad* could report on 7 June 2005 that “few flags and nothing resembling the celebration of a national holiday were seen in Strömstad on Monday”. A reporter from the Norwegian TV Norge/TV Østfold gave the following characteristic: “It seems as if there are more Norwegian journalists than Swedes here” (*Halden Arbeiderblad* 7 June 2005). The Norwegian journalists were also surprised to find that Swedes had very little idea of why they should celebrate their national holiday.

Swedes have never been accustomed to celebrate a national holiday, and their conduct cannot be modified abruptly just because a working day is declared a national holiday by the Swedish Parliament. Celebration of national holidays is more characteristic of Norway which is a young nation-state that had to struggle for its national independence. Sweden’s independence, on the other hand, has not been questioned for several centuries.

In contrast to what took place on the Swedish side of the border, the Swedish national holiday was visibly observed in the Norwegian border town of Halden. “We



58. A baker in Halden set up a sixty-metre-long, cream-filled sponge cake decorated with both Norwegian and Swedish flags on a table in the town’s pedestrian precinct 6 June 2005. Photo Tom R. Andreassen. *Halden Arbeiderblad*.

want to help our neighbours to celebrate”, said the director for a chain of stores in Halden. A baker in Halden set up a sixty-metre-long, cream-filled sponge cake decorated with the Norwegian and Swedish flags on a table in the town’s pedestrian precinct. In honour of the holiday, he invited the public to taste the cake free of charge. Some 1500 pieces of cake were distributed within a couple of hours (*Halden Arbeiderblad* 7 June 2005). Even Norwegians living in Sweden flew the Swedish flag when at last the official Swedish National Day was established.

### 5 The re-introduction of the Union flag during the observance of the Centenary Celebration in 2005

In 1844, during the period of Swedish-Norwegian Union between 1814 and 1905, a special Union flag was introduced. This flag was produced in two variants: Norwe-



59. A family from Gothenburg moored their boat in Mollösund harbour in the summer of 2005. The Swedish variant of the Union flag was mounted in the stern of the boat. On deck, they also had the Norwegian version of the Union flag. The man is originally from Oslo and his wife from Gothenburg. Photo Anders Gustavsson.



gian and Swedish. The Norwegian blue-white-red and the Swedish blue-yellow colours, respectively, occupied the major portions of the two flags, while a mixture of the Norwegian and Swedish colours was placed in the upper corner nearest the flagpole. This mixture of colours made the flag to be known as the “Herring salad” in Norway. This was revoked there in 1899 but was further in use in Sweden until the Union was dissolved in 1905 (cf. Stråth 2005).

Interestingly, the Union flag made a come-back in relation to the Centenary Celebration of the dissolution of the Union. I observed this during the summer of 2005. Mostly the Swedish variant of the flag appeared on houses and private boats. Local history societies and museums displayed the old Union flags, in connection with the new national holiday on 6 June and other summer celebrations. The Swedish variant of the Union flag became a tangible symbol whenever a remembrance of the Union, and thus a feeling of solidarity with Norway, was expressed.



60. The Norwegian variant of the Union flag fastened to the stern of a Norwegian tourist boat moored in Hälleviksstrand harbour in the summer of 2004. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

However, when the old Union flag was raised at a local history museum in the Swedish coastal village of Gullholmen and the place was visited by private boats from Norway, some Norwegians expressed their annoyance. The staff of the museum told about disapproval on the part of the visiting Norwegian tourists. For these Norwegians, especially the Swedish variant of the Union flag evoked a negative association as a symbol of Norwegian subordination to Sweden. This was something they did not wish to be reminded of 100 years later. Swedes, on the other hand, have no similar negative associations. The Norwegian tourists regarded the dissolution of the Union as the most important reason to celebrate in 2005, not the memory of the past represented by the Union flag. For them the use of the Union flag was more a kind of insult.

New Union flags of the Swedish variant were produced by the Swedish flag manufacturer "National" in Gothenburg, which has been in business since 1905. Immediately before and during 2005, the company noted a marked increase in the number of orders from private individuals who desired such flags. Some hundred flags were sold during 2005, primarily for use on board private pleasure boats. The Norwegian Flag Company in Oslo, however, did not experience any similar sales increase.

It was the Swedish partner in mixed marriages who took the initiative to purchase a Union flag. The customers have said that "it's a fun thing". No political unionist sentiments were noticed by anyone at the flag company. Some Swedish boat tourists also told that when arriving in port, they were asked to remove the flag by Norwegian boat tourists who came to Bohuslän. They regarded the Union flag as an insulting reminder of the past which they did not want to be reminded about.

Some Swedes working in Norway acquired Union flags, in this case the Norwegian variant, to use on their boats. This was the case with a medical doctor from Gothenburg who worked in Oslo since 1992. This boat owner only seldom observed a Union flag in Norwegian waters, and when this happened, it was used by persons with some connection to Sweden. Swedes in Swedish waters almost never noticed that he flew the Union flag on his boat, whereas Norwegians were far more observant in such cases.

## 6 Conclusions

There are differences, manifest especially in recent years, in the way national consciousness is expressed in the celebration of annual public holidays in the two neighbouring countries of Norway and Sweden. The results of the field work and archive studies in a border region where national cultures meet make this clear. Cross-border cultural contacts account for the fact that people in such regions obtain characteristic traits in the neighbouring country that differ from their own culture. Such differences

are greater than one might have first thought possible in the case of two neighbouring countries which appear to have so much in common. Different historical circumstances in these countries are factors that can explain contrasts in their celebratory practices. Thus, Sweden is a country whose sovereign position has not been threatened for a long period of time, whereas Norway, had to struggle intensely to regain its independence in 1905 which it had not experienced since the late 1300s. Such factors influence people's views of their nation and their desires or, rather, needs for demonstrating this through specific rituals. This is particularly manifest in the celebration of 17 May and 6 June, respectively. Attitudes concerning national independence were reinforced on Norway's part after the liberation from the German occupation in 1945 and in connection with the Centenary Celebration for the dissolution of the Union with Sweden in 2005. 17 May is the most important of the national days, but flags are also raised on 8 May in memory of the end of the occupation in 1945. Norwegians continue this practice even as tourists who leave their country to purchase holiday cottages or permanent homes in Bohuslän.

The fact that traditions and national sentiments linked with the country's flag are completely different in Sweden compared to Norway was especially obvious in two contexts during 2005. One was the introduction of a new national holiday on 6 June by the Swedish government. Such official sanction will not suffice if the Swedish people would feel that they have something important to celebrate. Instead, Norwegians in border areas attempted to help Swedes to understand the value of a national holiday. The increasing numbers of Norwegian tourists who have crossed the border in later years now understand better which holidays are really important for the Swedish people. This is especially true of the impressive Midsummer celebrations.

The restrained interest of Swedes in national celebrations and in flying the Swedish flag seem to explain the growing use of regional flags, especially in those parts of the country which in ages past belonged to Norway (Bohuslän) or Denmark (Skåne). Such flags have never been popular in Norway whose people instead emphasise the importance of the national flag as they had to fight hard for its retainment across their history.

In cases when Swedes have shown any concern about the fact of the Union dissolution, this usually takes place in individual families of a mixed Norwegian-Swedish background, but not among the majority of the people. This concern may take the form of the old Union flag reintroduction and reconstruction which has led to some annoyance among Norwegians. For Swedes this is a way of remembering a former historical era, whereas Norwegians feel they have every reason to celebrate the dissolution of that Union and the recovery of the independent nation.



## 3 Beliefs

### 1 Beliefs related to oral narratives and rituals

When studying oral narratives, it is important to pay attention to the beliefs that these stories are related to. This has been recognized internationally through the formation in the 2010s of a special commission named *Belief Narrative Network* (abbr. BNN) within the *Society International for Folk Narrative Research* (abbr. ISFNR). Its website can be visited at <http://www.isfnr.org/index2.html>). This commission has 90 members who come from all over the world. I am an elected member of the board 2017-2020 with Mirjam Mencej from Slovenia as the chairperson. BNN arranges regular Internet discussions and conferences, the latest in Miami, US in 2016.

When studying rituals, the researcher benefits from examining beliefs that underlie and are connected to the rituals (cf. *Belief* 2012). I became aware of it when I wrote my doctoral thesis on the ritual known as churching of women after childbirth in Sweden (Gustavsson 1972). My study of this ritual examined old folk beliefs about the supranormal situation of maternity. The mother was prohibited a number of things before she was churched after six weeks. Thus, she was not allowed to go out of the house and shake hands with anybody before her churching. She could not go to church or participate in the Holy Communion. Sexual intercourse between the spouses was prohibited; they were not even allowed to sleep in the same room (Gustavsson 1979b).

If the mother violated these prohibitions, she was at risk of being harmed magically. She was threatened by supernatural beings. Trolls as well as a variety of water demons would try to get hold of her and harm her. The child might be harmed too if the mother violated the prohibitions.

The mother might even cause magical damage to other people if she ignored the prohibitions and visited other people in their homes. They could then become unlucky in handling pottery, glass and porcelain, which might break. They might also be invaded by rats and mice.

Consequently, a woman who had not undergone the churching ceremony was positioned outside the social and religious community. She was regarded as a heathen who nobody wanted or dared have anything to do with. After the churching ritual, she was completely freed from these prohibitions.

## 2 The encounter between revivalist ideology and traditional folk beliefs in Sweden

When free-church revivalist movements appeared in Sweden from the later half of the nineteenth century onwards, new ideologies and attendant systems of beliefs came face to face with traditional folk beliefs. Consequences of this confrontation are worth studying. Did members of the free churches break completely with the old beliefs held by their contemporaries when they were converted? The question does not only concern their view of God, but also traditional beliefs in supernatural beings such as goblins, trolls and ghosts (Espeland 2002, Raahage 2016, Rømer 2016). Also, what was the attitude of free-church members to beliefs in premonitions?

The church historian Hilding Pleijel maintains that traditional beliefs of this kind did not disappear in the Nordic countries after the introduction of Christianity during medieval times and after the Reformation (Pleijel 1970). Among the people these beliefs continued to exist side by side with official religious beliefs. No investigation has, however, been made on how free-church members behaved in relation to traditional beliefs of this kind when they adopted the new religious ideology. The ethnological and folklore archives in Sweden do not contain any information that can provide an answer to this question. Hardly any of their informants have been members of the free churches. Collectors of information outside the free churches have, in certain cases, provided some generally-held views, such as: “The free-church movement came about 100 years ago and changed many things, so that drunkenness and superstition largely disappeared” (informant born in 1877 in Torpa, Småland, recorded in 1954, LUF M 13 023: 6). Similarly, in 1939, the folklorist Gunnar Granberg put forward the idea, without proving it, that the revival movements had succeeded “in something that the strict Lutheran orthodoxy had not managed, namely, in eradicating popular beliefs”. He pointed out that the “preachers in these movements” repudiated “the existence of nature spirits” (Granberg 1939). In 1958, the Danish researcher Henning Henningsen declared, in a similar way, that pietism and the “Home Mission” in Denmark “had firmly denounced all kinds of ‘superstition’ as being un-Christian” (Henningsen 1958: 109). A similar opinion about the effect of the “Home Mission” was put forward by the Danish folklore collector Evald Tang Kristensen as early as at the end of the nineteenth century (Christiansen 2011).

I want to throw new light on the questions asked here by using personal experiences of some members of the free churches. The interview material was collected during my field work along the coast of western Sweden. This took place as a part of the project “Folklore in maritime environments”, which was conducted in collaboration with the Folklore Archives of the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. The project was included in the Scandinavian “Kattegat-Skagerrak Project” in the 1980s. The

free-church congregations that were represented in the project data were the Swedish Missionary Society (SMF) and the Pentecostal Movement on the islands of Smögen and Tjörn in Bohuslän. In both these places, the SMF congregations were already established in the 1870s.

### 1 Hearing and seeing supernatural beings

Informants from the SMF and the Pentecostal Movement, born during the first two decades of the twentieth century, witnessed to their belief in the existence of supernatural beings, primarily ghosts, but also celestial beings such as angels. They were able to hear and see these beings, as well as experience premonitions (DAGF 1948). One man born in 1904, a smallholder in Klövedal on the island of Tjörn, had belonged to the SMF congregation since adolescence; his parents were also SMF members. He described several experiences of contacts with a supernatural world, especially ghosts. These experiences occurred both during the day and in the evening or at night, sometimes while he was going to or coming from the chapel. They took place during his youth and later in life. He told, amongst other things, of how he met the ghost of the teacher, whom he had in his first class, walking outside the school house. Here is the story:

I came cycling along and had just been to the chapel. A woman in a long skirt was walking along the road, but it was impossible to catch up with her. When she got to the bend by the school house, she disappeared. And I maintain that it was the teacher who was walking there. There was someone else from hereabouts who also met this person several times. I had been in that teacher's class some months, but then she died. When she went up the hill, she had been dead for many years. I recognized her by the clothes she wore.

This was said to have taken place about 1920, a short while after the informant had acquired a bicycle in 1918. Much later, in the 1950s, he was watching a man he had hired harrowing his fields with a tractor.

It was in the middle of the day. The fields were about 200 metres long, and I stood roughly in the middle of them. A man came walking from the road above. He came from the spot where my great-grandfather was born. It was his land we were harrowing. The man wore a flannel skirt with vertical stripes. He was a tall man. I had only seen him when he lay in bed. But my sister, who was five years older than I was (born in 1899), said that my great-grandfather was always dressed like that when he walked in the fields. I could see him easily. He came and put his hands on the tractor and looked at the man driving it. I thought it was someone who had come to get him to do something. The man who was driving for me was

called Arne, so I asked him: "Who're you going to work for now then?" "No-one's been here and asked for anything", he said. At the time my great-grandfather had lain in his grave for some 50 years (dead in 1910).

The informant declared that he didn't keep these experiences secret, but used to tell them to people in his neighbourhood on several occasions. Such things have been reported by other members of the SMF congregation in Klövedal, which indicates that supernatural experiences of this kind in the local congregation have not been regarded as incompatible with free-church ideology.

Evidence that such experiences were not unique in the revival movements is provided, for example, by the reports of a man born in 1892 who joined the Evangelical National Missionary Society (EFS) on the island of Åstol during the revival of 1914:

What I have seen and heard can never be taken away from me. I saw a man at 2 o'clock at night down by the jetty. I walked past him and on to the next jetty. I looked up and then he was gone. His name was Carl and he was from the town of Motala but was married here on Åstol. This was in the 1920s, a couple of years after he had drowned.

The informants who had less to relate about these supernatural things, and even showed some scepticism, chiefly belonged to the youngest generation of interviewees. This need not be primarily attributed to increasing disbelief within the free-church congregations with the passing of time. It may just as much depend on the fact that old beliefs of this kind have more or less disappeared in society as a whole.

One can ask oneself whether the old beliefs in supernatural beings could fulfill a function even after people were converted. Free-church members have, in the first place, referred to the fact that folk beliefs such as these were not in conflict, but rather in agreement with the message of the Bible. To justify their belief in ghosts, including one of the leading Pentecostalists (born in 1928) on the island on Åstol, informants have pointed out that the Bible talks of ghosts.

Free-church members may have experienced their greatest need of such a belief in border situations between life and death. It helped them to bridge the gulf between the living and the dead. This seems to have been particularly relevant in coastal regions where sudden death through shipwreck has been a more frequent reality than in inland areas. It is therefore easier to understand that more evidence has been found for belief in ghosts among the free-church members in the coastal areas of western Sweden than inland. Parallels to the coastal areas of western Sweden are also found in communities in northern Jutland coastal areas which have experienced revivalist movements. Members of the farming community there even joked about 'superstitions' associated with the sea that are typical of people in the fishing communities.



Such jokes are reported in the area where both farming and fishing communities belonged to the intra-church revivalist movement named the “Home Mission”.

## 2 The existence of evil

Beliefs on the existence of evil and good are assigned their place in the dualistic world view rooted in the Bible. According to this world view, there is an out-and-out struggle in the universe between Good and Evil. This belief is also common in records of customs and habits before the free-church revival (e.g. LUF M 2037 Jämtland, 13 333 Skåne). Supernatural beings were associated with the evil side of life and the Devil also in free-church milieux. Records in ethnological archives inform us that the supernatural beings of the old folk beliefs were thought to be fallen angels (e.g. LUF M 872: 24 Småland, 1498: 3 Östergötland). This indicates that the belief was older than the free-church revivals. As an example of beliefs held by free-church members I quote the information given by a man born in 1913 who had gained a prominent position in the Pentecostal congregation on Åstol and had been a hymn-leader for a long time:

There is a religious side: Jesus who suffered on Golgatha. Then there's the other side: sorcerers. We should not deny that there is an evil side as well. In the Old Testament there were Moses, the Servant of God and also sorcerers, who worked wonders just as Moses did. But they belong to the Fallen, the side of Satan. Here is the side of Satan, a Fallen angel. There are colossal powers. There are sorcerers. The Fallen can never bring people back to life again. Only Jesus can do that. The Fallen cannot give me life, but they can take life from me.

In line with this is the information supplied by other free-church members who maintained that only “unbelievers”, that is, non-free-church members, had been seen to “walk again [as ghosts]”. The above-mentioned informant born in 1904 in Klövedal recounted a story he heard from one of his “believing” cousins:

She could certainly see people sometimes. But she said she never saw people we call “believers”. These were people we call “unbelievers” who walked here. That's what she claimed, and I never saw any “believer” either.

When this view was assigned a place in the free-church system of beliefs, it could have the effect of retaining and strengthening the feeling of belonging to the free-church congregation. If you turned away from your faith, you could be in a danger of becoming a ghost after death. This idea cannot be regarded as a new belief, but it should be compared with the belief that ghosts in earlier times were thought to be

those “unquiet spirits” who had offended against Christian norms. Evidence for this belief is often found in the records of the folklore archives.

### 3 The existence of good

Besides the adaptation of the old folk beliefs in supernatural evil beings to the free-church ideology, the interviews also evidence for a view associated with the good side of life, the side of God. Free-church members assert that they have heard or seen angels, sometimes Jesus himself, and have also experienced a premonition that has been of assistance to them and which they believe has been sent by God. It has been claimed that Jesus was seen at periods of vigorous revival (cf. Hillerdal & Gustafsson 1973, af Klintberg 1973). Within the Pentecostal congregation on the island of Åstol, accounts of how fishermen were able to see Jesus coming towards them on the sea, have been handed down.

Information on how free-church members experienced their contacts with the divine world was mainly passed down orally, especially to younger generations of a particular family. One informant born in 1919, member of the SMF on the island of Smögen, heard his grandfather, who was one of the founders of the mission congregation in Smögen, describing how he had experienced the voice of God. First, he heard someone knocking outside the house. He went outside but did not see anyone. When the knocking was repeated three times, he said: “God, You must say what You want”. Then he heard a voice which bade him visit a man who lay ill. In certain cases, free-church members noted down their experiences of such contacts. Thus, the father (1870-1955) of the informant born in 1904 in Klövedal told in his notes about his conversion in the 1890s. When, after this, he felt he was being reproached for the sins he had committed earlier, he believed that

It was the Spirit of God that pointed out my sins. But then, one morning when I woke up (I know I was wide awake), I heard, just by my head, a clear voice saying: “It’s the devil that is tormenting you like this. Jesus only wants to forgive, forgive, forgive”. The third time the voice sounded a little far away, but distinct and clear.

An elder born in 1920 in the Pentecostal congregation on Åstol heard his father (1893-1960), also an elder, talking about a premonition that he had experienced out at sea. This had saved the crew of a fishing boat and was understood to have been sent by God:

Once Papa was homeward bound on the North Sea and there was a voice that said: “Ludvig, go up on deck”. The voice said this once, twice. Papa went up and

looked but didn't see anything. But the third time he looked out, he saw the breakers right by them. He had to shout to the man steering: "Quick, swing the boat!" So it was a warning. If he hadn't heeded the warning, they wouldn't have come home.

Insecurity at sea, in contrast to the situation inland, helps to explain why such premonitions could survive. They are remarkably reminiscent of old beliefs about positive premonitions at sea, quite common among the coastal people before the revivals. These were mediated via "warners", who warned of storms or other dangers (cf. Schön 1983: 55f, 94f) (see picture 68).

The informant born in 1920 on Åstol also related that he himself had experienced "a voice from the Almighty" in about 1970. His sons (born in 1948 and 1950) were on a car journey, but did not return home on the night they had planned. They were supposed to start work early the following morning. The father grew anxious and began to pray. He then heard a voice, which said "Vänernsborg". In the morning one



61. The informant, from Klövedal born in 1904, using a divining rod. Photo privately owned.

of the sons telephoned and said they had had some trouble with the car and that they had been forced to stay overnight in the town of Vänersborg. "I knew that already", declared the informant. For him to obtain a tangible contact with the divine world was a thing entirely possible, even quite natural. This kind of belief was equally natural for his father as well.

The informant in Klövedal has also described other contacts with the divine world. In particular, he heard or felt air movements made by angels passing (cf. Scharfe 1980, regarding German Pietists). It took place on several occasions at night when he was awakened and received a positive message: "It was an angel. The voice came from half a meter above the floor by my bed. It was sharp and light like that of a child of ten. 'You will get better'". The informant had been ill and the message came in a difficult situation. "Another time there was something by my head. I could feel how it made a draught and flew along by the sofa where I was lying. So, I think there was an angel indoors then". One of the visual experiences this informant had was seeing how golden letters were written above his bed at night:

There was a picture on the wall in golden letters, for when Our Lord writes, he does it in gold. It was shining gold, but I didn't understand what it said. There was an old voice that interpreted it in Swedish: "They will take care of you when you are old". There was light all round the picture, so I saw the letters. I don't know who is supposed to come. No one has come yet, but Our Lord doesn't lie.

This took place many years before the interview. The informant lived as a bachelor with his unmarried sister (1899-1980), which explains why on reaching middle age, he began to feel anxious about who would look after him in his old age. Just in this situation, when he prayed, he experienced a tangible contact with the divine world. Even the custom of going with a divining rod, which this man had practiced, he interpreted as obtaining contact with "something that belongs to eternity". When the rod twists down towards the earth without the informant being able to stop it, it has something to do with the minerals in the soil "since the old time when God created man". The question arises: to what extent beliefs of this kind about contacts with the divine world are linked up with old beliefs, or did they appear in connection with the revivals? The records in the ethnological and folklore archives contain some information about people in earlier times who were not involved in revivals but who, in some way, experienced meeting angels, Jesus and God. The reports on contacts with angels are most numerous even though nothing was asked about them in questionnaires, apparently because folklore collectors in former days did not think that such accounts were part of folk belief but belonged to experiences in the religious sphere. Belief in angels and other spiritual beings could be more widespread among people before the revivals than it is evident from the number of records. In a report made in

Råda outside Gothenburg in 1950, an informant said: “The angels have kept an especially good eye over me” (IFGH 5604: 1, cf. LUF M 2037, 6961). One informant born in 1859 in Spekeröd, Bohuslän, related in 1928 that a woman in the district had talked with an angel (VFF 1655: 29). People could even hear “angelic songs” (VFF 606: 3 Värmland).

Belief in angels obviously belonged to the popular world view before the period of revivals. By the concept “world view”, I mean everything that people believed in. The concept “folk belief” should not be so limited as to exclude entities in the people’s world of beliefs which belong to the official church religion, that is, belief in God, Jesus, angels, etc. It is impossible to discuss the beliefs sanctioned by the church and those not sanctioned by the church as separate entities if we aim at understanding the system of beliefs that people have actually embraced.

The numerous accounts among members of the free churches of their being healed by faith and/or having “spoken in tongues”, the latter in the Pentecostal Movement, provide further evidence of direct contacts with the divine world. Several of those who have experienced faith healing say that they have felt this as concretely as if an electric current passed through their bodies. The informant in Klövedal said:

I had a cough that wouldn’t get better. I was up in the attic and then I was very depressed one day because I couldn’t say a single word to a person without coughing. I went to the doctor several times. Then I prayed and the third time there was an answer. Just like a flash of lightning it went through my body and it burned a lot. The cough disappeared and never came back.

One man born in 1948, in the Pentecostal Movement on Åstol, had an equally tangible experience when in his twenties he was cured of a severe intestinal disease.

As for speaking in tongues, this phenomenon made its appearance in connection with the Pentecostal Movement. Relating about their experience of speaking in tongues, the informants maintained that they had felt an external power flowing through them. This is not the experience all Pentecostalists had but they strive to achieve this inner power and close contact with God’s world. One informant born in 1913, who was re-admitted to the Pentecostal congregation on Åstol in 1949, described his experience of such contact:

I prayed to God that I would be allowed to say hallelujah with my heart. ... I was about to kneel and pray to God. ... As I knelt down, I began to speak in tongues. It was a tremendous thing. It came from down in my chest and just poured out, I spoke some language. ... It was impossible to stop. It was an enormous experience. It helped me. I know it was something from God, something I didn’t do on my own, but it just came.

By means of conclusion, I can state that interviews with people who have been active in a free-church show that old beliefs in supernatural beings did not disappear as was formerly supposed.

This applies particularly to belief in ghosts and in premonitions which are characteristic of coastal regions - owing to insecurity at sea and, consequently, closeness to death. Old beliefs in the supernatural that existed in the informants' milieu at the time of their conversion survived as they were incorporated into the free-church ideology. This evidences how difficult it is to eradicate old beliefs when religious conversions take place. Also, beliefs of free-church members in contacts with the divine world were not established for the first time during revivals; they are largely linked up with old beliefs.

### 3 Swedish belief narratives on afterlife in preindustrial time compared with the 2000s on the Internet

This section examines afterlife beliefs in Sweden, partly from the late 1800s and the early 1900s, partly from the 2000s (cf. *Images* 2015). The data from two different periods are not analysed in terms of a diachronic study of developments across a continuous stretch of time but in a contrastive perspective. The study aims at answering the following research questions:

*What types of popular beliefs can be traced in the pre-industrial society?*

*What types of beliefs appear in the present-day society?*

*Which differences and similarities can be found in belief narratives of these periods?*

The data analysed here includes: the 1800s narratives collected in folklore archives, inscriptions on grave memorials, and memorial websites on the Internet. The Swedish folklore archives contain much information about the rituals and beliefs related to death and burial. It is largely provided by answers to free recordings made without questionnaires and collected during the first part of the 1900s. The majority of respondents were born in the latter part of the 1800s and told about this time. They came mainly from rural areas where most people lived in the late 1800s. The material used relates to different parts of Sweden in archives in Gothenborg (DAG, IFGH, VFF), Lund (LUF M) and Uppsala (ULMA).

## 1 Beliefs in the Pre-Industrial Society

According to the folklife records, people in older times hardly had clear ideas about the existence of the dead, referring to the lack of connections of the departed with the survivors who were left behind. Thus, the recorder Johan Kalén, active in the province of Halland, wrote in 1928: “it is difficult to obtain evidence on ideas of the imagined life on the other side of death” (IFGH 1305: 89). In contrast, people at that time were keen on finding hints of an impending death in their near surroundings. The records provide rich evidence on various forms of such premonitions which made people afraid. Johan Kalén also noted in 1928: “that the dead are able to reveal themselves to the living is a general folk belief still today”.

### *1 Soul and Body*

The informants provide a belief that the man is a being which consists of body and soul. At the moment of death, the soul is separated from the body. The soul is imagined to be related to the heart and blood. When the heart ceases to beat, the soul leaves the body and goes away. This could be seen in the form of a candle flame, smoke, a gust of wind or a bird observed at the moment of death. One concrete way to help the soul to leave the body was to open the fireplace damper up to the chimney. A recorder born in 1848 stated in 1926: “In several places, I have heard that people opened the fireplace damper so that the spirit could go away” (IFGH 751: 34, Östra Frölunda, Västergötland). Thus the soul was not just immaterial, but was believed to have a sort of tangible component.

### *2 Hints of a Blessed or Unblessed Death*

The records evidence a widespread belief that there was a double exit from the earthly life; one could acquire either a good or evil existence, called blessed and unblessed, respectively. The survivors were keen on trying to get a hint if the deceased had been blessed or not. One method of getting it was to listen to the sound of church bells immediately after the death, or at the funeral. If the sound was bright, it was considered as a sign that the dead had been blessed, but a dull sound indicated an unblessed death (IFGH 5166: 18, Vessige, Halland).

*Birds* who appeared at the time of death could give an idea of where the dead had arrived. A dove suggested a blessed death whereas a raven, magpie or owl an unblessed death. One informant born in 1861 in Stora Lundby in the province of Västergötland told in 1928: “If a raven appeared and sat on the coffin, when the deceased was carried to the grave, this was a sign that the deceased went to hell. The raven was perceived as the devil’s bird and the dove as God’s bird” (IFGH 1579: 30). The deceased’s appearance could also give hints. A smile on the lips indicated a

blessed death, whereas a contorted face meant an unblessed death (IFGH 1730: 17, Rölönda, Dalsland).

In case of a good death, *angels* could appear before or at the moment of death. An informant from Åmål in the province of Dalsland born in 1868 told in 1934 about his father's near-death experience and death shortly afterwards:

It was a few days before my father would die. Then he said one evening as we sat near him at his bedside: "You can never believe how lucky I'm feeling. I saw an angel coming and taking me, and everything was so beautiful where we came. They sang so beautifully for us. So now it's not long until I will pass away". It was only a few days before he died. If any be blessed, he must be the one (IFGH 3525: 41).

At the moment of death, angels were considered to retrieve the deceased to be blessed. An about 70-year-old informant from Skellefteå in the province of Västerbotten told in 1929: "If in the moment of death the bell ringing was heard and it was not natural, then it was a certain hint that the dead had been blessed. There were angels who took him away" (ULMA 2706: 9, 4). However, angels are not mentioned as frequently as the sound of church bells and birds at the moment of death.

### *3 Beliefs on the Meaning of Bliss and Unhappiness*

#### *1 Afterlife Bliss*

Thoughts of a good afterlife existence with God and Jesus are only characteristic of explicit Christians, such as the itinerant singer Fina Gren (1862-1957), and among members of free churches. Narratives of this type are largely lacking in the folk life records. However, they are found in chapbooks and interview data from members of free churches who openly talked about their religious faith (Gustavsson 2012: 196f). In this context it should be mentioned that the recorders in older time separated the religious belief from folk belief and therefore did not ask about it (Gustavsson 2012: 9, 174f). This suggests that certain beliefs about heaven and hell might have been more widespread than the folk life records show it.

The itinerant singer Fina Gren wrote in her hand-written songs about "God's paradise", "winning the crown", "streets of gold" etc. which is in accordance with Christian preaching that she had heard in the churches during her wanderings. One verse reads: "Yes, God grant me that I soon be blessed in heaven, reaching the blessed goal one day; then I would play the harp and sing my new song".

The farmer, churchwarden and writer of diaries Jakob Jonsson (1795-1879) in Röra parish in the province of Bohuslän did not write about his death until the end of his life (Gustavsson 2009). "In this as in all my other affairs, I deliver myself into the





62. *Two separate limestone gravestones standing side-by-side in Fiskebäckskil. The stone to the right commemorates the wife Maria Brita (1767–1827) and the one to the left commemorates the husband Lars Andersson (1768–1843). A text from the 1819 hymnal is inscribed on the wife's stone. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.*

hands of the Blessed Father. He shall dispose of me as He pleases". After his death, a handwritten song with five verses was hung on the wall in his home. Its verses were written in the first person, the newly deceased Jonsson speaking in the I-form and committing his soul into God's hands. "As if borne by the wings of angels", the soul rises "free and joyful" up to Heaven which is described as a "beautiful city" full of "sweet peace". There the deceased shall meet those that have died before, and his body shall be renewed on the Day of Judgement.

Also, some inscriptions or references to hymns on grave memorials in the 1800s describe how the deceased long to come to a blissful heavenly existence (Gustavsson 2014c). In Fiskebäckskil in the province of Bohuslän, a text from the 1819 hymn book was inscribed in 1827 on the limestone gravestone of the wife Maria Brita. This text expresses safety as Jesus guards and cares for the grave while her remains rest there. The soul is not there as it is already resting in happiness with Jesus. Thus, a radical contrast between the body lying down in the grave and the soul far away is manifest.

A limestone tombstone in Torp in Bohuslän dated to 1847 was erected over the wife Christina Olsdaughter from a small farm Rödstegen who died of cold 48 years old. The text from hymn 482: 6 in the 1819 hymnal reads: "God be praised! I reached the harbour, for a little time here I toiled and I got peace and consolation in the grave, and here God unites us again". The deceased who speaks in the first person contrasts the difficulties she had in her earthly life with the bliss she experienced after her death

when she “reached the harbor” and got peace and consolation in the face of God. The word harbour implies that the existence after death is seen as the aim of life.

Although the folk life records do not expand on what the blessed existence looked like, there is some data on meetings with the deceased which their descendents could experience. To these positive contacts belonged the belief that the deceased were able to send messages to the living with the help of a bird. Birds were important messengers in contacts with the invisible world. Mothers who died could appear to help their children when they got into trouble. A female recorder, born in 1861 from Hjälm-seryd in the province of Småland, told in 1931 about two young children who lost their mother and whose father was remarried. The stepmother treated the children badly, and they were frozen and starving. They went to their mother’s grave and wept. The dead mother then appeared before the stepmother with a rhyme: “be you a mother so kind, you will be blessed in heaven, but be you a mother so evil, you will suffer much coercion in hell”. Thereupon the kids got a better care (LUF M 3079: 33f).

## 2 Unblessed Existence

According to the records, it is obvious that the unblessed existence was miserable. However, there are only a few stories about a specific place such as hell with the devil as a tormentor. An informant born in 1905 in Ragunda in the province of Jämtland heard in his youth of the “club of hell”.

It would torment those who because of their sins had come to the devil. The club was made of a human cranium whose contents consisted of a curious mixture of flowing iron and burning sulphur. It was part of the daily routine in the hell that flogging was performed with such clubs (ULMA 27348: 20).

According to the folk life records, people were most afraid of evil meetings with the disquieted spirits of dead people known as ghosts. Because of their previous living they had no peace in the grave where the body lay. Sinister meetings with ghosts are mentioned far more often than meetings with those who were blessed after death. This suggests that the fear of evil meetings was something you lived with and were afraid of. Along the coasts, the ghosts of people who had died at sea and were not given a Christian burial were named specters. They could be heard screaming in the night. These beings were considered to be especially dangerous for those searching for sunken wreck ships. Ghosts that had lost their clothes froze because of the cold, bad weather. Thus, a ghost depicted by the folk-life artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson (1915-1998) in the form of a naked skeleton was walking around and crying: “I want my coat back. The north wind is blowing and I’m freezing”. Bernhardson believed in the existence of beings which he painted and could attest to having seen them. He maintained that he had met dead people and recognized them (Gustavsson 2011b).



63. *A ghost on the little island of Gåsö cries out that he is freezing and wants his clothes back, to the dismay of the man and the woman standing to the right. Painting by Carl Gustaf Bernhardson. Bohuslän Museum, Uddevalla no. 225.*

The ghosts caused terror among people. An informant from Erska in the province of Västergötland born in 1868 told: “I remember that people were so afraid that they would see such a ghost in the night” (IFGH 4953: 8). Ghosts could be a danger for the deceased’s former enemies in life. So, it was important for all enemies to be reconciled before any of them died. One informant from Augerum in the province of Blekinge born in 1857 told in 1931:

If someone was dying, his enemies were asked to come so that they could be reconciled. Otherwise, the dead revenged on adversaries. He had no peace in the grave. One person got hurt by the dead who had enemies here on earth. People were sure of that. Directly after the funeral, the deceased visited his enemies. ...They were harassed by the deceased as soon as they were out in the darkness (LUF M 3196: 1-2, 5).

People tried to protect themselves against ghosts by using protective agents that were

common in traditional folk belief. It was important to obtain such protection as this is mentioned in a great number of records. People sprinkled flaxseed, ash or salt just after death and around a funeral. This way the deceased who were likely to become ghosts could be prevented as they had to pick up all the seeds on the night before the sunrise. Then they had to return to their graves (IFGH 740: 86, Böne, Västergötland). Another way of protecting against ghosts was described by an informant born in 1862 in Seglora in the province of Västergötland: "People sprinkled burnt seed or corn on the road and said, 'Now, you will not go over here before this seed grows up'" (IFGH 4602: 35). It would be as difficult as possible for ghosts to come.

#### *4 Connection between the Earthly and Future Life*

The folk life records evidence that the existence after death is imagined similar to that of earthly life in highly concrete terms. People seem to be unable to think of it differently from what they were used to. This being so, objects were placed in the coffin in the way the deceased were thought to need these things, no matter whether they had died blessed or unblessed. In some cases, the deceased earlier expressed wishes about what they wanted to have in the coffin for the use in their future existence. These could be money, clothes, glasses, work tools, and food. An expression about money in the coffin from Krogsered in the province of Halland reads: "He shall have with him so much that he can do the right thing where he arrives" (IFGH 1305: 74).

A criterion for the selection was that the deceased would have objects in the coffin which they particularly liked in their earthly life. Women could wish their finest clothes. One informant born in 1855 in Eskilsäter in the province of Värmland told in 1928 about a woman whose will was "to be beautifully dressed when she died, with her rings on the fingers, as she believed that this is how she would be clad after her death" (IFGH 1224: 1). Men who were addicted to alcohol could have a bottle of spirits. Those who used snuff or pipe got a filled snuff box or a pipe of tobacco with them.

These objects in the coffin would not only be helpful after death; thanks to them there would be no reason for the deceased to live a ghostly life, walking around and picking up things which they might need in the afterlife, such as, for instance, their snuffbox. One informant from Naverstad in the province of Bohuslän told in 1920 that leaving gifts in the coffin "was practised as late as 30 years ago" (VFF 165:1). That suggests that this practice could last till the late 1800s. Other informants maintained that it no longer existed during the early 1900s, but could be observed during their parents' generation. Bottles of spirits, snuff boxes and pipes with tobacco have actually been found in cemeteries at renewed excavations in earlier graves. This has been mentioned in several records by sextons. When sextons and other men found bottles of spirits, they emptied those up. The father of an informant, born in 1870 in Daretorp in the province of Västergötland, was a gravedigger. This is what he told in 1945:

Per i Knäppet was a gravedigger before my father. When he dug a grave at a stone wall, he found a bottle of brandy. He and another man sat on the stone wall and drank it up. The bottle was earlier put in the coffin of the deceased. My father dug up many old pipes, snuff and tobacco boxes (IFGH 5043: 23).

That life on the other side of death recalled the earthly life is evident in one of the folk-life artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson's records. A man born in 1860 related how he once dreamt that he had seen another man whom he knew but who had been dead for several years. "He was just like he used to be. ... So I thought I'd ask him if he was happy up there. He said: 'You can't imagine how good it is. And no one has to do very much either. I just go outside every day and gather spruce cones. That's all I do, so everything is always just fine'" (IFGH 6194: 2).

## 2 Beliefs on the Internet during the 2000s

After examining images of afterlife in Sweden in preindustrial time during the last part of the 1800s, the focus is now turned to the 2000s. Research on material obtained from the Internet has begun to attract attention of cultural scientists during the 2000s. This is seen in, inter alia, articles in the annual *Ethnologia Scandinavica* from 2009 (Palmgren 2009) which discuss questions related to the use of the Internet as a research source. Of interest is also the anthology *Digital Storytelling* edited by the Norwegian sociologist Knut Lundby in 2008. *Society International of Ethnology and Folklore* (abbr. SIEF) published the anthology *Shaping Virtual Lives* in 2012. The term "Netnography" is emerging (Kozinets 2010) but also online ethnography (Hine 2015). *Death Online Research Network*, abbr. DORS, started in the beginning of the 2010s and arranged its first symposium in 2014, the second in 2015 and the third in 2017. Its aim is to "study how dying, death and the afterlife is mediated and expressed online" ([https://pure.itu.dk/portal/en/activities/death-online-research-network\(b1671615-c1c2-48ce-8b58-c9cec7f82e7f.html\)](https://pure.itu.dk/portal/en/activities/death-online-research-network(b1671615-c1c2-48ce-8b58-c9cec7f82e7f.html))).

In this new research situation, I decided to study memorial sites on the Internet. These are a new form of expressing grief and memories about the deceased relatives and friends. Since the messages and imaginary conversations are published on the Internet, they are also accessible to outsiders, acquaintances as well as strangers, including scholars. In the sample of such websites, I have studied those that are open to the public. I have avoided those that are available only to a limited circle or those which require the guest to log on.

Memorial sites have undergone an explosive development during the 2000s. In 2008, there were about 600 websites of this type in Sweden (*Minnesplatser* 2008). Memorial pages on Facebook have started to appear; the Finnish anthropologist Anna

Haverinen has called attention to these in both Finland and the USA (Haverinen 2015: 6-22).

My research deals with websites that became available during 2009 and 2010 in Sweden<sup>1</sup>. These websites were set up by people, for the most part by women, who were coping with grief and loss. The focus of my analysis is on the contents of messages related to faith. My research questions are:

*What concepts of afterlife are expressed?*

*What does the afterlife status of the deceased look like?*

*Is any form of dialogue with the deceased considered to be possible?*

*Is any form of future reunion with the deceased believed to be possible?*

### *1 Afterlife in Heaven*

The concept that the deceased come to heaven is common. There they can meet other deceased. A new fellowship is believed to take place after death. The existence in heaven is considered to be very similar to that on earth. It is conceptualized as a highly pleasant life in very concrete terms, and the deceased are believed to be able to continue practicing in heaven their usual activities. This can be a motocross which Marcus, who died in 2008 at 23 years of age, loved so much. A message about him says: "We hope that you're happy there among the angels and do a lot of motocross racing".

You never meet negative concepts of the existence in heaven. This seems to reflect neo-religious ideas of "the recaptured paradise" (Alver 1999b, Kraft 2011). In spite of increasing secularization, doubt and a clear denial of any form of existence after death are very rare in the memorial messages. The concepts of afterlife existence can change when a sudden death occurs in one's own immediate circle. It seems impossible to believe that everything has come to an end. This is especially true with regard to deaths of children and young people. This new turn in ideas about afterlife is manifest in the messages expressed by the mother of Max and Saga who were murdered in 2008:

I have never been a believer. Never believed in God and was rather sceptical about the concepts of life after death. But after this ... I am still an unbeliever. But I want to believe that something happens after death. I want to believe that Max and Saga are well and happy and that they are together.

This non-traditional, non-Christian belief has come to light in the postmodern, secularized Sweden. It is part of a conceptual world that the afflicted persons can create

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1 My sources are recorded in Gustavsson 2011a: 161 and were accessed 1 April 2011.

in order to find some form of consolation. This type of individualism is characteristic of neo-religious trends (Sælid et al. 2005). The concept of vernacular religion in everyday life has also been put into practice nowadays (*Vernacular Religion* 2012).



64. Angels guard the stairs that the dead climb up into heaven. Photo [www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=.344](http://www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=.344).

### *2 Opportunities for Contacts with the Deceased*

The idea that the deceased can be contacted by the living who can even communicate their messages to the deceased on a computer is often expressed in memorial sites. It is even believed that the deceased can have a computer. The material technical possibilities of this life are thus transferable to the afterlife existence. Also, when the deceased are in heaven, they are often believed to watch over and protect their friends and relatives.

The concept of *reunion* with the deceased at some time in the future is visible on website messages. In terms of this concept, a new type of existence and fellowship that will never end is believed to be possible in afterlife. Finiteness gives place to eternity, and joy is supremely restored. To look forward in this way brings consolation in a state of grief. One explicitly writes about hell or punishment after death only in reference to those who have murdered a loved one close to the message writer.

### *3 Meetings with Angels and Other Divine Beings*

A frequently expressed belief concerns the deceased meeting angels after death who can contact the living by watching over them as guardian angels. In order to enter their world, the deceased must climb an endlessly long stairway which is depicted in a number of messages.

The meeting with angels is described in a highly positive way for the deceased. Thus, when Richard died in 2008 at 27 years of age, his cousin Laura wrote: “Your



65. *The mother of the deceased daughter has written: "Hugs from your beloved mother". The angel has a halo and wings. Photo [www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=34](http://www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=34).*

last journey to heaven has taken place and a lot of angels carry you there on their wings". The deceased can also speak poetically about their happiness of being among angels. This can help to comfort mourners. If angels are presented as beings of a supernatural or divine character, they are described in terms of neo-religious New Age conceptions (Kraft 2011). In such cases God appears more distant.

There are, however, instances when in addition to angels, God and Jesus are mentioned. This is seen as a highly positive factor for the deceased. When the four-month-old Nicolai died, his family wrote: "God had other plans for you. He wanted you to be near him, and you left us in despair about our loss". Another instance is when the deceased is described as a gift or a loan from God.

#### *4 The Deceased as Angelic Beings*

A concept common in the messages is that children and young people become angels after death. This is in striking contrast to earlier beliefs according to which the deceased were supposed to be souls, not angels. The British sociologist Tony Walter has detected the same tendency in England (Walter 2011). Mothers of dead children call themselves "Mothers of Angels" in the Swedish messages. In addition, the deceased are glorified when they are described as the very best, finest or prettiest angels in heaven. Belief in angels can exist even if one does not believe in God. The new belief is part of the conceptual world created by the afflicted persons in order to find some form of consolation and emotional stability that can help them to cope with life going on. In Sweden, one observes a kind of diffuse religiosity characteristic of a New Age way of thinking distinct from the Christian dogmas about death. It glorifies individuals and extols the bliss of an afterlife existence free from any punishment.



There are some examples of belief in the deceased already having been an angel while on earth and having acted there as a loan to their relatives and friends. The folklorist Bente Gullveig Alver argues that earlier conceptions of a guardian angel have changed in modern neo-religiosity; human beings are believed to receive the angelic wings themselves (Alver 1999a). Thus the supernatural is relocated onto the individual.

One might expect that only the best individuals could become angels. This is not the case, however. There are messages that speak with regret about drug addiction that brought the deceased (usually young men) to an early death. However, drug victims are also presented as angels in their afterlife.

### 3 Comparisons between Then and Now

Finally, I will compare characteristics of the folk beliefs of the preindustrial society and those of the 2000s. What are differences and similarities between these two historical periods?

#### *1 Differences*

Firstly, I will look at differences. In older times the folk belief always differentiated between a blessed and an unblessed exit from this life. This, however, cannot be observed in the present-day internet messages. The older beliefs have been replaced by exclusively positive ideas about afterlife existence. If people in the 2000s do not believe in the unblessed exit from life, there are no prerequisites for the belief in evil and dangerous ghosts. This may explain why the fear of those who were so threatening in the older material has been replaced by the search of surviving relatives for a close contact with the deceased, instead of protecting themselves against such meetings.

The deceased in the present beliefs watch over and protect their descendants. In earlier times, only those who died a blessed death were believed to perform this positive function; however, they were not mentioned as often as ghosts.

In the preindustrial society, angels appeared as positive beings in connection with the death of blessed people. The dead man's soul was helped on its way to heaven where it was believed to obtain the new existence. Nowadays the belief in angels is even more prominent, but at the same time it is increasingly disconnected from the traditional Christian belief in angels. In the context of increasing secularization, New Age inspired beliefs (Kraft 2011) have been largely taken over in Sweden (Gustavsson 2011a). Their focus is on the individual to a much greater extent than it used to be in the earlier conceptual world. This is the premise of the modern belief that the dead become angels after death and, moreover, that they had this status already in their earthly life and then became perfect angels after death. This belief would have been

unthinkable in earlier times. Soul was then the central concept; this belief, in many cases, has been replaced by the new belief that the deceased may be angels. So, the angel concept has lost its previous religious meaning (Köstlin 1994).

The older folklife records hardly maintain that people are expected to get reunited with their deceased relatives after death and thus be together forever. However, such beliefs are expressed in Christian texts in the form of chapbooks, inscriptions on grave memorials as well as in free church songs and interview data. Such faith and hope are also expressed nowadays in contemporary messages on the Internet. The relatives of the deceased who write these messages look forward to this type of eternal existence, even though it will take place in a vague future (*Grassroots Memorials* 2011).

## *2 Similarities*

The most obvious similarity characteristic of these two periods is the common belief in a continued existence after death. This existence is perceived similarly to the earthly life. Thus, in earlier times various objects were placed in the coffin to meet future needs of the deceased; this was also a way to protect the living against ghosts. In the 2000s, this belief does not take such concrete forms, but a similarity with older times is manifest in memorial messages which presume that the deceased have access to today's new technology. This can apply to a computer which can be used by the deceased when they send and receive messages to and from the survivors. The deceased are also believed to be able to continue running motocross if they had a great interest for that in the earthly life.

## 4 Folklore and Materiality

### 1 Folk-life art

The folk-life artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson was born on 22 September 1915 in the fishing village of Grundsund on the island of Skaftö, in the province of Bohuslän. His father Martin Bernhardson (1879-1961) was a fisherman. His mother Lydia (1886-1961) was born at the farm Lönndal just outside Grundsund where her father Johannes Jonsson (1860-1944) and mother Kristina (1860-1943) owned a smallholding. He thus grew up in the borderland between a smallholding farm district and a fishing village. In 1932, aged seventeen, he took part in deep-sea fishing off Iceland and other regions. Parts of the year he worked as a seaman on a cargo ship. Bernhardson began taking interest in the traditional culture of his home district at an early age. As a young man, he listened to old people's tales and began collecting objects from a bygone age.

Between 1949 and 1952, Bernhardson attended Hultberg's school of art in Gothenburg. He painted in the winter and otherwise earned a living doing short-term work during the summer on farms and market gardens. In 1965 he returned to Skaftö for good and moved into the newly built house where he lived for the rest of his life until his death in 1998 at 83 years of age.

526 of the artist's folk-life paintings, comprising the greater part of his production, were in 1981 transferred from Skaftö to Bohuslän Museum. In 2005 all the paintings were published on the Internet at [www.digitaltmuseum.se/search/](http://www.digitaltmuseum.se/search/). The 233 paintings that remained in Bernhardson's home at the time of his death in 1998 were purchased by Aina Barnevik in 2008 and have been made available on the Internet at [www.cgbernhardson.se](http://www.cgbernhardson.se).

The artist had the ability to transform immaterial conceptions of belief into visual images. What preconditioned the artist's ability to transform immaterial conceptions of belief to a visual dimension on canvas? Numerous informants from Skaftö have testified the important role which Bernhardson's maternal grandfather played as a communicator of the ancient folk beliefs in his surroundings. He paid regular evening visits to various homes, often accompanied by Carl Gustaf. He believed in the beings about which he told and could attest to having seen them. He had, in other words, second sight, which is to say that he had visions of a different world than that which can be seen with the ordinary eye. He described the beings' appearances: goblins

were undersized, wore wooden shoes, grey clothing and woollen caps on their heads. The artist continued these conceptual beliefs, declaring that “I have second sight just like the whole rest of my family”. He believed in the existence of beings which he painted and could attest to having seen them. He maintained that he had met dead people and recognized them. On a bicycle tour in 1979, in broad daylight, he met a headless woman who had been dead for several years, but as the artist told, “when I looked up again, she had disappeared”. The artist was later able to paint these inner visionary experiences. He was, in other words, very well-informed since he experienced this belief from within. His experiences have obviously been visions. The scholar must consider the narrator’s own statements about his experiences without attempting to decide on their degree of veracity. In this respect one can recall the words of Norwegian folklorist Bente Gullveig Alver in her study entitled “The third eye”



66. A man meeting some goblins down on the shore raises his hat politely and the goblins return his greeting. Bohuslän museum No. 075.



67. *The merpeople living at the bottom of the sea were a threat to the men out fishing and to the women rowing home from the islands who are shown at the top of the picture. Bohuslän museum No. 009.*

about a clairvoyant woman in Norway: “It would be far less scientific to deny clairvoyance than to remain receptive to the idea that it can exist” (Alver 1982: 35).

Religion played an important role in the surroundings of Bernhardson's childhood and youth. Based on their religious convictions, these people generally assumed an other-worldly perspective. Their interest in an existence after death is shown in statements made by older informants.

In addition to the ecclesiastical religion, there were conceptions of belief about the presence of supernatural beings in humans' immediate surroundings. These were ghosts, spectres, goblins and the underwater merpeople. Such conceptions, often depicted in Bernhardson's paintings, were never considered by the islanders to be incompatible with their ardent religiosity. It was a matter of having both, not an either/or in these levels of belief. Supernatural beings were for the most part considered as being dangerous for humans. They contributed to accidents or they foretold such events. Only to a very limited degree could they benefit to their surroundings.



68. Bernhardson, shown to the right in the painting, crossing the ice in the 1940s. Alongside his comrade in the centre of the picture, there is a dim being pulling the man in a different direction than the way he had planned to go. Bohuslän Museum No. 032.

Goblins could also threaten their surroundings as they were suspected of lighting fires on the tops of boat-masts. The islanders therefore held these beings in great respect. This has been illustrated by the artist in a painting entitled “Courtesy” in which a man meeting several goblins raises his hat to them and is answered in like manner.

The underwater merpeople could reveal themselves to men out fishing. If one of the merpeople were caught on a hook, it was of vital importance that it could be freed immediately and put back into the water. Disaster would otherwise strike men and boats. The merpeople breathed through gills, had fish eyes and lifeless hair. They lived lives comparable to humans with, for example, herds of animals on the bottom of the sea.

The forewarnings, which people believed they had experienced, foretold of danger. These conceptions were closely related to the fact that they lived in a maritime environment. The sea was, naturally enough, a perilous place of work for the men taking part in deep-sea fishing and shipping. Danger also lurked in the waters just off the



69. *Black dogs with fiery eyes and tongues racing in the night in front of a terrified woman and signalling sudden death. Bohuslän Museum No. 191.*

coast. In winter it was the ice that represented an ever-present danger. Utmost care had to be shown, however, when walking over the ice. The numerous deaths by drowning showed the islanders that they could never display enough caution. The salinity of the water and the unpredictable currents in the sounds meant that the strength of the ice could never be depended upon. The artist has illustrated how people believed themselves to have seen humanlike beings that tried to tempt people crossing the ice over to some dangerous current. There were also, however, benign beings who warned of weak ice or approaching storms at sea. The artist had himself seen in the 1940s an indistinct being ahead of him on the ice. It tugged at the arm of the man walking together with Bernhardson to get them to walk in a direction different from the one they had planned on originally. The next day they heard that a man had fallen through the ice somewhere near the route they had thought to go.

Deathly beings were made up of various kinds of spectres that had not been buried in sanctified ground. Death was very near whenever nets or hooks were being put out or the catch was being hauled in while fishing. Prior to unexpected deaths one could see black dogs with flaming eyes and fire-breathing mouths rush by in the night. A woman who sees such dogs holds her hands in front of her face in terror. This brings to mind the commonly held conceptions about black, fire-breathing dogs who represent the devil (af Klintberg 1977: 74, 165).

Ghosts could be heard screeching in the night. This was thought to forecast bad weather or disasters at sea. Along the coasts the ghosts of people who had died at sea and were not given a Christian burial were named specters. These beings were considered to be especially dangerous for those searching for wreckage from sunken ships. Ghosts that had lost their clothing froze in the cold, bad weather. A ghost is depicted by Bernhardson in the form of a naked skeleton walking about and crying: "I want my coat back. The north wind is blowing and I'm freezing" (picture 63).

Various magical rituals were carried out in order to protect people against these supernatural beings. Commonly used preventive measures could consist of the use of steel, the sign of the cross or magical incantations, all rooted in older folk beliefs. Fishing people waved a knife back and forth in the air over the stem of a boat before the start of a voyage. The sign of the cross was made in the water before nets were put out in order to protect the fishing grounds and the equipment.

All in all, the artist may be said to have made a unique contribution to folklore with his portrayal of supernatural beings which were a matter of belief for people in past times. His art also conveyed the tangible influence these beings could have on human lives.



## 2 Inscriptions and pictorial symbols on old grave memorials

This section focuses on pictorial symbols and texts found on old grave memorials. Much can be learnt about the view of life and afterlife at the time when the grave memorials were erected. A study of memorials can shed light on how body and soul could be related. Thus positive and negative views about death can oppose each other as corruption and darkness versus resurrection and joy.

The period under the present study extends from the early 1800s, when grave memorials of resistant material began to be erected at cemeteries in Sweden, until the middle of the 1900s. In what follows, I examine the latest developments from the 1990s onwards in Sweden and Norway.

In order to carry out this study, it was necessary to select some cemeteries which have been studied over a long period of time. Given my experience of previous eth-



70. Map of the island Orust in western Sweden. The map was drawn by Kirsten Berrum, Oslo, Norway.

nological investigations, I chose the island of Orust in Bohuslän, western Sweden, having about 15 000 inhabitants throughout the 1900s, and its seven parishes, namely Långelanda, Morlanda, Myckleby, Röra, Stala, Tegneby and Torp. Family farms dominated the inland districts of the island, while shipping, ship building and fishing were the main activities along the western coast.

Before the 1800s, nearly everybody who was buried on a cemetery was anonymized for posterity due to the absence of permanent grave memorials. Only a few people belonging to the higher social strata got permanent memorials; those were stone slabs laid on the church floor. Grave memorials erected before the 1800s and still visible in the cemeteries under study are absent on Orust. The number of grave memorials increased in the 1800s, but they were still few compared with the 1900s.

The new type of grave memorials that emerged in the early 1800s consisted of limestone tombstones with a rounded or pointed top. Most of the stones were erected in the mid-1800s and they ceased to appear by the last two decades of the 1800s.

By the mid-1800s cast-iron graves began to be erected. There are three types of such tombstones: simple crosses, three-leaf clover-shaped crosses and hollow crosses with specific patterns. The last cast-iron cross is dated to the year 1898. On Orust there are 29 graves with cast-iron fences. Usually, such graves are more lavish. The entire grave area is surrounded by a fence with a gate for the care of the grave. The limestone and cast-iron gravestones disappeared at the end of the 1800s. In the 1800s, a large number of deceased persons were still anonymous for posterity as they did not get a permanent grave memorial in the form of a limestone gravestone or later, a cast-iron cross.

The family graves were introduced in the 1870s and persisted primarily into the 1920s. They were a type of collective grave memorial. The family graves never prevailed on the cemeteries. All deceased persons within a household were part of the family and were not mentioned individually, with the exception of the husband as the head of the family. It was not until the 1920s that women's names were again inscribed on the gravestones and became visible as was usual before the 1870s.

Throughout the 1800s, the wife's personal identity in relation to her husband was marked by her maiden name coined from her father's first name followed by the affix -daughter.

Granite monuments began to appear in the late 1800s and dominated during the 1900s. The first granite gravestones on Orust appeared in the 1870s. During the 1880s and 1890s, granite stones became more common. It was only in the first part of the 1900s that the anonymity in the cemeteries disappeared for the majority of the deceased, regardless of social status, gender or age.

### *1 Inscriptions*

Texts are either inscribed in their entirety on the tomb or as references mainly to the Bible or hymn book. The inscription on the oldest limestone gravestone in Orust commemorates the county bailiff J. Eiserman in Stala, who died in 1809; it relates to the deceased's lifetime and his merits, not to his after-death existence: "In testimony to his virtue as an honest citizen, an active philanthropist and a father, this memorial has been erected by his love". Emphasis on the role of personal qualities is reinforced by the reference to Proverbs 10: 7 which says: "The righteous memorial is blessed, but the name of the wicked melts when they are gone". It is the individual positive qualities manifest in Eiserman's life, not his professional status that this inscription commemorates, written by "his love", which may refer to his wife. This characterization of the deceased is unique compared to other inscriptions dated from the 1800s. The deceased's individual life and actions are usually not emphasized, with the exception of the squire Abraham Gustaf Bildt's grave memorial in 1828. The text reads: "He was an affectionate husband, loving father, active philanthropist and a true Christian. He is missed, blessed and glorious" (cf. Thorburn 2014: 88f).

That it is the body that lies in the grave is marked with the words on Eiserman's stone: "Here lies the mortal part" of the deceased. This is a common expression in



71. A tall limestone gravestone commemorating the county bailiff J. Eiserman from Stala born in 1748 and deceased in 1809. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

many tombs in the 1800s as well as “here lies the dust”, but these expressions stopped being used in the 1900s. Such expressions imply that there is something more than the mortal body, referring to the spirit or soul. Some thoughts about an existence after death are not expressed along with Eiserman’s name but are found on the reverse of the stone regarding his wife and daughter.

Closest in time after Eiserman there is an inscription on the limestone gravestone over the parliamentary member and farmer Andreas Jönsson from the island of Flatön in Morlanda who died in 1822 at the age of 56 years. The text on the gravestone from Psalms 94: 19 reads: “I had many worries in my heart but your consolation delighted my soul”. The deceased speaks in the first person. In contrast to Eiserman’s gravestone, this inscription tells about a difficult earthly life, but God has comforted the deceased in his difficulties although there is no mentioning of a future existence. The difficulties can be explained by the fact that this parliamentary member was accused of treason. He had agitated at local parish meetings in Morlanda against the Royal Decree in 1811 and a parliamentary decision on the discharge of extra troops at a difficult time of war for the country. The entire legal process has been extensively studied by the church historian Bertil Rehnberg 1997. Jönsson was sentenced to death in the first instance in the district court and in the second instance in the court of appeals in 1812. The verdict was mitigated, after a request for clemency from Jönsson, to imprisonment with handcuffs and shackles in a fortress in the town of Marstrand. He was set free later but was no longer a member of parliament and died in 1822 of a severe illness he caught in prison (Rehnberg 1997: 53ff).

In Fiskebäckskil a text from the 1819 hymn book was inscribed in 1827 on the limestone gravestone of the wife Maria Brita (picture 62). This text radiates safety as Jesus guards and cares for the grave while her remains rest there. The soul is not there but is already resting in happiness with Jesus. Thus, a radical contrast between the body lying down in the grave and the soul far away up is manifest.

In Stala cemetery, there is a rounded and broad limestone gravestone over the woman Johanna Nöring who died in 1836 at the age of 40. Her father Olof Nöring was a big farmer in Stala. The inscribed text shows a clear optimism about a future existence: “Now the harvest shall reach maturity which had only started to bloom. Now I go home to the Lord and will be together with the pious”.

Another preserved longer text is on a wooden cross dated 1838 over the fisher merchant Anders Jonasson, who died in this year at 35 years of age in the island of Gullholmen. God’s protection is needed in life against all the evil in the world. God’s help is needed to fulfill the earthly work “with faith and hope”. Then you can calmly fall asleep in death, and rise with joy “when night is no more”. Evil in earthly life contrasts with joy and darkness with light in the future after death. The text conveys a

positive vision of the afterlife existence and is fetched from hymn 444 in the 1819 hymnal.

Still another text on a limestone tombstone is dated to 1847 in Torp; it was erected over the wife Christina Olsdaughter from a small farm Rödstege in Torp parish who died of cold 48 years old. Unlike the earlier examples of inscriptions, this woman didn't belong to well-to-do people. The text from hymn 482: 6 in the 1819 hymnal reads: "God be praised! I reached the harbor, for a little time here I toiled and I got peace and consolation in the grave, and here God unites us again". The deceased who speaks in the first person contrasts the difficulties she had in her earthly life against what she experienced after death when she "reached the harbor" and got peace and consolation in the face of God. The word harbor means that the existence after death is seen as the aim of life. At the same time, the deceased thought of her survivors and her wish to them is: "may God's rest be with you". These words are not taken from the hymnal but are a free addition.

Three years later in 1850, the farmer Mattias Samuelsson from Svineviken died in Röra at the age of 62, and his wife Johanna Andersdaughter in 1868. At the bottom of the stone the following verse is inscribed: "At the boundary of life they no longer tremble. No, they hurried happily towards death. They do not fear the grave, for it is the gateway that leads from death to the city of bliss". Here you meet only a joyful vision of death and no fear because the deceased are on their way to "the city of bliss" although God is not mentioned by name, and nothing is said about the past life.

A contrasting and dark view of death is expressed in the inscription on the gravestone over the successful fisher merchant Anders Falk, who died in 1853. The text on the stone is taken from Psalms 90: 10: "The years of our life are seventy, or at most eighty; yet their span is but toil and labor; they are soon gone, and we fly away". Life has been toil and labor. Nothing suggests that there can be any continuation after death but rather decay. The introduction of the text on the stone reads: "Here lie the remains of Anders Falk". The negative perception conveyed on the headstone is understandable in the context of the deceased's sad family situation, despite his good economy. In 1812, his wife Anna Elisabeth Falk née Bergström from the coastal resort of Mollösund died at only 26 years of age. On her gravestone, lying in Mollösund's old cemetery, a totally different and forward-looking text is found - compared to her husband's tombstone: "He took me to his home because he wanted me" with a reference to Psalms 18: 20. Two of the couple's three sons died as babies while the third reached adulthood. He died in 1843, ten years before his father who at his death was all alone in life (Rehnberg 1997). The great earthly fortune that Anders Falk had gathered was donated to a foundation for the needy in the future.

Inscriptions are rare on cast-iron crosses due to the lack of space. One exception is the cross over the unmarried parliamentary member Johan Henricsson of Röra,

who died of typhus in 1867 at the age of 34. The inscription refers to Psalms 144: 4: “Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow”. Here only life’s transience is pronounced, and nothing is said about an existence after death. This view is very similar to the inscription on the successful fisher merchant Anders Falk’s grave.

A similar attitude could be expressed on early granite stones. The oldest granite stone at Röra cemetery in 1872 for the well-to-do farmer Gustaf Andersson and his wife refers to Psalms 39: 5: ”You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure”. Such exclusively negative pronouncements with references to the Old Testament and with emphasis on life’s transience and no reference to the future are found on a number of grave memorials dated to a short period between the 1850s and the early 1870s. These inscriptions refer to people who had high social and economic positions during their earthly life, namely members of parliament, well-to-do farmers and fisher merchants. From the 1870s on, the entirely dark vision with emphasis on life’s transience disappeared. It was followed by a vision characterized by joy and belief in resurrection after death.



72. A three-leaf-clover-shaped cast-iron cross commemorating the parliamentary member Johan Henricsson who died of typhus in Röra in 1867 at the age of 34. The inscription is quoted from Psalms 144: 4. The top is decorated with the symbols of faith, hope and charity intermingled with each other while an angel holding a triumphal wreath decorates the foot. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

The few texts that can be found on cast-iron crosses are otherways inscribed on the back, as in the case of a cross over a peasant woman from the parish Myckleby who died in 1899. The text says: “The larger the cross, the more your death will be a bright and safe harbor for you against fatal storms and troubles. Redemption is its real name. At the end the cross is erected over your grave as a sign that you have ceased your sufferings”. This text is a quote from hymn 235: 5 of the 1819 hymnal. Happiness, light and security after death are contrasted with the earthly life’s sufferings; however, God is not mentioned.

All the references to various verses of hymns, on limestone gravestones, cast-iron tombstones and early granite stone memorials fluctuate between the trials of earthly life and death anxiety on the one side, and a longing and hope for a better existence after death through resurrection, on the other side. These opposites usually occur in the same hymn. There is no similar one-sided emphasis on transience of life as was found above in some of the Old Testament passages used between the 1850s and the early 1870s.

Long inscriptions on the limestone gravestones and cast-iron monuments are few. The same applies to granite gravestones in the late 1800s. In the 1900s, inscriptions on granite stones became even fewer. In Röra one finds the text in 1921: “We will meet beyond the river where no storms will ever reach us” over the farmer Anton Abrahamsson and his wife Anna Helena, both of whom were born in 1854 and died in 1921. This text alludes to a happy meeting of the spouses in the diffuse future but lacks any clear religious anchoring. This future existence stands in contrast to negative storms in the earthly life.

In Orust, there are almost no long inscriptions in the later part of the 1900s until the present time. The deceased’s view of life and afterlife thus has become more difficult to trace on the grave memorials when inscribed texts and religious references increasingly ceased to appear during the 1900s. This is not only because of secularization as older religious texts on grave memorials have to a lesser extent been replaced by secular inscriptions. Instead, there are usually no texts. Secular texts that do occur are brief phrases expressing thankfulness, loss, sorrow and remembrance (Gustavsson 2003: 97ff). However, during the early 2000s, memorial websites on the Internet complement what is lacking on the tombs regarding beliefs about life, death and afterlife (Gustavsson 2011a: 142ff).

## *2 Pictorial Symbols*

Besides inscriptions one can also rely on pictorial symbols when assessing the view of life and afterlife. The pictorial symbol that distinguishes the earliest limestone gravestones is either a star or a sparkling light similar to a rising sun, or a triangle on the top of the stone. The symbol of light conveys a positive message. In Christian



73. A broad and pointed limestone gravestone commemorating the peasant and shipbuilder Olof Jacobsson who died in 1846 and his wife Christina Larsdotter dead in 1871, with a radiant half-sun symbol on its top. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.

imagery, the sun is a symbol of immortality and resurrection, while the triangle is a symbol of the Trinity (Biedermann 1994: 375, 427f).

However, on the limestone gravestones dated to 1880s and 1890s, there was a black cross engraved on top of the stone, whereas the sparkling light had disappeared. The cross may signal death, but it may also symbolize victory over death through Jesus' death on the cross as highlighted within the innerchurch revival movement named Schartauanism which was influential in Orust in the late 1800s.

On cast-iron crosses, the cross symbol is represented by the form of the cross itself; in such cases there is no need for another cross on the memorial. In some cases light rays shine out from the center of the cross where the cross arms meet, resembling the sparkling sun symbol on limestone gravestones. This sign alludes to bright and positive aspects of death.

A symbol that is observable on cast-iron crosses consists of one or three stars on the top as well as on the two arms of the cross (Herjulfsdotter 2013: 36ff). The star indicates light and divine guidance (Ferguson 1973: 44f) like the symbol of faith, hope and love, namely a cross, an anchor and a heart intermingled in each other (Ursin 1949: 85f). This last symbol occurs in some cases on the top of the memorials. Stars, however, are more common.





74. This limestone gravestone commemorating the farmer Jakob Johansson from Morlanda (1817–1890) and his wife Christina Nilsdaughter (1819–1891) has a black cross symbol instead of a radiant sun or a star as was common earlier in the 1800s. The hymn 469: 5 from the 1819 hymnal contains a prayer for “a happy resurrection”. The texts have been painted and are thus clearly visible to observers. Photo Anders Gustavsson.



75. A cast-iron cross in Kåringön commemorating the sea captain M. Larsson who was born in 1817 and died in 1860. It has a star on its top and a winged angel at its foot. Light rays radiate out from the center of the cross where the cross arms meet. Photo Anders Gustavsson.



76. A three-leaf-clover-shaped cast-iron cross in Röra. The farmer Olof Kristenson buried here was born in 1781 and died in 1858 while his wife Anna Jonsdaughter was born in 1782 and died in 1859. The text is no. 473: 4 from the 1819 hymnal. One star decorates the top with one on each of the two cross arms. Under the star on top there is a symbol of faith, hope and charity intermingled with each other. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

The cast-iron crosses may have space for a symbol in the lower part nearer the ground, and this is often a *winged angel*, which can be related to a positive vision of afterlife and a belief in an invisible world. At the same time, the idea of a mourning angel also existed (Herjulfsdotter 2013: 39). The latter opinion may be the case with the memorial over the parliamentary member Johan Henricsson (picture 72).

*Two hands* that clasp each other as in a handshake also occur, but this symbol is rarer. These hands signify a positive vision marking unity and love between husband and wife; they may also represent farewell as well as a meeting in a new existence (Herjulfsdotter 2013: 37).

When the first granite blocks appeared during the late 1800s, a cross became used as a common symbol, just as on limestone gravestones from the same period. The first granite stone in Röra 1872 was designed as a cross, similar to cast-iron crosses, but this did not occur later to any significant extent; crosses were instead incised and painted on the stone. These were generally black crosses, and this became the standard well into the 1900s.

In the late 1900s, the following change is observable: black crosses tend to symbolize only death, something negative; they no longer signal resurrection, that is something positive. Then they disappeared to a great extent and were in many cases

replaced by religiously neutral symbols expressing a more positive and brighter view of death (see more about this change in the next section).

From the mid-1900s, relatives who wanted to continue to use crosses and simultaneously highlight the belief in resurrection started painting crosses in a light color, instead of in black. The bright crosses have sometimes been supplemented by rays of light from the center of the cross, similar to the beaming and rising sun that appeared on limestone tombstones and some cast-iron crosses in the 1800s.



77. A granite gravestone in Myckleby commemorating the farmer Carl Emil Peterson who was born in 1866 and died in 1954. His wife Hildur Fredrika was born in 1876 and died in 1958. Light rays beam from the center of the cross where the cross arms meet. This reminds of the cast-iron crosses dated to the 1800s. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

### 3 Pictorial symbols on recent grave memorials in Norway and Sweden

In the 2000s, the symbolic perspective became important in ethnological discussions about material culture (*Materiel kultur* 2011). In the research project “Symbols of



78. This map shows localities and towns where field work within the project “Symbols of death” has been carried out. The map was drawn in 2001 by Torill Sand, Oslo.

death”, concerning pictorial symbols and epitaphs on gravestones in Norway and Sweden, my focus has been on the 1990s and the 2000s. During this time customs markedly changed compared with earlier times. This is shown by the use of new pictorial symbols. The aim of the aforementioned project has been to interpret the pictures and epitaphs as symbols and expressions for the deceased’s way of life, sentiments, thoughts and ideas. This project has been realized in cooperation with the Nordic Network of Thanatology, abbreviated NNT, established in Ålborg, Denmark, in 2010.

Taking society’s restrictions regarding graves in Norway and Sweden into consideration, it is obvious that the 1990s have seen a greater freedom of choice for grave’s leaseholder as to the shape of gravestones as well as pictures, epitaphs and objects on the stone. Liberal legislation sanctioning this measure was passed in Sweden in 1990 (*Svensk författningssamling* 1990 nr 1144). A comparable law was passed in Norway in 1996; it replaced previous legislation passed in 1897 (*Norges Lov* 2000). Thus national regulation became standardized in situations where local regulations and restrictions previously were a priority in both of the countries. The new legislation allowed individual expressions on the gravestones to a far greater degree than it had been possible in the past.

My special interest has been new expressions for individual personal indications on the cemeteries, that is, symbols that may characterize the deceased person (cf. Dahlgren 2002). Individualism has been said to be a sign of our time, but how could this be explicit after death on grave memorials? Here I will concentrate on dissimilarities between symbols on Norwegian and Swedish gravestones and on factors which can explain these contrasts on the basis of different conditions in the two countries without, however, dealing with specific regional deviations. The national level will have precedence over the regional level. Innovation acceptance will be contrasted with the preservation of traditions. The fact that certain tendencies are more common in one country than in the other is studied without any determination of the exact quantitative degree of difference.

The source material consists of around 2 000 photographs taken by me on seventy cemeteries in Norway and Sweden. I have also carried out about 200 interviews with family members on the cemeteries, especially in Sweden, as well as with stonecutters and cemetery personnel on the visited cemeteries. I have attended ten stonecutter companies and their archives, five in Norway and five in Sweden. No attempts have been made to carry out quantitative evaluation; instead, a qualitative selection has been assembled through photographs of both innovative and traditional images and epitaphs in the cemeteries. Observations recorded during fieldwork have given a satisfactory illustration of characteristic and deviatory aspects in the cemeteries. Geographically, seventy selected cemeteries are situated in the area ranging from Göte-

borg, Sweden, to Oslo, Norway, and including urban and rural districts, along the coast and in inland agricultural and forested regions.

### 1 Norwegian bronze figurines

To begin with, characteristically Norwegian bronze figurines fastened to gravestones, including portraits of the deceased in bronze and bronze lettering, were introduced in the late 1980s and henceforth became the fashion. An example of a bronze portrait from the gravestone erected in 1998 in memory of a middle-aged carpenter can be seen in Idd cemetery in the southern part of Norway. Very few signs of such bronze figurines have been found in Swedish cemeteries, as in Sweden stonecutters did not sell bronze objects. This difference between Norway and Sweden may be ascribed to differences in fashion; it cannot be related to any observable difference in opinions and beliefs. Thus, a stonecutter in Fredrikstad, Norway said in an interview that the use of bronze figurines that had become so common from the 1990s on, had been inspired by Continental fashions where they had been in use over a long period of time.



*79. A bronze portrait fastened to the front of a gravestone erected in memory of a fifty-two-year-old carpenter in 1998 in Idd cemetery, Norway. A bronze bird has been set on the top of the stone. The hammer symbolizing a craft is very rare in Norway. Text: "Remembered with love". Photo Anders Gustavsson.*

## 2 Christian and secular motives

Christian pictures and epitaphs are far more usual in Norway than in Sweden, where secular and popular religious expressions lacking an obvious Christian character are a more frequent choice. The words God, Jesus and Lord or references to Bible texts are more common in Norway than in Sweden. This is especially true not only of Østfold county where evangelical and revivalist congregations abound, but also of the capital Oslo where the incidence of revival movements has not been high. Expressions that suggest a reunion after death, for example, “We’ll meet again” are more usual in Norway. In Sweden, such expressions usually apply to graves of children and young people. In such cases it is, of course, more difficult for relatives and friends to reconcile themselves to an irrevocable parting. This trend observable in Swedish cemeteries should be considered as the expression of a diffuse popular religiosity (Kraft 2011).

In Norway, the worldly and the sacred are combined in an entirely different manner than in Sweden, where worldly pictures and epitaphs more often appear alone. For example, in Norway, a boat motif can often be found in combination with a religious text comparing life to a voyage. Eternity is then a shore on the far side of the



80. A maritime design showing a ship at sea together with a lighthouse and the Christian inscription “In the gloom of night Jesus’ name shines out like a lighthouse”. You also find a shining star to the left. Gravestone for a forty-three-year-old man at Vestre Gravlund cemetery, Oslo, 1986. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

sea. The darkness of death is illuminated by Jesus' name. The text can read: "In the darkest night, Jesus' name shines like a beacon". A figure of Christ is not unusual on a Norwegian gravestone, but is almost unthinkable in Sweden.

In coastal towns in Norway, the anchor motif can often be found encircling a cross. This is also the case when flowers such as lilies-of-the-valley or spikes of grain are combined with a cross. In Sweden, such combinations of the spiritual and the worldly are only seen in places with a strong revivalistic tradition. Persons who have worked in shipping can in Sweden have an anchor or a freighter depicted on their gravestones. The stone can even be shaped like an anchor. A symbol of a boat that in Sweden has become an occupational or recreational symbol can in Norway often be combined with a religious text comparing life to a sea voyage.

According to my field observations, the cross has maintained its popularity in Norway to a greater degree than in Sweden during the 1990s and later. Continued



81. A resurrection cross in Långelanda commemorating a man who died in 2005 at the age of 83. The family is inspired by a free-church movement. Two intertwined hearts signify the love between the spouses. A white dove on top signifies peace which was rather common on Orust in the mid-1900s. Photo Anders Gustavsson.



regard for older traditions is widely accepted in Norway, as is the continuation of doing as one and others have always done in one's surroundings. The fact that in Norway the use of the cross is more common than in Sweden should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of a more explicit Christian foundation but also as the awareness of the importance of traditions.

In Sweden during the late 1900s, black crosses began to be more associated with death and grief, something negative, rather than with the Christian belief incorporating a conception of resurrection, something positive and bright. Because of this heightened association with death and sorrow, the lessened usage of the cross was observed during this period. Due to this conceptual modification, people tend to feel that the cross has a somewhat dismal and serious character from which they wish to distance themselves in their encounter with death. Other symbols are chosen instead, symbols that express a more positive view of death. Thus, an agent for a stonecutting firm stated: "People don't want crosses nowadays. They fancy a brighter symbol. They can choose a sunrise, for example, to show that the deceased is sitting and watching the sun rise. Even a bird or a flower loved by the deceased can be chosen, lilies-of-the-valley, for example". This change should not be considered exclusively as a sign of growing secularization, which reduces the role of religion in the public consciousness ([www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se) *Sekularisering*), but rather as a result of changes in the perception of the cross: its message has acquired a different content. A similar tendency is observed in obituaries where after 1976 the cross has been more and more seldom in Swedish newspapers (Dahlgren 2000); by contrast, it is used in a great extent in Norway (Wiggen 2000).

Crosses surrounded by beams of light, so-called crosses of resurrection, have become the preferred Christian variant in Sweden in revival settings. The cross of resurrection consists of a white, sometimes gilded figure of Christ whose hands are stretched out in a cross-like fashion. The cross can also be made not as solidly black, but in outline and encircled by beams of light. This version gives a much more radiant impression than the solid black cross does. Crosses encircled by beams can also be found in Norway and quite often in combination with a Christian text indicating a coming existence in Heaven such as "Cast off the flesh, come to the Lord" on a gravestone dated 1993 in Enningdalen near the Swedish border.

### 3 Tradition and change at the choice of motives

It is evident that in Norway the next of kin are less interested than people in the same situation in Sweden in commemorating their deceased by means of the gravestone that they have erected. Relatives therefore select epitaphs and pictorial symbols similar to those already chosen by others. This means that the individualistic elements, which

came into use in Sweden during the 1990s, have become more pronounced there than in Norway. Next of kin in Norway usually visit cemeteries and study the stones and designs found there before making their choice. This has long been evident to both stonecutting companies and cemetery personnel. An agent for a stonecutting firm in Fredrikstad, Norway stated that “people are careful not to break any norms. A cemetery is not exactly the place where they want to be conspicuous”. Relatives therefore follow the beaten path of tradition instead of finding variations that depart from the customary usage. In other words, collective mentality is stronger than the presentation of individual identity. The gravestone is not considered a proper place for attracting special attention.

In Sweden, the next of kin usually submit proposals for symbols, epitaphs and stones, which the stonecutting firm attempts to fulfil. Proposing their ideas, the next of kin are able to emphasize individual details in the deceased’s life. In recent years, one finds examples from different social strata in Sweden when the deceased already during their lifetime have expressed their own wishes for the gravestone in order to highlight characteristics of their lives. Thus, a farmer in Bohuslän who was born in 1925, expressed before his death that he would like to have one of his horses, a stallion of North Swedish breed, depicted on his gravestone. In this way, one attempts to keep one’s memory alive for at least a certain amount of time into the future. This custom of the deceased making proposals as to what is to be done after their own deaths indicates an increasing personalization and relaxation of a previous taboo against discussing death.

In Norway, I have not found any examples of the deceased having expressed any preferences concerning the appearance of the gravestone previously to his or her death. The need to emphasize the personality of the deceased does not appear to be as urgent as in Sweden. A collective way of thinking, in the sense of unhesitatingly doing as others have done previously, is still obvious. One might assume that it is a result of Norway, having been historically a more egalitarian society with fewer social distinctions than Sweden. It has been more important to be equal to others and emphasize the belonging to the common and independent nation (Hodne 1994). This strengthens collective disposition and maintenance of traditions thus creating the atmosphere in which one is unlikely to demonstrate the status of the deceased on gravestones. In a hierarchic and socially segregated society, marking one’s status becomes important which is also a characteristic feature of individualism. This accounts for the greater variety in choices of symbols and epitaphs in Sweden. Gravestones thus reflect the prevailing values of the surrounding society.

#### 4 Visiting the grave memorials

Another difference between Norway and Sweden, observed during the field work in cemeteries, is that one does not meet as many Norwegians visiting their relatives' graves as one does in Swedish cemeteries. It has, therefore, been impossible to carry out as many interviews in relation to the grave as in Sweden. Some of the about fifty Norwegians whom I interviewed at other places than cemeteries and who had recently lost a close relative, said that visiting the grave has not been considered important. The memory of the deceased does not seem to be associated with the grave and with the care of the grave to the same extent in Norway as in Sweden. This does not mean that remembrance of the deceased is less intense in Norway but that it is not as strongly related to the grave as in Sweden. The specifically Norwegian connection between the spiritual and the worldly can account for this. The deceased's abode does not need to be linked solely to the grave but also to a more indiscernible existence unrelated to the actual grave. On the contrary in Sweden, the grave itself, according to the collected field material, more often has become the site linked to the deceased and to the remembrance of him or her. A more obvious secularization in this respect manifest in Sweden could mean that the grave itself becomes the site linked to the deceased and to the remembrance of him or her.

Another factor may be significant in this intercultural contrast as surviving relatives in Norway oftener than in Sweden pay cemetery personnel to care for the grave. A burial trust is established, and relatives are thus freed from any practical care and consequently from motivation for regular visits to the grave. A cemetery employee in Fredrikstad stated in the beginning of the 2000s, concerning the routine in this city: "It is more and more usual that we cemetery employees are paid to take care of the grave. ... Burial trusts have become more popular in recent years. There are more and more of them. In other words, people pay money, for example, 10 000 crowns".

#### 5 Use of occupational and leisure time symbols

A further difference between Norway and Sweden concerns the use of occupational symbols. During the 1990s, the use of pictorial symbols for many more occupations grew popular in Sweden, whereas this was not the case in Norway. Horses and tractors for farmers that have become popular in Sweden are lacking in Norway as are symbols for other crafts. In Swedish cities and small towns, various occupations can be represented with a symbol on the gravestone. This has also been common among workers and not only among the middle and upper classes. Although occupational symbols are not common in Norway, occupational titles are used there more often than in Sweden. Such examples are "Captain" or something similar for those who have been to sea. This does not apply solely to status occupations, such as teaching,



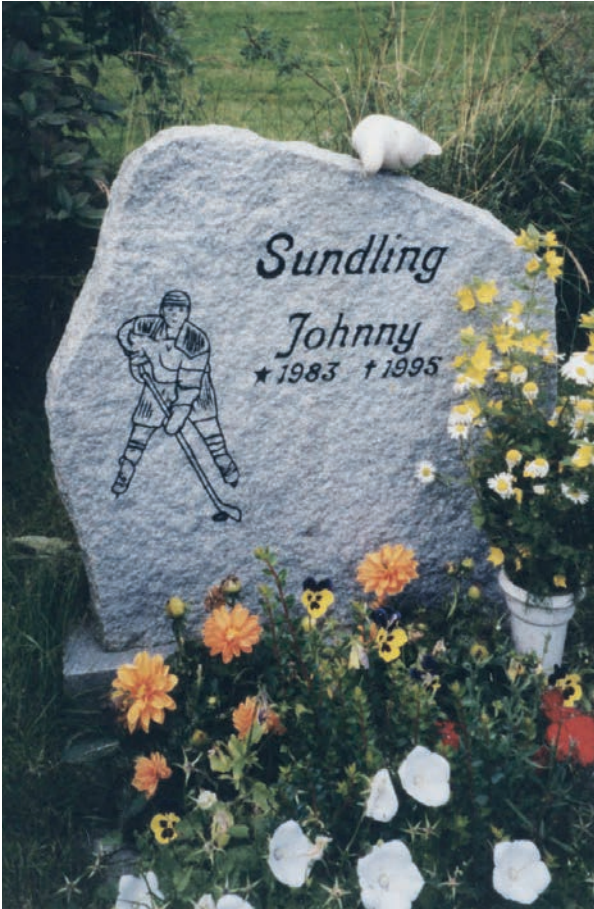
82. A figure of a woman with a halo and a pair of tongs in her hand has been inscribed on the gravestone of a middle-aged woman dentist who died in 1997 and was buried at Svarteborg cemetery. This is the attribute of the dentists, the saint Appolonia (Nilsén 1986). The gravestone is shaped like a tooth. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

building or dentistry, but also to shoemaking. This is a further example of how the established order, apart from the traditional religious influence, is usually preserved in Norway and not rejected to the same extent as in Sweden.

Various expressions of *leisure time symbols* have become popular on Swedish gravestones since the 1990s and later. This applies especially to city dwellers. Leisure time or recreational symbols often apply to masculine fields of interest, such as sailing, leisure time boating, sports fishing or sporting activities such as soccer, tennis or ice hockey. In some cases, women's interests can also be expressed by gravestone symbols.

Just as in the usage of occupational symbols, symbols for modern leisure time and sports activities have not as yet found a definite expression on Norwegian gravestones. This corresponds to the fact that individual expressions on gravestones, as well as the use of innovative symbols, are not as widespread in Norway as in Sweden. One has instead been more attentive to traditions and interested in preserving older usage. The grave has been an arena where relatives prefer to take the usage elsewhere in the same graveyard as a model and to make no effort to differ from these others. In other respects, certainly, leisure time, love of nature and various sporting activities, especially winter sports, have at least as prominent a place in Norway as in Sweden. Expressing this interest on gravestones quite simply has no relevance.

So, former traditions appear to survive longer in Norway than in Sweden, where a greater tendency to adopt innovations and to leave the long-standing is observable. This clearly relates to the symbols on gravestones. The emphasis of individuality is evident in Sweden. There it is often a tendency to regard the new and to focus on the



83. An ice hockey player has been incised on the gravestone of Johnny Sundling, 1983-1995, in Norum Cemetery in Bohuslän. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

cheerful events as being positive. The result can be that people tend to cover over anything that is sorrowful. Life's darkest moments can be painted in brighter colours. In this respect, Norway can be seen as being more realistic in its preservation of older traditions and in not merely rejecting life's darker sides without further discussion.

#### 4 Cultural heritage and protection

Issues of cultural heritage have acquired an increased interest in cultural sciences in the Nordic countries during the 2000s. An anthology about the borders of cultural heritages in the Nordic countries discussed in comparative perspectives was published in 2005 (*Kulturarvens gränser* 2005). Another anthology edited in 2008 by the research centre in Lund for the study of Denmark presented scholarly discussions from Denmark and Sweden about the concepts of canon and cultural heritage (*Kanon*

2008). The latest anthology on cultural heritage with Nordic contributions was published in Oslo in 2013 (*Å lage kulturminner* 2013) by the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Monuments, NIKU, and has been reviewed by this author (Gustavsson 2014a). The Norwegian folklorist Anne Eriksen, Oslo has presented and analyzed discussions on the concept of heritage (Eriksen 2014). Her book has been reviewed by this author (Gustavsson 2015). She has also discussed the relation between the old folkloristic concepts of tradition and cultural heritage (Eriksen 2013) and assets that the last concept is a construction, agreeing in this with the Swedish folklorist Owe Ronström (Ronström 2008).

In Scandinavia, the concept of cultural heritage first came into use at the end of the 1990s. In the book *Folkloristikens aktuella utmaningar* (Current Challenges of Folkloristics), published in 2013, the Norwegian folklorist Torunn Selberg has discussed two Norwegian cultural heritage projects. One concerned the medieval pilgrim route between Oslo and Trondheim, the other project was about an industrial plant, Odda smelting works, which was shut down in 2003 (Selberg 2013). The chronological distance between these two cultural heritage projects is considerable which demonstrates that cultural heritage issues do not only deal with prehistoric times but also with modern times. In her role as a folklorist, Selberg focuses on narratives in the context of the cultural heritage concept.

In the cultural sciences in Sweden, memorials on cemeteries as cultural heritage have hardly yet been taken into account (Nolin 2014). In Great Britain, the archeologist Harold Mytum is a leading scholar recording and analyzing graveyards (Mytum 2000). The founding of the Commission for Cultural Heritage and Property within *Society International of Ethnology and Folklore*, SIEF, is a sign of the recent international interest in issues relating to cultural heritage which should be preserved for posterity. In this research situation the question arises: what is worthy of preservation for posterity in the cemeteries?

In this section, the following questions regarding grave memorials are addressed: why must we preserve certain memorials and what criteria are relevant for the selection of such items? My research in the 2010s has shown that the studied grave memorials reflect the culture of the age in which the deceased lived and died through their choice of materials, inscribed texts and pictorial symbols. It is both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This is the answer to the first question.

As for the selection criteria, the best strategy may be to select items from each distinct epoch to be preserved for future generations, and this strategy is in line with the current Swedish Heritage Conservation Act of 1988 (*Svensk författningssamling* 1988: 950). The Act states in chapter 4, section 11: "In the care of a cemetery, its importance as part of our cultural environment shall be taken into consideration. Cemeteries shall be cared for and maintained so that their cultural value is not reduced

or distorted”. The current Funeral Regulation of 1990 (*Svensk författningssamling* 1990: 1144) entered into force in 1991 (Gustavsson 2011a). Chapter 2, section 12 of this document states: “A cemetery should be kept in orderly and dignified condition, and the sanctity of the resting places of the deceased must always be honored”.

The Swedish National Heritage Board has stipulated that local cemetery authorities from January 1, 2014, must establish a care and maintenance plan for cemeteries to be audited at intervals of no longer than ten years. The plan shall record which grave memorials that qualify as “very precious” and “valuable”, respectively, will be assigned the status of cultural memory. The “very precious” grave sites must “be kept and maintained well” and, “if possible, preserved at the grave site”. The “valuable” grave memorials can, however, “be reused in their original location”. The County Board is given the opportunity to comment on the preservation plan.

How has the aspect of cultural heritage hitherto been observed on the island of Orust’s cemeteries where I have made field studies in the 2010s? What must further be done to counteract the destruction and extinction of important cultural values?

The stones that lay on the floor of the church until 1815 were left in their original location as in Morlanda church where they are so worn-out that the texts cannot be read. A better way to preserve them has been to line them up along a wall in the porch. This has been done in Myckleby when the church was repaired. In this way, they are protected not only against being trampled but also from weather outside. Another alternative is to place such older gravestones outside along the church walls as has been done with eight large stone monuments in Fiskebäckskil. Their texts are for the most part illegible. On one stone it is possible to read the name Johan Didriksson, born in 1734 and died in 1784. No one tramples on the rocks any longer but the weather can erode them. The essential point must be to maintain the selected items of cultural heritage for posterity as unspoiled as possible.

A necessary measure in the case of many limestone gravestones is to carefully and leniently wash away moss and algae without damaging the inscriptions on the porous stones as this can easily happen. On many limestone gravestones it is impossible or very difficult for observers to read texts and picture symbols as they are filled with moss. In some cases, one can see that the external form has been repaired after some physical damage. The limestone tombstones must regularly be controlled so that they are steadily anchored in the base. Otherwise they may fall and get broken as the stone material is porous.

For posterity, it is equally important that not only the external form, but also texts and pictorial symbols, the intangible heritage, can be identified and interpreted. On some limestone gravestones, inscriptions are painted in black, which facilitates the interpretation of their messages. Such a painting needs to be repeated in the future - to keep the inscription permanently visible.



84. Three grave slabs that were moved from the church floor in Fiskebäckskil and raised along the outer church wall. The original text has been worn out due to the earlier pressure of walking feet while the stones lay on the church floor. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.

The cast-iron crosses are difficult to renovate. This explains why some of them have been moved away from the cemeteries. Others have been repaired or moved from their original site and placed along the outer wall of the church. This is the case with five of the eight crosses in Röra, all five crosses in Torp and three of the four on Kåringön. There they are protected against damage that may occur during the maintenance of the cemetery. Some cast-iron crosses have during the 1900s been repainted with gold paint by the descendants of the deceased. One example, which should be followed, is a cross dated to 1875 in Myckleby which was repainted by two great-grandchildren of the deceased spouses in the 1970's.

The cast-iron fences are more liable to fall into pieces than are the cast-iron crosses. Therefore, several fences have been removed from cemeteries. It is important that the few that are left can be maintained as cultural heritage and kept either by descendants or by the local cemetery authorities. Stopping the grass growing inside the fences has in some cases been done by placing stone slabs or gravel inside the fence-off area. This may be recommended as a way to improve the look of the fence for observers.





85. The back of a narrow, rounded limestone gravestone from the 1880s repaired with iron in Långelanda. The limestone was broken in previous times. Photo Anders Gustavsson.

Examples from each distinct period of the 1800s ought to be selected for preservation. Moreover, examples of different types and forms of graves must be preserved. In the case of limestone gravestones, this applies to broad and narrow stones and



86. A three-leaf-clover-shaped cast-iron cross from Myckleby dated to 1875. This cross was repainted in gold in the 1970s by two great-grandchildren. Three stars decorating each arm and the top symbolize light. The image of light is enhanced by the rays radiating from the center of the cross. A winged angel decorates the foot. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.

those with a rounded or a pointed top. The same situation applies to various forms of cast-iron crosses, namely simple, hollow, and three-leaf-clover shaped. The few preserved cast-iron fences should be saved as they reflect a short period in the late 1800s. Since there are so many granite gravestones, beginning from the 1870s, a selection must be made so that the earliest examples from each cemetery could be maintained. Some of the first examples of family tombs from the 1870s should also be preserved.

Cemetery authorities in Sweden have an opportunity to undertake this preservation task because starting from the year of 2000, all taxpayers regardless of their creed have to pay a burial fee. These payments are set aside for the care and maintenance of grave memorials in accordance with the relevant funeral and culture monument laws (*Svensk författningssamling* 1999: 279).

Because the tomb memorials of stone have become so numerous during the 1900s, cemetery authorities may be very restrictive in the selection for cultural heritage items. Grave memorials from the 1900s consist primarily of stone and are there-



87. A renovated cast-iron fence in the coastal village Mollösund surrounding the family grave commemorating the sea captain Johannes Olsson the elder born in 1812 and died in 1874. Gravel has been laid inside the fence. Photo Kristina Gustavsson.

fore more resistant than porous limestone gravestones and cast-iron memorials from the 1800s.

The few wooden crosses that remain from the 1900s should be preserved as examples of grave memorials that were common in earlier times but also had a short existence as they were destroyed by weather. Some of the remaining wooden crosses are painted or impregnated while others are marked by signs of decay. These must be renovated if they are to be maintained.

The frames around the granite gravestones that became common from the late 1800s were largely removed by cemetery authorities in the late 1900s and early 2000s. This has been done for the practical reasons of facilitating the maintenance of the cemetery with the help of motor-driven lawn mower. In some cases, the frames have been saved and placed near the cemetery wall. From a cultural heritage standpoint, the frames may not be considered as important as raised gravestones that remain

standing. It is primarily these stones that by their design, inscribed texts and pictorial symbols convey historical messages for posterity.

Another aspect in cultural monuments selection is how they can be made available to as many people as possible. Inscribed texts and pictorial symbols ought to be made readable for observers. Therefore, continuous cleaning is important. Selected grave memorials also ought to be digitally accessible on the Internet which requires photographing. A number of Swedish cemetery authorities, primarily in cities, have already arranged this. The available Internet addresses are: [www.finngraven.se](http://www.finngraven.se), [www.hittagraven.se](http://www.hittagraven.se) and [www.svenskagravar.se](http://www.svenskagravar.se).



88. A wooden cross from the twentieth century commemorating two sisters with the surname Andersson from the place Sollid in Morlanda parish. Photo Anders Gustavsson.



## Concluding remarks

With the help of many examples, this book illustrates the fruitful use of folkloristic perspectives in the ethnological and cultural historical field work and archive studies which I carried out during the period from the 1970s until the 2010s.

For my part, the study of *small narratives* started during the latter half of the 1970s. The focus was on long lived narratives in which the same theme or motif might be told in various, completely different versions. One example of this was a selection of narratives about a parson who was active during the nineteenth century in a coastal parish Kärningön on the west coast of Sweden. Such narratives must be regarded in relation to prevailing social and economical living situations during the lifetime of the parson. The same aspects were decisive in the analysis of small narratives that arose as a result of the encounters between summer visitors and local inhabitants along the coast of west Sweden. Narratives of this type have commonly been used as a means of indirect opposition oriented upwards in situations of social, economical inequality or national differences in power relations. This is apparent in stories about customs officials in their endeavours to prevent smuggling of spirits over the border from Sweden to Norway during the Norwegian ban on alcohol in 1916-1923 but not in Sweden.

The same applies to the period during the Second World War. During the national crisis in 1940-1945, when the German Nazis occupied Norway, people had to be reticent in their conversations. Norwegians held back small narratives as they were afraid of reprisal from the government authorities. Not talking openly became a pattern that continued for decades after the war. I became fully aware of this during my field work on wartime narratives in Norway in the 1980s.

The introduction of technical novelties such as the bicycle was marked by social inequality. Small narratives in humorous form were used to bridge over socio-economic contrasts related to bicycle ownership.

During the 1980s, in studies of the revivalist movements and temperance movements, I was able to analyse the way in which small narratives were used as a means of norm maintaining. Small narratives could also be used as a weapon in controversies between different contemporary revivalist movements active in the same local environment.

In the 2000s, I have studied small narratives posted on memorial pages dedicated to deceased pets, in this case cats. Here you find retrospective narratives about the

lives of pets as well as strong emotional expressions of loss and beliefs about an after-life in the so-called Cat Heaven.

I embarked upon *ritual studies* in the 1970s. These studies were related to the life cycle, from birth, through to marriage and death, and the focus was on the oscillation between continuity and regression of older rituals, particularly in the post-reformation periods. In the 1980s, my research was more focused on the revitalisation of older rituals after they had died out for a while. The studies concerned such revitalisation processes observable in the 1900s and 2000s. When the older rituals were revitalised, they needed to be adapted to modern times and to undergo a transformation process, which was apparent in the study of the Oasis Movement, covering a period from the 1980s until today.

In the 2000s, a new field of research concerned innovations in the form of new collective rituals that developed in relation to death. A further field of research dealt with marked differences between the neighbouring countries Norway and Sweden in celebrations of their national days and how this is manifested in the areas along the border.

Questions concerning *beliefs* constituted an important field of my research as early as in the 1970s, then related to life cycle rituals in historical times. In the 1980s, I studied the encounter between traditional folk beliefs and beliefs of the revivalist movements, which arose in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

In the 2000s, beliefs expressed in memorial pages posted on the internet have been immensely interesting to study, in particular those expressing beliefs and ideas of life after death. These modern ideas can in turn be compared with beliefs of after-life during the pre-industrial period. Such comparisons reveal differences and similarities in the afterlife concepts across time.

Towards the end of the 1970s, the connection between *folklore and materiality* became evident when I began my study of a large number of paintings depicting traditional life by the folk-life artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson (1915-1998). In his paintings, he visualised traditional folk beliefs and magical rituals. They were based on oral narratives as well as on his own supernatural visions.

In the years after 2000, I started to investigate symbols and texts on grave memorials in churchyards during the last two hundred years. They can be regarded as cultural expressions of the times in which they were erected. Changes in the choice of motifs and ideas expressing a greater emphasis on the individual can be seen on gravestones from the 1990s and onwards. From a cross-cultural perspective, it has been interesting to study and explain the many differences between the neighbour countries Norway and Sweden.

An issue that has become topical in the 2000s is how to protect the material and the intangible heritage, in churchyards and how to preserve it for the future. In my

study, I have discussed parameters that are important in defining and selecting the heritage in our days when older grave memorials risk removal and destruction.

Finally, I would like to express my hope that this book will contribute to emphasising the significance of keeping folklore studies as an important field of research at universities. It provides new dimensions, which other disciplines within human studies cannot supply. The study of folklore could indeed occupy a prominent position in interdisciplinary science programs.





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## Abbreviations

BNN Belief Narrative Network  
DORS Death Online Research Network  
EFS The Evangelical National Missionary Society  
IOGT International Order of Good Templars  
ISFNR International Society of Folk Narrative Research  
NIF Nordic Institute of Folklore  
NNT Nordic Network of Thanatology  
RAF Reference Group for Spiritual Renewal in the Swedish Church  
SIEF Society International of Ethnology and Folklore  
SMF The Swedish Missionary Society