

EVENT TIME AND INTERPRETATION TIME: ANALYSIS OF THE INTERACTION OF TIMES

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Abstract. This research paper will study the phenomenon of time through folklore. The focus is on the educational film created in the 1950s about folk traditions that is analysed on three levels: the response of today's students, the role of context in interpreting the film, and changes in the concept of folklore in the second half of the 20th century. The author argues that the shift of the main focus from the folk traditions of the time to the 1950s can be regarded as a change of time frames and was influenced by three causes: (1) perception of time as periods that carry certain qualities, as opposed to neutral time-flow (in this case, *Soviet time* as the idealization of the working class); (2) the expiration of Soviet folkloristic rhetoric; (3) replacement of the object-centred concept of folklore with an activity- and context-based concept.

Keywords: folklore, folk tradition, anthropological film, quality of time, reception, wedding traditions, Kihnu

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1. Introduction

It is characteristic of oral folklore that a text is adapted to the situation where it is performed. This gives folklore text its flexibility. The actual performance of oral folklore also establishes the moment of time. While the text itself cannot be changed, it is the time of performance that will influence further interpretations of the text.

In this article I will observe one such connection between the time of event and the time of interpretation, by using the example of an educational film made in the 1950s about pre-modern wedding traditions. I will show how, in spite of the pursuits of the film's authors, modern interpretations amplify not only the timeless element of folk traditions, but also the actual time of the filming. The additional film-related sources and the relevant research help to more specifically understand and perceive

the interrelated connection of times. For theoretical background, it is important to emphasise the changes that took place in folklore studies in the second half of the 20th century, including the change in the definition of folklore. The film in question was created during a period when the research of folklore was focusing on objects. It means that it was possible to categorize texts (for instance, a description of wedding traditions) thus enabling their collection or recording without affecting the understanding about the specific subject matter. When researchers started to regard folklore as a specific type of communication (see, for instance, the works of Dan Ben-Amos from the 1970s), the performance situation began influencing the concept of folklore. In his article “Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context”, Dan Ben-Amos showed that folklore acted as a communicative process in the cultural context, as opposed to the earlier concept that regarded folklore as a set of certain phenomena (songs, stories, traditions, etc.) (Ben-Amos 1971). The filmmakers drew a distinction between the wedding traditions that were being described and the daily life of people who knew and carried these traditions forward.¹ It can be claimed that people’s traditions and their modern-day activities were handled as two essentially isolated phenomena in the film. But when folklore is regarded in the cultural setting as part of this system, the main focus will not be on individual cultural phenomena, but on persons and their actions.² Therefore, people interpreting the film today tend to focus less on ancient wedding traditions and more on the community acting in the given time and space.

I have analysed the film on two levels: first, the film’s reception by students today, including aspects related to the past, rhetoric and folkloristic principles, and, second, new contexts in the interpretation process that I created by including film-related materials and by monitoring folkloristic changes of paradigm.

2. Research source and issues

The film in question – “Wedding Traditions of Kihnu Island” – was completed in the Film Studio of Tartu State University in 1956.³ The film’s authors defined it as a documentary to be used as a supplement to the study course on Estonian folklore. The film’s research consultant was Eduard Laugaste, the then associate professor for folklore at Tartu University, and his assistants were folklorists Veera Pino and Udo Kolk. One of the students who took part in the filming was Otilie

¹ Dan Ben-Amos (1971) emphasises that folkloristic collecting of ‘items’ requires meticulous separation of these ‘items’ from the folklore’s natural habitat. While this is undoubtedly necessary, it is important to understand that the text that is removed from its natural habitat becomes a different text.

² I witnessed the discussion of the role of presentation conditions in defining folklore as the focus of research in Estonian folklore studies in the late 1970s. The results of the debate are reflected in Vaike Sarv’s monograph “Setu lamenting culture” (2000), among others.

³ The film’s original is stored in the Estonian Film Archives in Tallinn. The film was digitalised in 2006 and its copy is kept in the Tartu University Library. The materials of the folkloristic fieldwork related to observed film are stored in the Estonian Literary Museum (ERA, EKLA I 8).

Kõiva, who later studied the same geographical region and subject matter more thoroughly.⁴

As today, researchers in the past were similarly attracted by the ancient feature of Kihnu weddings. In her description of these weddings, folklorist Ingrid Rüütel emphasises the fact that these folk traditions have been preserved from pre-Christian times to the present day:

Fundamentally, the Kihnu wedding is a so-called tribal wedding that confirms an agreement made between two tribes. It is based on family society, on pre-Christian religious concepts and is generally characteristic of the Balto-Finnic nations. The so-called halved or two-ended wedding is held separately in the homes of both the bride and the groom, while both parties jointly attend the more important rituals and sing old wedding songs in runo-verse form (regivärss). After a long period, there were two traditional Kihnu weddings held in 2007 and another wedding in 2008 (Rüütel 2009:62).⁵

Kihnu Vana Kannel (“The Old Psaltery” of Kihnu) – a collection of wedding songs stored in the Estonian Folklore Archive – includes descriptions of traditional weddings held in Kihnu in 1893 and in the period 1952-1975 (Vana Kannel:807-839). Since 2003 the Kihnu cultural space has been included in the UNESCO world heritage list.⁶ Thus the film made in the 1950s on the folk culture of Kihnu Island was further studied by a significant number of people. Although it would have been natural to analyse this film from the viewpoint of Kihnu folklore, I decided to choose another aspect for my study (with regard to this research paper, the Kihnu subject matter is a random selection and not a deliberate choice).

The key issue of this research paper is how the film connects the past and the present and what is today’s interpretation of the 1950s era, when the film was made, i.e. the ‘then present and today’s past’. Both time frames are prominently displayed in the film: the preservation of traditions as ‘timeless time’ (*still preserved ...*) and the 1950s as the specific time (see Photos 1–2). In current interpretations, the latter has become more prominent than the traditions; while the filmmakers defined the film through the introduction of folk traditions, the film is listed in the ESTER catalogue of the Tartu University Library as follows: “[---] a film on the work and activities of the residents of Kihnu Island in the 1950s and their wedding traditions (staged)”. Its keywords include ‘wedding traditions’, ‘ethnography’, ‘collective fishing farm Soviet Partisan’ and ‘1950s.’

It is apparent that the artistic purpose of this educational film was to highlight folk traditions and not the 1950s. This is clearly visible in the film’s title and in the

⁴ In her research Otilie Kõiva mainly studied the island’s singers, singing tradition and older wedding songs (e.g., Kõiva 1964, 1987). She is also one of the authors of the Kihnu volume of the scientific publication of Estonia’s older folk songs (Vana Kannel 1997).

⁵ The article by Ingrid Rüütel describes Kihnu dances; a description of the wedding is given on pages 62–67 thereof. The magazine’s online version also includes videos, both from the previously-mentioned 1956 film and of later Kihnu wedding movies.

⁶ See <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?cp=EE>; <http://www.unesco.ee/kihnu.pdf> (4.01.2010).



Photo 1. A photo taken while filming the wedding customs on Kihnu Island. Photo: Estonian Literary Museum, EKLA, reg. 2009/79.



Photo 2. „Those attending the wedding had large bags with them, filled with bread, butter, meat and other items.“ (Estonian Literary Museum, ERA, EKRK I 8: 59). A scene from the film. Photo: EKLA, reg. 2009/79.

volume dedicated to these times. The total length of the film is a little over 37 minutes. Of this, the general description of the island (location, nature, people's activities and work on the collective farm) covers only five minutes, while the rest (i.e. 32 minutes) is dedicated to the display of the traditional wedding. The film's closing (bringing the party to an end so that everybody can return to their everyday work the next day) lasts under a minute.

The claim that filmmakers were focusing predominantly on the time of the traditions is proven also by the fact that wedding traditions presented in the film follow the same structure as in textbooks and by the documents that can be found in the materials of the film's research consultant Eduard Laugaste.⁷ However, since in modern interpretations of the film the focus has shifted notably from the traditions themselves to the fact that the film was made in the 1950s, it would be appropriate to ask why.

3. Event and interpretation: the issue of the chronology and quality of time

In 2009 I showed the educational film in question to the students who were taking a course on the basics of folkloristics.⁸ They were asked to undertake an analysis of the film by applying their theoretical knowledge about the development of folklore studies, including the changes in defining folklore⁹ and the concept of the 'first and second life' of folklore (Honko 1990). In addition to other aspects, the opinion of the students showed how they responded to the film. It appeared that for students the fact that the film was made in the Soviet time prevailed over the time of folk traditions (*preserved for centuries*, i.e. 'timeless time'). They sensed Soviet propaganda in addition to (or in place of) the presentation of folk traditions. This is shown by the following quotes of students:¹⁰

*It glorifies the Soviet era and working class – delicious honey and juicy apples are produced during the Soviet time. The Soviet era has brought success. [---]
Life is harmonious and fun in Soviet times. (LV)*

⁷ Eduard Laugaste's handwritten and as yet unsorted materials are kept in the Estonian Cultural History Archives of Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu (EKLA, reg. 2009/79).

⁸ The film was no longer screened in folklore classes during my own studies between 1978 and 1983, although its authors Eduard Laugaste and Udo Kolk were my teachers – the film had already become obsolete as teaching material. I first watched the film in spring 2009 and got the idea of using it for another teaching purpose. I also found that if seen from the vantage point of changes in folkloristic paradigms and specifics of the 1950s era, this presentation of wedding customs is also an appropriate introduction to the theme, helping to observe and understand the latter research of Kihnu folk traditions.

⁹ Various eras of Estonian folklore definition: subject lists (old songs, stories etc.) in 1870s–1920s, definition of the essential characteristics of folklore (collective, traditional, anonymous) in 1930s–1980s, folklore as communication since 1990s, see e.g. Jaago 1999.

¹⁰ I adapted the quotes from spontaneous notes to readable text: I have replaced the abbreviations and, if necessary, added clarifications. All quotations come from different students. Names of students were replaced with their initials.

As usual under Soviet rule, a thorough description of agriculture and the abundance of work in the life of working people are provided. Workers and fishermen are idealised. (TV)

During that [Soviet] time the life and ways of working people constituted Soviet culture. [---] Kihnu wedding traditions are presented as Soviet tradition, with the wedding procession decorated with a hammer-and-sickle flag. (KV)

The wedding flag was problematic (Why the flag of the USSR? Did the tradition involve a flag at all?) (MK)

Wedding traditions have been put into a Soviet context. (NN)

Filmmakers glorify or show life there as the best possible life – the USSR! (EL)

Ideological pressure of the USSR – socialist realism, depiction of an idyllic way of life (JM)

It [the time of filming] is Soviet time, 1950s, Soviet symbols can be seen at several occasions, as if they were a natural component of Kihnu traditions and weddings (LR)

Students saw filmmaker-folklorists glorifying or idealising the Soviet era, as if they had wanted to serve folk tradition as Soviet tradition. Students said this impression was based on their knowledge of Soviet-era approaches to folklore, citing worker-related rhetoric as an example.

One may agree with the students' that this Soviet-time approach did in fact emphasize the part of 'working people' in folk culture (cf. Laugaste 1975:56). The students' attitude is probably also founded on general knowledge of the Soviet Union's worker ideology: folk traditions were held in esteem, but combined with the Party's rhetoric. Eduard Laugaste, in his folklore textbook for universities, on the one hand proceeds from pre-Soviet notions,¹¹ connecting the substance of folklore to peasant (not urban or modern) culture only. On the other hand, he spices his text with Soviet ideology, from predictable connections between folklore and class struggle in the 'light of Marxist-Leninist teachings'.¹² Despite the aforementioned points, the students' assessment that the film intentionally glorified the Soviet era is, in my opinion, overdone. My reasoning is given below.

¹¹ Eduard Laugaste was educated in folklore studies in Tartu University in the Republic of Estonia and his knowledge was mostly founded on (Estonian) folkloristics as it was in the 1930s. For example, Laugaste's definition of folklore follows that of his predecessor Oskar Loorits (see Jaago 1999 for more information).

¹² Laugaste explains that "[f]olklore tells a story of the life of people, the social and economic conditions of people". His description of the environment is limited to the ethnography of peasant culture (subsection "Economic life of Estonians under feudalism"). In his more general description, he connects folklore to class struggle: after saying that folklore reflects the living environment of people, he goes on to specify: "That is why Estonian folklore has so many songs about serfdom, in which the exhausted serf expresses hate towards the oppressor – the landlord, or, in capitalist society, servant towards kulak, worker towards factory owner. Thus – folklore is a reflection of class struggle". According to Laugaste, Soviet folkloristics is also characterised by research of previously "overrun or oppressed nations". (Laugaste:13–37; 67–68; 90.)

Notions of time are a product of culture because periods of time are perceived as having certain qualities, not as a neutral time flow.¹³ Previous periods of time are comprehensible through the interpreter's contemporary understanding of the past (cf. the concept of noncontemporaneity: Giesen 2004:28–29). It is therefore natural that the *time* notion of filmmakers and of the viewers half a century later is not fully overlapping. Where the film speaks of 'traditions', it is, on the one hand, a reference to a set of folkloric phenomena, but it should also be noted that the time of traditions was a time of the past. Although the film distinguishes between different layers of time in the development of folk customs (e.g. it speaks of 'distant times', 'archaic customs preserved through centuries', 'dating back to the tribal era', being connected to 'the collective assistance custom dating from immemorial times' etc.), customs are nevertheless presented as parts of a single period of time. Time specifications in the comments and the mixed use of older and newer folk music and dances in the film do refer to different time layers, but only in respect of the time of traditions. The script, intended to tie up the events depicted, provides the viewer with an overview of Kihnu wedding as a folk tradition still alive today.

The 'presence' of the 1950s in the film is partly beyond filmmakers' control (e.g. filming technology) and partly intentional (e.g. the time concept). That a 1950s Kihnu wedding could have actually been that archaic is an illusion. The researchers have selected more interesting parts of the actual wedding and left out other modern aspects related to marriage, such as official registration. It should also be noted that contemporary Kihnu wedding films do not isolate the elements of pre-modern (or traditional) wedding from the official registration and marriage ceremony in church, all of which may combine within a single Kihnu wedding ceremony. The film reflects an understanding that the object of folkloristic study are specific wedding customs (folk traditions, according to scientific definition), but not the actual modes of action of the people who know and make use of them.

In the film's contemporary interpretations, the filmmakers' concept of time meets that of the receiver (interpreter). The fact that today's students define the film's time by means of a single concept (i.e. the Soviet time) particularly refers to the perception of political boundaries: 'Soviet time' as related to the present, with 1991 (i.e. restoration of national independence) as the turning point. It is remarkable that changes that have taken place in everyday life (e.g. horses in the wedding procession instead of modern cars¹⁴ or, even less, commodities of the time, which are not pointed out in the comments) were less noticed than Soviet symbols and rhetoric. Thus, the time of filming is not being interpreted as merely a chronological fact, but more as a period of a certain quality: namely Soviet time.

¹³ On the quality of time, see e.g. Vahre 1991:11, Hiimäe 1993. On description of "time" in the context of different periods in life stories, see Kõresaar 2001.

¹⁴ The move from horses to cars is notable when comparing this film to newer films of Kihnu weddings. According to local historian Theodor Saar (1906–1984), only one of the four weddings of 1959 had horses in the wedding procession: "Procession on horses is considered fancier, but machines are more comfortable" (Vana Kannel:827).

This time is characterised as a single, closed period, as related to other ‘times’, i.e. periods of a different quality. The students’ notes particularly highlight the perception of Soviet symbols (red hammer-and-sickle flags etc.) and the idealisation of Soviet life, praising the working people etc.

4. Interpretation, experience and rhetoric: the issue of intentional presentation of *time*

When watching the film in spring 2009, my dominant impression was similar to that of the students. But our approaches differ in that I did not see the filmmakers’ aim as promoting the Soviet era. Instead, I saw justification in a juxtaposition of two different time periods.¹⁵ Although it is true that the film uses a ‘during the Soviet regime’ concept, it does not overlap with the later definition of a finished ‘Soviet time’; the former does not point to a certain quality of the time (period), but to a political system which was actually in its early stages in Estonia at the time. Admittedly, the political regime is praised in the film’s commentary. But that might not constitute propagating the Soviet order in today’s meaning. Rather, the time of filming in the early 1950s imposed its own boundaries. ‘Soviet time’ was thus not a specific time quality for the filmmakers, it was merely the ‘present’, the moment when everything took place. Furthermore, the 1950s was a period of economic development on Kihnu Island (unlike the economic life in mainland Estonia during the same period). Prosperity made the communication of people of the time and their attitudes towards Kihnu Island more optimistic. But the period of development suffered setbacks in the 1970s, which was reflected in attitudes as well (Vana Kannel:27).

The film’s contemporary documents attest to the filmmakers’ intention to focus on preserving traditions, not on praising the Soviet system. But it is not possible to directly establish, either from the film or the accompanying documents, to what extent the praise for Soviet regime was intentional (due to beliefs or political pressure) or incidental-immanent (merely based on dominant discourses of the time). Additional sources do provide some indirect clues. For instance, a comparison of the 1950s film and newer films of Kihnu weddings supports the notion that traditions cannot be realised outside the context of time. But when examining the film’s presentation of the 1950s from the aspect of oral history, the optimism

¹⁵ I had experienced such change of time frames before. In 2004, I prepared a folklore textbook and used Baltic students’ “Gaudeamus” song festivals as an example of vernacular tradition. In that connection, I also reviewed a 1981 song festival newspaper. As a participant of the festival in 1981, I remember perceiving the event as well as photos, magazine publications etc. as a chance to step out of the Soviet time and space (through the use of national clothes, national symbols and other attributes, and especially the mentality of fellow singers and dancers). Going over the same materials after the Soviet period had ended, in 2004, I was surprised to note the actual prominence of Soviet symbols (flags of the Soviet republics etc). Symbols fitted into the same picture brought out different time emphases, depending on the time of interpretation.

of the 1950s-1960s narrators (dedication to 'building a new life') is the exact opposite to post-Soviet narratives of the same era (Jaago 2004:64).

The difference between the interpretations of the students and myself may be justified by subjectivity of the researcher-interpreter (cf. Andrews 2008:89). We are using different anchor points to describe and interpret the same time. This is due to the film's different contextualisation, caused by the use of various sources and proceeding from previous personal experience, which is naturally different. However, it cannot be argued that interpretations of a multiplicity of contextualisations and based on heterogenous experiences could be more correct, or 'better' or 'worse', when compared to each other (cf. Andrews:89).¹⁶ On the contrary, the comparison of interpretations leads to the question of why the tradition-based time frame (continuity of traditions as timeless time) recedes in comparison with the filmed events' so-called Soviet timeframe half a century later.

One of the main reasons for the time perspective change is the politicization of tradition-related language. The difference between folklore terminology of the 1950s and today provides fertile ground for alienation, expressed by the students as the glorification or idealization of the Soviet time. When speaking of folk culture, the tradition-bearing 'folk'¹⁷ is a political category, because it relates to 'our' political identity. In that context, folklore is not so much made *by* the folk as it is used to *make* the folk (Gencarella 2009). The politically-charged nature of the term 'folk' is indeed expressed in the movie in question. In this context, spectacular details begin with the following note in the titles: "Events in the film are **attended by members of Kihnu island's fishery kolkhoz (collective farm) 'Soviet Partisan'** (emphasis by T.J.) The film speaks of the people of Kihnu as 'hard-working people of the coast', who 'have flourished in all areas under the Soviet system'. This has been the result of 'joining the Soviet Partisan kolkhoz' and 'working collectively' to make it a millionaire kolkhoz. The success of the kolkhoz is used to describe the Kihnu people's activities: cattle farming, apiculture (beekeeping) and horticulture. Although the wording of some comments was dictated by the need for colourful expression, it is still grating to hear that 'juicy apples are produced in kolkhoz gardens'. In background comments, traditions and the Soviet time may intertwine, as in the case of agriculture and fishing. Those activities reach beyond the Soviet (kolkhoz) framework, because 'according to a long-standing labour distribution' women work in the fields and men at the sea. Completely outside the Soviet time scope are the issues of Kihnu women's 'fast fingers' (they spend every free moment knitting gloves and socks) and lack of locks and bolts (locks are unnecessary on the island, a wooden bar is set at the

¹⁶ Molly Andrews, by analysing her own experience with earlier and later interpretations of the same source, shows how historical changes and a researcher's personal experience enable the researcher to establish new levels of meaning of information within a source. Re-interpretation does not give rise to negation or rebuttal of the earlier interpretation, but is rather "a picture taken from different angle". Assessment of an interpretation's scientific value is not based on the aspects (contexts) of observation, but the credibility of the interpretation itself. (Andrews:92, 98)

¹⁷ On the concept of "folk" in folkloristics, see Dundes 1978.

door to indicate that nobody is home). In that case, the location is revealed as Kihnu Island or 'here'. For example 'fishing is the main field of production here'. The kolkhoz and working people issues with their Soviet rhetoric seem to have background significance in the film, sometimes used to add vividness to the text and sometimes resulting from common rhetoric of the time. Yet in our time, everything on the screen inevitably forms a part of the time of filming and the whole film thus falls under the 'Soviet time' tag, framed (created, shaped or amplified) by the aforementioned rhetoric of 'working people' prospering 'during Soviet time'.

The transfer from contemporary kolkhoz success issues to describing wedding customs is clearly marked by two interim screens with comments on the customs. The first says: "Colourful national costumes adorn Kihnu women in the workplace and festive occasions alike. The life of Kihnu people is also accompanied by old folk songs". The other specifies: "The island has preserved archaic customs from centuries ago. Today's pace and ancient traditions of the past are combined here. [---]". Starting from that image, Kihnu's wedding traditions 'from centuries ago' are performed until the end of the movie, until the very last frame returns to the Soviet theme: "Tomorrow, work calls [the wedding guests] again. For they are all builders of a joyous new life". Does this conclusion entail Soviet glorification? Not directly, and students have not expressly marked it out as such. Nevertheless, the final message is connected to the Soviet time by the Soviet-themed beginning of the film.

Politically charged rhetoric refers to certain attitudes and power over folk traditions, which of course does not mean the absence of folk traditions beyond such rhetoric. Rather, the problem comes down to a social group's inside view or, as opposed to that, a power-centred outside view. That is one of the reasons for separating the concept of 'heritage' from 'folklore'. Using the concept of heritage (*kultuuripärand, Erbe, patrimoine*) is closely connected to relevant political developments. But it has always been ideological, because the main significance lies in the belonging of heritage – its origins and ownership (Kuutma 2007). In that case, 'folklore' would enable a closer focus on observing traditional culture, and the other – 'heritage' – on its evaluation. Today this movie would thus be classified as a presentation of heritage rather than of folk traditions. The aforementioned interpretations of students are clearly influenced by the politically charged framework in which tradition is served: events in the film are seen in connection with the 'working people' idea of folklore theory of the time.¹⁸

5. Adding contexts and versatility to interpretation: schematic handling of the past

With the help of adding new sources and interpretations to the research the importance of interpersonal relations should also be emphasised, in addition to

¹⁸ Indeed, 'working people' were the tradition-bearing group in contemporaneous definitions of folklore (Laugaste:56).

rhetorics. It seems that its objective was not so much to idealize the Soviet time, but to thank the people in Kihnu who helped to produce the film.¹⁹ This view is upheld by the materials of Eduard Laugaste in the folklore department that are now being stored in the Estonian Cultural History Archives (EKLA, reg. 2009/79). This includes a letter dated 10.12.1954 that was written by Leili and Jakob Sutt who were featured in the film and who thank Eduard Laugaste for his letter and photos. “We are happy to have been of any help at all”, they add to the thanks, and express their hope to see the film upon completion: “that we can see ourselves on screen, if it is possible for you to screen it, which is an object of great anticipation in the 17th Soviet republic (Kihnu)”. On the one hand, this is an expression of the sense of involvement between researcher and members of the social group, and of human curiosity – the desire to see oneself in a movie. On the other, it is also a sign of the ‘Soviet time’ as it refers to Kihnu as the 17th Soviet republic. Yet in the letter it is the time of ‘today’, ‘now’, not a retrospectively, clearly delimited period with a distinctive name. The 17th republic is, of course, a joke, because there were 16 Soviet republics at the time and Kihnu was not a republic of its own. Kihnu peoples’ letters to Laugaste deal with everyday issues: where and how to travel to Kihnu, how to arrange meetings between locals and researchers in Kihnu etc.

That the film was acceptable at the time and could be interpreted as a depiction of the time of traditions, is witnessed in an official letter prepared at the Literary Museum (it is impossible to establish the addressee, but it is an official letter). The assessment, signed by Estonian folklorists Herbert Tampere, Selma Lätt, Otilie Niinemägi (Kõiva) and Olga Jõgever, is positive: “*Kihnu Wedding Traditions* is the first Estonian ethnographic-folkloristic film. Although there were no examples whatsoever to perform such work, the film is a complete success.” The document appraises the folkloristic proficiency of ‘bringing out’ and ‘recording’ wedding customs and mentions the film’s aesthetic value: “It is impossible to overstate the importance of this film in the context of ethnography and folkloristics. But besides scientific value, the film provides an aesthetic experience with faithful play of its characters, beautiful nature views and well-picked background music”. The Soviet rule, or its significance in recording Kihnu traditions, is not mentioned at all. It should be noted that unlike the film’s contemporaneous folklorists, the students of 2009 did not find the presentation of wedding customs natural (*faithful to their roots*). The term ‘play’ appearing in the film’s contemporaneous assessment confirms that it was an intentional screen production, which was not considered a problem for folkloristic theory at the time. This fact is significant in the context of folkloristic change – acting out a wedding was then considered to equate to an actual wedding. In other words, presentation does not affect customs as folk tradition *per se*. In this view, positions have changed within folkloristics. Increasing attention is now paid to connections between the presentation of traditions and the text; not only is a new version of text created during a presentation, but the pre-

¹⁹ On development of the relationship between researcher and locals and its role in folkloristics, see Anu Korb’s monograph on fieldwork (Korb 2005).

sentation comprises the text's meanings for the social group, which in turn influences the text creation. Later films of Kihnu weddings have been observational, not of a presenting and commentary nature (cf. e.g. Rüütel).

The Soviet timeframe is, however, exposed in another letter from the time of the film. This is an official letter of gratitude from University administration to the Kihnu people, who are addressed via the 'Soviet Partisan' fishery kolkhoz. It once again appears that people of Kihnu, as members of the kolkhoz, are 'the people', who cooperated and whose culture is displayed in the film. The letter ends with the following: "I wish to the 'Soviet Partisan' kolkhoz success and unceasing perseverance in building a Communist society" (copy of the letter dated 9. March 1955). The letter expresses the positions and/or rhetoric of an institution: Signed by Tartu State University's rector and the secretary of ECP's local organisation at Tartu State University and addressed to the chairman of 'Soviet Partisan' fishery kolkhoz.

According to Norman Fairclough, the making of a Kihnu film (more specifically, a wedding traditions film) can be seen as a social event; aspects related to the film also reflect relations between people and their activities and the film comprises the various levels of a social event, such as modes of activity, participants in the event, instruments, place and time, as well as social institutions etc. (cf. Fairclough 2003:21; 137). The Kihnu film as a social event can thus be constructed on the level of folk tradition research, involving researchers and filmmakers (folklore researchers and recorders and 'folklore keepers' – local inhabitants). This is a purposeful, focused activity. On the other hand, the film as a social event is on a more general level where people communicate and which can be surveyed from a more general point of view, i.e. one based on analogy. The institutional field of interaction (kolkhoz, Soviet university, and literary museum), which describes the arrangement of social relations during the Soviet time, is contemporaneous. Those levels merge with each other as well – the institutional level has professional aspects and vice versa. The professional level can be examined diachronically (e.g. the development of Kihnu culture studies in the second half of the 20th century), as well as in temporal connection (e.g. technical means, which involved the making of a black and white movie without synchronous sound etc.).

The addition of contemporary and comparative sources to the film's interpretation reveals not only the rhetoric, but also the issue of interpersonal relations (in a sense, beyond or outside politics) and institutional level (in this case, an amplifier of 'Sovietness'). Differences in time perception, i.e. assessments of the period, cannot be ignored completely. At the time, the 1950s may not have been perceived primarily through the experiences of Stalin's repressions, but may also have been felt as the years of emerging from the war and, literally, building a new life. Especially in Kihnu: "While Estonian agriculture suffered a huge setback in the early years of kolkhoz formation, the fishery collectives, including in Kihnu, offered decent earnings" (Vana Kannel:27). At the moment of filming, the Soviet time may have been 'positive' for Kihnu people, as reflected in the filmmakers'

timeframe where life has 'flourished in all areas under the Soviet system'. Setbacks followed in the 1970s: "Unemployment deepened [in Kihnu], even men could not find a job." This caused social crises and alcoholism and facilitated the emigration of the workforce (Vana Kannel:27). There is no Soviet timeframe behind the 1970s descriptions of Kihnu weddings (except references to the wedding flag, which was the flag of Estonian SSR: Vana Kannel:833-839). This indicates a certain prudence (including ethical considerations) or perhaps the intention of isolating the long-standing folk tradition values from the problematic and volatile 'our time'.

Adding new sources to the research will add not only new nuances to the interpretation, but these nuances will further become prominent through the contexts created by new sources. Analysing contextual concepts on the basis of practical research, Chi W. Huen showed that contextual limits were perceived rather than clearly identifiable. An example is the saying that something is 'out of context'. Namely, the dilemma is that in the new context, also things 'taken out of the context' are true (Huen 2009:151). Satu Apo has described a similar problem in folklore study by referring to the criticism of folkloristics that archive texts lack context. She claims that this criticism is only partly true, since an archive text itself has a new context that in turn is divided, for instance, into source-specific or genre-based contexts, etc. Adding new types of source to archive texts enables the creation of both historical and social contexts for them (Apo 2003:225-227). One may ask whether the filmmakers had placed the Kihnu wedding traditions too sharply in the Soviet focus at the time of the filming. And whether this internal timeframe is today perhaps more prominent than the time related to the wedding traditions, i.e. when the traditions were created?

The film can be regarded as a social event where filmmakers were focusing on the wedding traditions, but had to communicate with the islanders in order to present these traditions. Since at that time folkloristics did not include monitoring the activities of a social group within the framework of folk traditions, the problem was solved outside the description of traditions, i.e. by introducing the island in general and its social structure in detail. Unfortunately, the latter was associated with the collective fishing farm. Since a collective farm was a phenomenon of the Soviet time, it could be expected that the approach which during the filmmaking was intended to be general, or a background level, became specific (i.e. through the lens of the 'Soviet time') when the film was being interpreted. Quoting Norman Fairclough: "In representing a social event, one is incorporating it within the context of another social event, recontextualizing it" (Fairclough:139). On the interpreting level, contextual aspects obtain a new meaning within the new contextual framework. It also appears that the further we are from the 1950s, the more prominent these schemes become. It seems as if the Soviet aspect has become the dominant aspect in presenting the life of the islanders, hiding the human and timeless subject matter of interpersonal relations. Creating contexts enables the restoration of the versatility of time settings.

6. Conclusion

The changing relationship of the past and present is one way to analyse the concepts of time when interpreting a film about folk culture. The film in question focuses on showing folk traditions that according to the film's authors are 'ancient' and have been 'preserved for centuries'. At the same time, it was unavoidable that the presentation was more or less deliberately pinned to a given timeframe. At the time of filming it was the 'today' that has now become the past and, as part of the past, is more restricted than the usually fuzzy 'today'. The film's creators could not operate outside their time. But it also affects people who interpret this film today, as they are contemplating the film and its time of creation from today's perspective. Since the film inevitably contains different simultaneous levels of reality (from the physical environment to the presentation of attitudes and values), they are selectively included in the interpretation. Which of them are included in the interpretation depends on the situational context (see also situational contexts of Fairclough:27), including differences and changes in both historic and individual experiences (see Andrews).

Students who only saw the film once noticed the Soviet ideology in it. This was mostly due to the political discourse (about the Soviet time, its symbols, tokens of the society's ideological pressure, e.g. the 'working people' phenomenon etc.). Oddly, watching the film revealed social changes at the political level, but not in everyday life or other levels. The former is probably more general, while the latter would have required local material (e.g. Kihnu films from different years or other texts describing the 1950s). The deeper the observation of folkloristic aspects, the less sketchiness there is to the 'Soviet time' aspect and the more is revealed of the network of human relations (researchers-filmmakers, people of Kihnu, officials – all of whom were somehow connected to making or assessing the film in the 1950s) on the one hand, and the dynamics of folklore studies on the other. During the filmmaking period, folkloristics was focused on the research of texts which may have been influenced by presentation (i.e. a song was folk tradition, not the singing; a story, not storytelling), but that is not the case anymore. This point of departure allowed the filmmakers to present wedding customs as screenplay – enacted with the cooperation of researchers and the traditional group in order to obtain a scientific description of wedding customs. Today's viewer does not perceive folk traditions separately from their presentation, whereby the time of filming and contemporaneous concepts are once more highlighted.

First, the Kihnu wedding film revealed the effect of tradition-related rhetoric on interpretation, and second, the overshadowing of interpersonal relations by ideological sketchiness. This sketchiness is increased by the temporal distance between the event and interpretation time. Adding the film's contemporaneous sources to the research reveals the field of interpersonal relations once more, and reduces the dominant rhetoric ideology back to just one of the aspects of describing the film and time relations.

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