Winter festivals and traditions conference, Oxford University

Presenters' abstracts and biographies

Panel I: Festivals through history

• Dr Brigid Burke, Montclair State University (USA)

The Lenaia: The winter festival of Dionysus in the context of Greek beliefs about death and the afterlife

The Lenaia was a festival of the Greek god Dionysus, connected with his birth, the first mixing of wine, and very likely his rebirth after being murdered by the Cyclopes in Orphic myth. In Athens this festival took place in the month of Gamelion (our modern January). This paper looks at the changes in the Lenaia festival when it is no longer only a "rural" festival, by exploring the psychological impact of the movement from "tribal" communities to urban centers. Also discussed is the born/resurrected Dionysus as a transition figure for changing beliefs about life after death among the Greeks. The rise of Orphic belief in the 5^{th} and 4^{th} centuries BCE represented a movement from collective ideas about the fate of mortals entirely separate from the divine to a belief in an "immortal" spark in humankind that made the fate of the individual soul important, and led to later ideas linking ethical behavior with the fate of the soul after death. Concurrent with these changes was the idea that the wicked dead were punished under the earth and the righteous were lifted up to the sky, which may be reflected in later attempts in Orphic mythology to link Dionysus and Apollo.

Brigid Burke (D.Litt.) is an adjunct professor of Mythology in the Classics and General Humanities department of Montclair State University (Montclair, New Jersey, United States). Her research and writing explores the link between death beliefs in Western culture and our collective psychology of good and evil, masculine and feminine.

• Dr Joy Fraser, George Mason University (USA)

"Some fiends disguised as *mummers*": The Isaac Mercer murder case and the politics of sectarianism in nineteenth century Newfoundland

In the urban communities of nineteenth-century Conception Bay, Newfoundland, participants in the custom of Christmas mumming attracted a reputation for antisocial behaviour and physical aggression that resulted in numerous prosecutions in the local courts from the 1830s onwards. In December 1860, an escalating pattern of mumming-related violence culminated in the alleged murder of fisherman Isaac Mercer by mummers in the town of Bay Roberts, prompting the legislature to enact an island-wide ban on the custom that remained in force for over a century. This paper focuses on a range of contemporary responses to the Mercer murder case, exploring how local newspapers, politicians, religious leaders, and colonial officials promulgated discourses that served their own political agendas. The competing narratives that emerged reflected a deep-seated sectarian division within Newfoundland politics that pitted supporters of the predominantly Roman Catholic Liberals against those of the Protestant Conservative colonial establishment. While there is no evidence that sectarian

tensions played a role in the fatal assault on Mercer, public responses to the case played into a well-established association of the custom of mumming with the island's lower-class Irish Catholic populace and as a threat to the "respectable" inhabitants of Conception Bay. I go on to situate such discourses in the context of a major constitutional crisis that engulfed the colony in 1861, arguing that the Mercer case provided a vehicle for the enactment of bitter partisan conflicts, professional rivalries, and personal animosities among Newfoundland's politico-religious elites.

Joy Fraser is Assistant Professor of English and Associate Director of the Folklore Studies program at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, USA. For the past several years, she has been researching the relationship between mumming, violence, and the law in nineteenth-century Newfoundland. She has an article on this topic in *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* (2009) and a forthcoming chapter on contemporary responses to the Mercer murder case in Alison Marshall's edited volume on *Masking and Mumming in North America*. Meanwhile, she is completing a book tracing haggis's role as a contested symbol of Scottishness, provisionally entitled *Addressing the Haggis: Culture and Contestation in the Making of Scotland's National Dish*. Her work on this and other topics has appeared in the journals *Contemporary Legend, Scottish Studies,* and *Ethnologies*. http://folklore.gmu.edu/people/jfraser3

• Dr Richard Irvine, Cambridge University (UK)
Following the bear: the revival of East Anglian Straw Bear traditions

In Whittlesey and Ramsey, two market towns in the East Anglian fenlands, farm labourers led a 'Straw Bear' through the streets; one of an array of Plough Monday customs marking the start of the agricultural year. The practice seems to have come to an end in 1909, when it was forbidden by a police inspector as a form of begging. Yet what had come to be seen as an unruly and unsavoury practice was renovated as a valued form of cultural heritage in 1980, in the wake of the wider 'revival' of folk music and dance in the United Kingdom in the 1960s and 70s. Emerging from this, Whittlesey is now the site of an annual festival of Molly (and other folk) dancing as different teams from around the country, many of them with blacked or otherwise disguised faces, move through the streets 'following the bear', who is burned the following day. Yet alongside the apparent gentility of revived folk customs, as evening falls, folk musicians and their activities give way to the convergence of young people from the surrounding region for a night of drunken revelry around the town. This paper explores the different facets of this modern midwinter custom: as heritage and as night of joy in the cold of winter; as cultural spectacle and as people throwing up in the streets; as continuation and as invention; as cyclical calendrical ritual and as a symbol of the linear passage of time.

Richard Irvine teaches Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. His PhD research sought an understanding of the everyday life of contemporary English Benedictine monasticism, and his more recent research has explored moral and economic dimensions of landscape change in the United Kingdom and Mongolia. He has recently completed a book manuscript on the relationship between Anthropology and Deep Time.

Keynote speaker

• Dr Cesare Poppi, La Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera Italiana (Switzerland)
Sex and the Afterweb: rethinking tradition and cultural continuity

'Modern' Social Anthropology in Oxford and Cambridge (A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, E. Evans-Pritchard and M. Fortes), was programmatically meant to reconsider and possibly replace the 'modernist' trend of 19th century anthropology bent on stressing the persistence of 'The Primitive' within contemporaneity. Our Founding Fathers rejected the concept of 'evolution', eventually conjugated as the notion of 'primitive survival' in later years. Thus the main thrust of Anthropology in the 60's and 70's was concerned more with 'change' as the framework within which to articulate what were then current anthropological (and political) issues. Concerns with issues of a superstructural/symbolical nature were somewhat sidelined until they were brought back with the Structuralist and then Cognitivist-cum-Ontological turn of the '90s or so – leading to the current Post-Modernist endgame.
My contribution will address a (chrono)logical sequence cast in both contemporary disciplinary concerns and field-grown ethnographic issues. If cultural practices change through history, why do they often, and especially in critical times, seek legitimacy in a measure of continuity with the past? The paradigmatic, successful, subjectivist concept of the early '80s of 'the Invention of Tradition' will be critically reconsidered in this perspective. Accordingly, Winter Masquerades as practiced today can be historically and sociologically - as well as symbolically and cognitively - brought to bear paradigmatically on the history of the discipline as far as we know.
In recent times the issue of Cultural Continuity has developed as one of the most stimulating *problematiques* within the panorama of contemporary social sciences. In the light of a continuing long time involvement in Winter Masquerades fieldwork - my personal enquiry about why 'primitive' and 'survivalist' practices are still well alive – and growing - will be considered in an attempt at a synthesis of current ethnographic and field-induced concerns.

Panel II: Krampus and Christmas

• Dr Gertraud Seiser and Dr Matthäus Rest, University of Vienna and University of Munich (Austria and Germany)
Wild and beautiful: the Krampus in Salzburg

In the Austrian province of Salzburg performances of Krampus and Saint Nicholas have been historically documented for at least 300 years. Since the turn of the millennium related events are enormously booming. We and our students are following this boom through ethnographic fieldwork since 2011.
We observe very diverging kinds of rituals and performances comprising between one and several hundreds of Krampuses. There are different groups of actors involved. Among these heated debates are concerns over inclusion and exclusion, which are prevalent. For traditionalists the function of the Krampus is to assist Saint Nicholas in punishing evil

children while looking at the cohesion of families. For those working in globalised and virtual surroundings the Krampus provides the opportunity to get in touch with their bodies and sense their local communities. Nationalists use the Krampus to express their disgust of immigrants. Many men take the opportunity to play out an aggressive masculinity which has no more place in everyday life.
We suggest that the fascination with the Krampus phenomenon lies in its potential to satisfy diverging and contradictory needs within one character by addressing relations between male and female, young and old, nature and culture, tradition and modernity, violence and death, sexuality and morality. The Krampus figure allows expression in nearly everything that is important to people, especially with regards to socially suppressed emotions, like fear, horror, violence or lust, which are vigorously performed.

Gertraud Seiser, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna: Main fields of research and teaching concentrate on economic anthropology, in particular, economy, kinship and social structure in marginalised rural areas of Austria and on methods of ethnographic research.

Matthäus Rest is an anthropologist interested in the relations between the rural and the urban. At the University of Vienna, he has done work on political transitions and their ramifications on farming communities in South Africa and Poland. His dissertation at the University of Zurich dealt with an unbuilt hydropower dam in Northeastern Nepal and the changes in large-scale infrastructure construction in the global South over the last thirty years. Rest has held visiting positions at the University of Oxford, UCLA and the Nepā School of Social Sciences and Humanities in Kathmandu. Currently, he is a research fellow at the University of Munich. Since 2011, together with Gertraud Seiser and MA students from Vienna, he has been investigating the Krampus across Austria.

• Amber Dorko Stopper, co-founder of Parade of Spirits, Liberty Lands (USA)
Spectres and spectra: building self-sustaining folklore and neurodiversity inclusion into processional arts

One of the first two "Krampus"-related events to hit the US (featured on National Public Radio in 2011), Krampuslauf Philadelphia – now known as Parade of Spirits, Liberty Lands – is a once-a-year gathering and ritual that has produced beautiful homemade costumes as well as taught children to walk on stilts, to solder battery packs to LEDs for lanterns, to dance with fire, and to face their monsters.
Leaving its "Krampus" title behind as Krampus fever hits (and peaks) in areas outside of the Alps, Parade of Spirits has created its own culture, drawing visitors from far-flung parts of the United States to be part of its "sacred, and relaxed" atmosphere. While remaining entirely secular, Parade of Spirits has made ties to the Pennsylvania Dutch Heathen community and continues to draw support, inspiration and energy from Philadelphia's own diverse ethnic communities and belief systems.
As originator and co-founder of this festival, my paper will address how a "community" can be built even when it meets for only two hours per year, and will address Parade of Spirits'

commitment to furthering its reach to the neurodivergent community, to make processional arts and folklore something that is within reach for those unable to attend crowded, noisy, or social events – and still have those individuals' contributions and creations be included, and why we believe Parade of Spirits may outlast other "Krampus" – themed events that have popped up all over America.

Amber Dorko Stopper is the co-founder of Parade of Spirits, Liberty Lands (formerly known as Krampuslauf Philadelphia). She has held the festival for the past six winters, had two art gallery exhibitions based on artifacts and portraits from the Parade, and has spoken at Ignite Philly about the Parade in 2015 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y77LSWB1Wa0).

• Lucinda Murphy, Durham University (UK)

The nostalgia of Christmas worship: a resource for re-collection, re-flection and re-newal

'Christmas' undoubtedly conjures up a rich variety of meaning in the British mind. Robins. Mince pies. Snowmen. Sparkly baubles. Father Christmas. The imagery, associations, and traditions abound. But for many, Christmas just wouldn't be Christmas without having a good old sing song of *O Come All Ye Faithful* in the 'magical' candlelit atmosphere of a local church carol service. There is no doubt that, for some reason, Christmas carol services see usually diminishing Church of England congregations bolstered by an energised, excited crowd who do not feel able or inclined to participate during the rest of the liturgical year. This phenomenon, up until now, has received little attention from researchers. This paper draws upon a qualitative case study I conducted last year with congregants who attended the 2015 Christmas Eve Carol Service at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford upon Avon.
Comparing the narratives of both regular and non-regular church attenders, I explore motivations for attendance, emotions and reactions to the liturgy, and memories of past Christmas traditions; alongside the kinds of meaning and significance attributed to the festival, and its relation to personal beliefs. Putting these exchanges into conversation both with each-other and with potential anthropological, and psychological theoretical explanations, I hope to illuminate the role that this popular tradition may be playing in British culture. Identifying 'nostalgia' as the predominant emotion experienced, I argue that the Christmas carol service should be seen as a symbolic cultural resource which provides a facilitative, reflective space for the active recalling of core identities.

Background

Having completed my undergraduate degree in Theology at the University of Durham, and more recently, my Masters in Psychology of Religion at Heythrop College in London, I am now near the beginning of a PhD back in Durham with Professor Douglas Davies, looking at British Christmas traditions, particularly in relation to the concept of 'Christmas spirit'. As in my Masters work, which focused on experiences of Christmas carol services and school nativity plays, I am especially interested in the role of personal memory and emotions in collective ritual settings.

Panel III: Carnival, museums and department stores

• Prof. Adrian Franklin, University of Tasmania (Australia)
Where 'art meets life': the making of Australia's most successful mid-winter festival [Dark MOFO] in Hobart, Tasmania

In Hobart, a litany of winter festivals flopped and failed over the past twenty years but with the arrival of MONA (Museum of Old and New Art) a private museum owned by successful on-line gambler, David Walsh, this changed dramatically. From 2013 Dark MOFO not only reignited long-somnolent traditions of midwinter festival imaginaries among its European settler society, it also proved to be an effective vehicle for multicultural and indigenous participation. It also completely overwhelmed the city with visitors' keen to participate in a ritual with no holds barred. While MONA explored themes of sex, death and the body in its darkened, labyrinthine and subterranean levels, Dark MOFO permitted their mix of carnivalesque and Dionysian metaphors and embodied practices to take over the city in a week of programmatic mischief and misrule at midwinter. Research from an Australian Research Council study of MONA will be used to account for its origins and innovation as well as its social, cultural and economic impact.

Adrian Franklin is trained in social anthropology and has held professorial positions at the University of Bristol, The Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo and where he is now at the University of Tasmania. His current research interests include the ethnographic analysis of festivals, rituals, travels and 'events'; art museums and art publics; art tourism; culture-led urban regeneration, urban anthropology and human-animal studies. He is in Tasmania leading the ARC funded project: 'Creating the Bilbao Effect: MONA and the Social and Cultural Coordinates of Urban Regeneration Through Art Tourism'. Recent books include *The Making of MONA* (Penguin) 2014 and *Retro: A Guide to the Mid-Twentieth Century Design Revival* (Bloomsbury) *2013*; *City Life* (Sage) 2012.

• Dr Gareth Hamilton and Dita Vinovska, University of Latvia
Losing 'track' of inverted time and space: the 'Crazy Days' in and outside a Finnish-owned department store in Riga

This paper presents and analyses the 'Crazy Days' ('Trakās dienas'), a seemingly commercial event which takes place biannually in Riga, Lativa (and Tallinn, St Petersburg or Helsinki) in the Finnish-owned, premium Stockmann department store(s). It marks the separation between the warmer seasons and winter, taking the climatic calendar and its standard patterns, and inserting further sales opportunities within while also subverting the carnivalesque notion of inversion of time, role and space. While yellow-and-black fancy dress is donned by staff amid apparent price reductions, importantly, this is not limited to the store itself, and through advertising, 'ghosts' walking the streets, and the infiltration of bright yellow carrier bags, the 'Crazy Days' temporarily bring change to the city itself and its inhabitants. Presented as a festival, masquerade, a liminal period during which everything changes, they mark a

commercial intervention into the climatic/cultural calendar which mimic the activities of other festivities. Whereas the winter may be marked, religiously and commercially, by Christmas, the Crazy Days, even by name a creation which relies on human (dis)agency, recalls questions of mind, matter and time out of place. However, formal control is firmly maintained by management in the form of pricing, security and physical barriers. Our research thus shows while customers and even staff may lose the sense of time and place within this event, we suggest that the 'Crazy Days' in Riga are a form of ritual practice which is firmly regulated, despite carnivalistic appearances within the 'Lent' of the staid, controlled Finnish department store.

Gareth E. Hamilton is assistant professor in socio-cultural anthropology at the University of Latvia in Riga. He completed his doctoral studies at Durham University on rhetoric and personhood in eastern Germany and has published on this, mass-gifts in commercial environments and, forthcoming, on murals as persuasive artwork. He recently took part in a Riga Capital of Culture project as co-author of a film on the city viewed through the lives of its cats.

Dita Vinovska holds a Master of Humanities degree in socio-cultural anthropology from the University of Latvia. Having previously studied transport systems engineering, she works as a journalist and has experience in the media and public relations. Her research interests include language and communication, questions of 'normality', space and time relations, and agency.

• Dr Giovanni Kezich, Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina (Italy)
Carnival King of Europe: European winter masquerades in ethnographic perspective

European masqueraded winter festivals display a number of astonishing similarities in the shape of their characters, their acts and their structure, across huge geographical distances, from the Balkans to the British Isles, and from Eastern Europe to Iberia. This fact, already well known to Sir J. G. Frazer one hundred years ago, has been recently revived by a project of ethnographic research and visual anthropology that has swept over the continent with a new wave of enquiries on the field. This has gone under the heading "Carnival King of Europe", a project led by the Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina, and has involved some nine European countries and as many national museums (France, Spain, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia besides Italy), with more field excursions carried out in England, Swiss, Austria and Greece from 2007 to the present day, promoting fieldwork, itinerant exhibitions and seminars, the publication of several books and articles, one website www.carnivalkingofeurope.it and a number of documentary films, mostly authored by award-winning film maker Michele Trentini. The presentation will provide a short overview of the project's theoretical standpoints and some of its findings.

Giovanni Kezich, trained in Siena and London as a social anthropologist (Ph. D., UCL, 1989) has published extensively on the Italian 'peasant poets' (cf. *Some Peasant Poets. An Odyssey in the oral poetry of Latium*, Peter Lang, Bern etc. 2013). Since 1991, he has been

the director of the Trentino Folklife Museum (Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina), founded by G. Šebesta at San Michele all'Adige, at the foot of the Italian eastern Alps. Within the scope of the Museum's activities, he has worked on alpine pastoral graffiti, and is head of the EU project 'Carnival King of Europe' (www.carnivalkingofeurope.it; cf. *Carnevale re d'Europa. Viaggio antropologico nelle mascherate d'inverno*, Priuli & Verlucca, Scarmagno, 2015). He will be presenting his research on the 'Carnival king of Europe' at the RAI film festival in Bristol, UK on 31 March 2017.

Panel IV: Food and animals in festivals

• Dr Francesco Della Costa, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Be'er Sheva (Israel)
The venerable pig: ritual food sharing within a traditional festival in Abruzzo, Italy

This contribution aims to propose the ethnographic case study of a winter festival which takes place in several towns of interior Abruzzo (Italy). On January 17, in accordance with the catholic calendar, these communities celebrate the feast of Saint Anthony the Abbot, a hermit monk who lived in Egypt in the 3rd century. In the folkloric iconography, which is partly shared by the official catholic liturgy, the Saint is strongly connected with animals, and signally with the pig, which is also always represented with him in the sacred effigy. What is central in the traditional celebration is the food sharing which involves the whole community: on the feast's eve, several groups of men go door to door singing the legend of the Saint, whose role is played by a member of the group who wears a fake beard and the sackcloth, overcoming the devil's temptations in the desert. After the song, the landlords give them particular food, such as boiled mixed cereals, pork sausages or meat and wine. The classical interpretation of this tradition maintains that it is a sort of "carnivalesque" rite of pacification between the pours and the riches in the town (Di Nola 1976). My contribution aims to show how the pork meat sharing is central in such an annual community festival: whether we consider pig in a materialist (Harris 1998) or symbolist (Fabre-Vassas 1994) perspective, I maintain that this ritual exemplifies the category of "holy meal" (Fox 1994) and creates a coincidence of Saint and pig as the mythical hero that, in the middle of the cyclical winter socio-economic crisis, re-founds the society by the sacrifice of himself.

Francesco Della Costa obtained his Masters degree (cum laude) in "Discipline etnoantropologiche" at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" and carried out his PhD in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Naples "l'Orientale" and at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, in Paris. His research fields are anthropology of writing, anthropology of literature, autobiography, memory and also ritual and the sacred. Currently he is a Post-Doctoral Fellow in Anthropology of Food at the Sociology and Anthropology Department of the Ben Gurion University – Be'er Sheva, where he is working on Jewish kashrut and Italian Cuisine. He has participated in several international conferences and has published various articles in peer-reviewed journals. He is also Editor in Chief of *Primapersona. Percorsi autobiografici*, a journal published by the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale, which he has collaborated with since 2007.

• Pawel Sendyka, Jagiellonian University (Poland)
The *bacas* and the priests: how the old adversaries came together to revive and reinterpret tradition

In the Polish pastoralist tradition there have always been two seminal community events which bracketed the winter season. There was the autumn event of "Redyk Jesienny" when the sheep brought back from the summer alpine pastures were given back to their owners. There was also a spring "Redyk" also called "Mieszanie Owiec" which literally means the Mixing of Sheep. Historically, it was an important event in which the head shepherd, or the *baca* had to use his magical knowledge to ensure that the big herd made up of sheep from the individual owners will keep together as one and produce enough milk to make this summer venture profitable. To do that he used magic spells and performed rituals learned from his predecessors. The *bacas'* magical knowledge was frequently in opposition to the powers of the priests who viewed them with suspicion.
Today, this spring event of "Mieszanie Owiec" is much changed. It is no longer a private affair of the *baca* and the sheep owners. Frequently, it is a public event, a tourist attraction, with the priests often taking centre stage. There is even a new, "invented" tradition of region wide "Mieszanie" at the sanctuary of Ludźmierz. There, a small herd of around 200 sheep is symbolically used to bless all the herds going up the mountain pastures for the season.
The paper examines how the traditions changed from old ethnographic descriptions and how they are evolving in a modern economic reality.

Pawel Sendyka is a Ph.D. candidate at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. His research is on the revival of sheep pastoralism in Polish Carpathians; how the practice rooted in the 14th century is being actively adapted to the 21st century social, technological and bureaucratic environment. He also collaborates with Oxford's Dr Nicolette Makovicky on the "Ecologies of Citizenship" project about Polish pastoralism.