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The Latvian Folk Ornament and Mythology Nexus as Revival: Contested Historical Layers, Visualized Ideologies, and Commodified Creativity

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UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Press

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I consider myself remarkably fortunate to have had the possibility to study folkloristics at the University of Tartu. Since the Latvian national awakening in the second half of the 19th century, Tartu has been a significant place for Latvian intellectuals. The most widely recognised Latvian folk song collector Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923) studied mathematics and astronomy in Tartu. Anna Bērzkalne (1891–1956), who was among the first generation of academically educated folklorists in Latvia, started her studies in Tartu in 1922, with the prominent folklorist Walter Anderson (1885–1962) as her supervisor. Bērzkalne was also the founder of the Archives of Latvian Folklore in 1924; thus, unintentionally I have the pleasure of finalising my dissertation in the year that the Archives of Latvian Folklore celebrates its centenary.

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

ARTICLE I
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ARTICLE III
Ūdre, Digne 2023. Vernacular Voices and Contested Meanings: Contemporary Uses of the Swastika in Latvia, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 55(3), 545–566.

ARTICLE IV
Ūdre-Lielbārde, Digne 2025. The Nexus of Folk Ornament and Mythology in Latvia: Traditionalization, Commodification, and Spirituality. *Journal of American Folklore* 138 (548).

INTRODUCTION

Through an ethnographic lens theoretically grounded in folklore studies, this dissertation explores the nexus of folk ornament and mythology in Latvia. In contemporary Latvia, ethnographic insights into the contemporary uses of folk ornament reveal a diverse scene with creatively interpreted and recycled elements from traditional culture, inspired by the romanticised past aligned with globally sourced ideas, functioning and flourishing in the conditions of a neo-liberal consumerist economy. Apart from traditional practices such as textile production, woodwork, and pottery, folk ornament is used in contemporary design, domestic decor, fashion, tattoos, architecture, and theme parks. Alongside institutional design and official logos, there is a rich do-it-yourself scene. The folk ornament and mythology nexus has found resonance with contemporary spirituality, thus ornament is part of self-development courses, seminars and themed literature. When the inquisitive gaze turns beyond contemporary creativity, it unveils the historical layers of this nexus, giving insights into conflicting versions of contested pasts and ideological patinas accumulated over the course of history.

The folk ornament and mythology nexus refers to the interpretation that combines the geometric shapes of ornaments characteristic of Latvian folk art with mythological entities. These visualisations of mythology in geometric form each have a specific mythology-related name and story to tell. Based on folklore as the main source of Latvian mythology, an important component of the ornament and mythology nexus is narratives about the meaning of specific elements of ornamentation. This develops in beliefs about the benevolence of ornament and its ability to give protection against various misfortunes or to attract favourable forces. In popular understanding, the pre-Christian period or in emic terms 'ancient Latvia', is where the roots of folk ornament and its mythological meanings lie. Therefore, the folk ornament and mythology nexus is not just a visual exercise or for those with a passion for ethno-design, but also involves a vernacular understanding of mythology mixed with recirculation and reinterpretation of academic versions of reconstructed Latvian mythology.

The connection of ornament and mythology, with large parts of it carried through commodified forms, in contemporary practice manifests itself as essentialised, and is perceived by practitioners and observers alike as self-evident. This dissertation aims to scrutinise this perception. Therefore my research has been guided by the urge to deconstruct the self-evidence of the folk ornament and mythology nexus and look for academically guided ways to account for it. The initial question directing this dissertation was how to frame the ornament and mythology nexus in academic terms and dig beyond the layers of national sentiment and the romanticised aura of pastness clouding the general perception of everything to do with folklore in Latvia. Despite the theoretical detours I have taken in the articles constituting this dissertation, first and foremost this is a work grounded in folklore studies as an academic discipline whose foundation lies in the acknowledgment of vernacular knowledge, creativity ranging from the festive

to the everyday and to the stigmatised, and the value of individual voice, approaching them all as important sources when exploring the social fabric of societies and communities both in contemporary situations and historical settings. Therefore, this dissertation aims to explore the ornament and mythology nexus by looking into individual experiences and ways in which people assign meaning and value to their creativity, how it forms their belonging through expressions of national sentiment, and how contested historical layers of conflicting versions of the past both shape and are shaped by individuals engaged in the mythological interpretation of ornament. Part of the task of framing the ornament and mythology nexus in academic terms is finding the appropriate language, terms, and theoretical concepts to describe these past and present cultural practices from a critically analytical perspective, as is crucial to academic enquiry, while staying ethically committed to valuing peoples' lifeworlds and knowledge without over-romanticising their endeavours. To sum this up, the overall aim of this dissertation is to explore the origins of the ornament and mythology nexus in Latvia, to analyse how it has played out through different historical periods and how it has been shaped by different ideological constellations of the 20th century, as well as to examine its manifestations in contemporary settings. As this dissertation comprises three articles and a volume chapter published over a period of several years, the research questions have multiplied and become more specific for each of the narrower topics explored.

In the overall framing of the questions discussed in this dissertation, both the articles and this chapter have focused on particular turning points in the history of the mythology and ornament nexus. Two of these coincide with major historical events that have been significant in the history of the national self-determination and statehood of Latvia. The origins of ornament and mythology can be traced to interwar Latvia (1918–1940). I argue that during this period, the folk ornament and mythology nexus represented a special form of cultural production, a folk revival which I frame as a renewed interest in and appreciation for traditional cultural expressions, involving rediscovery, reinterpretation, and traditionalisation of revived material. The ornament and mythology nexus was created alongside the establishment of the national ideology in Latvia, with both having roots reaching into the period of national awakening in the second half of the 19th century. The best-known contribution, with long lasting effects on the interpretation of folk ornament, comes from Latvian artist Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942) whose intellectual biography will be discussed in section 1. The second turning point is the Singing Revolution (1986–1991), which made possible the return of the ornament and mythology nexus after five decades of Soviet occupation. With the emergence of grass-roots social movements such as environmental and folklore movements, folk ornament became an element of cultural resistance. Both because it could be used to establish links with the interwar period that aimed to bring political continuity, and because it had the capacity to convey emotional messages based on the historical imaginations attached to it. These two major historical turning points are partitioned by the rupture of the Soviet occupation, which in Latvia as in other Baltic states lasted for nearly fifty years. As the ornament

and mythology nexus didn't correspond well to the modes of production of historical materialism and the dogmas of Marxism–Leninism, during most of the Soviet period, the mythology part of the nexus was silenced. Forms of folk ornament remained in active use and were even celebrated alongside other parts of ethnic culture as mediums for installing socialist ideology. These historical layers, sometimes overlapping, sometimes discordant because of conflicting versions of contested pasts, are present in contemporary ornament practice.

I will sum this up through a short introduction to the topics covered in the articles. In article I, based on the interrelation between cultural opposition and non-violent resistance, I explore the meanings and uses of the eight-pointed star – one of the most potent visual symbols of the Singing Revolution in Latvia (1986–1991). Article II covers the ideological pressures placed on the form and content of the folk ornament and mythology nexus during the Stalinist era in Latvia (1940–1941; 1944–1953) and forms of discursive confusion caused by the rapid changes of the Soviet regime playing out in people's lives and careers. The contemporary uses of the swastika, with the various layers of contested meaning attached to it and represented by conflicting memory regimes are covered in article III. Article IV focuses on the contemporary practice of the ornament and mythology nexus, analysing creative rearrangements and recontextualisations of traditional practices. These topics have emerged by noticing, acknowledging, and focusing on small acts of vernacular creativity. Along with the proficiency and privileged position of the folklorist to shift the attention from these small acts to considerations of the larger historical and socio-economic contexts, my research aims to uncover these links which inevitably have affected both ornament practice and interpretation. Apart from the detailed conclusions as answers to research questions presented in each article, I argue that the folk ornament and mythology nexus in Latvia, even as a seemingly minor creative expression, paves the way to explore the ideological shifts that began with the national awakening in the second half of the 19th century and continue into contemporary settings, with vernacular narratives uncovering conflicting historical pasts, national sentiments, and social imaginations.

This also brings to light the novelty of the research carried out in this dissertation. Even though the folk ornament and mythology nexus has gained analytical attention in Latvian academia (Zemītis & Rozenberga 1991; Zemītis 1994; 2004; Vaska 2017; Anča 2023) and beyond (Ryzhakova 2002), this dissertation stands out as because it aims to present a comprehensive history of the ornament and mythology nexus from its origins as a folk revival to the commodified creativity of contemporary settings. The academic publications are outnumbered by those assessing folk ornament from an emic perspective and which, aimed at the general public, focus on the benevolence of ornament and represent a fascination with the notions of contemporary spirituality (Celms 2007; Garokalna 2014; 2016; Jansone 2003; 2013; Krūmiņa 2013; Liepkalna 2013; Liesma 2013; Poikāne 2016; Ektermane 2018; 2022). Another point I would like to add relating to the novelty of this research centres around the particular point of view that this dissertation rep-

resents. Without losing the analytical perspective, the ethnographic lens and theoretical toolkit of folklore studies – which enable acknowledgment of vernacular creativity – have provided me the possibility to look at creative uses of past and recycling of traditional elements both in the past and present, not as an inauthentic invention deviating from an imagined canon, but rather as valuable aspects of culture that matter in people's individual lifeworlds. As the previous academic research addressing the ornament and mythology nexus has mainly come from the discipline of history, in my reading their analytical tools are too rigid to acknowledge the value of the vernacular.

This chapter consists of four sections, each contributing to the overall framing of the articles that form this dissertation. The first section sets the historical scene and explores the origins of the ornament and mythology nexus in Latvia during the interwar period as a folk revival. This dissertation aims to analyse the underlying assumption of the ornament and mythology nexus as a given and self-evident, therefore section II focuses on the question of form and content in ornament research, drawing parallels both between the Latvian case and other geopolitical locations, and between different historical time periods. Section III covers theory and aims to account for the theoretical borrowings from visuality and social movement studies, Soviet postcolonial theory, and collective memory studies. These have contributed to outlining the conflicting historical layers, explaining the reasons behind the popularity of particular elements of ornament as well as providing an analytical frame to explain the contemporary tensions surrounding ornament practice. The last section covers methodological issues, with my main argument being that my positionality as a researcher has played out differently within the process of writing each of the articles. Arguably it is article III, which focuses on the contemporary uses of the swastika, that uncovers the most contested part of the ornament and mythology nexus, therefore leading to the hypervisibility of my positionality as a researcher. The final part of the chapter sums up the conclusions that I have put forward both in the articles and which I have discussed in this chapter. It also outlines the directions for further research connected both to the historical layers and contemporary contexts of the ornament and mythology nexus.

1. FOLK ORNAMENT REVIVAL

The underlying theme that grounds and runs through all the articles of this dissertation is the ornament and mythology nexus and expressions of it in culture at different historical times and in different historical contexts. By exploring the historical and cultural conditions that prompted the ideas that produced the folk ornament and mythology nexus, I argue that the best approach would be to view it as a folk ornament revival. This special mode of interpretation and cultural creation was embedded in cultural nationalism and the political climate of interwar Latvia both in the periods of parliamentary democracy and authoritarianism. In a broader take, revival is one of the available theoretical concepts in the folklorist's toolbox that characterises the conscious and symbolic uses of the past for present purposes. However, among other authenticity-related theoretical concepts that could be used to theorise the intentional uses of the past, such as folklorism (Moser 1962; Šmidchens 1999; Bendix 1997: 176–187; 1988), folkloresque (Foster and Tolbert 2016), or invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), all of which have in some way been used to distinguish between folklore and continuous uses of folklore, folk revival, understood here as a renewed politically motivated interest in and appreciation of traditional cultural expressions, involving their rediscovery, reinterpretation, traditionalisation, and popularisation on revived material, best characterises the cultural logic behind the ornament and mythology nexus. Today the connection between ornament and mythology is generally accepted and perceived as a tradition that comes from time immemorial, and its beginnings as revival in the 1920s and 1930s are largely not part of public discussion, or even public knowledge.

A large part of research on folk revivals has stemmed from ethnomusicology (Rosenberg 1993; Fujie 1996; Ronström 1996; Livingston 1999; Bithell & Hill 2014), however, one of the seminal theoretical works belongs to the anthropology of religion, specifically, the theory of revitalisation movements by Anthony Wallace. Based on his research on religious revitalisation movements, he defined revitalisation movements as "a deliberate, organised, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" (Wallace 1956: 265). Conceptualising this as a phenomenon of cultural change, Wallace emphasised the individual's role in initiation these changes:

> [T]he persons involved in the process of revitalization must perceive their culture, or some major areas of it, as a system (whether accurately or not); they must feel that this cultural system is unsatisfactory; and they must innovate not merely discrete items, but a new cultural system, specifying new relationships as well as, in some cases, new traits (1956: 265).

According to Wallace, there are five stages in the overall processual structure of the revitalisation movements: steady state; periods of individual stress; cultural distortion; subsequent periods of revitalisation, including such components as "reformulation, communication, organisation, adaptation, cultural transformation,

and routinization”, and, finally, new steady state (1956: 268). Following Wallace and other scholars engaged with the concept of revival, there are four theoretical aspects which have been particularly relevant to analysing the folk ornament and mythology nexus. First, as labelled by Owe Ronström, the ‘burning souls’, enthusiastic individuals “typically found at the core of the revival, who initiate the production by identifying something that could or should be revived” (2014: 45). Second, the crucial role of the particular cultural and/or political agendas as motivation for restoring certain disappearing practices, traditions, or cultural artefacts. Third, shifts (Ronström 1996; 2014) as different historical, social, and cultural contexts that help to explain the processes of de- and re-contextualisation, which inevitably take place when specific elements become the focus of revivalist efforts. Fourth, the conceptualisation of the post-revival phase to account for the changes that revivalist efforts have achieved in shaping contemporary ornament practice. Before analysing how these aspects played out in the folk ornament and mythology nexus, I outline the conditions and contexts of ornament and mythology research before and during the connection between the two was proposed by Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942) – an example of Ronström’s ‘burning souls’.

1.1. Ornament and Mythology from the National Awakening to the Interwar Period

In 1923, when Latvian artist Ernests Brastiņš published his work on ornament and mythology, proposing that ornament carries mythological meaning, the field of folk art in Latvia held an eminent symbolic weight as one of the cornerstones of national identity. Folk costumes, textiles, and other peasant-made vernacular art and craft items were sources and inspirations for visualising national identity. In the same way, national imagination was sparked by mythological notions of the pagan past. The symbolic importance of mythology as a powerful nation-building tool had been there since the national awakening in the second half of the 19th century, and “the ideological regime of Latvian mythology scholarship was the national agenda” (Ķencis 2012: 69). More serious research works followed at the beginning of the 20th century, dovetailing with a general interest in the topic. However, neither ornament research nor mythology ever turned into independent research disciplines. Apart from considerable interest and contribution to both topics by lay enthusiasts, ornament has been of concern to historians, art historians, archeologists, and folklorists, whereas folklorists and scholars of religion studied mythology. One of the points of criticism that Brastiņš received for his work was that he combined these two subjects – ornament and mythology – before they had been explored properly on their own, and thus by starting on shaky ground he provided further unfounded propositions. In line with these considerations, the aim of this subchapter is to outline some of the historical aspects of folk ornament and of mythology research that contextualise Brastiņš work.

Conscious discovery and recognition of folk art dates back to the second half of the 19th century when the Latvian national awakening inspired heightened interest in tangible and intangible aspects of peasant life, visual expressions like ornament included. After the Russian conquest of the Baltic region in the early 18th century most of the territory of contemporary Latvia was part of the Russian Empire's Baltic provinces (the governorates of Estonia, Livonia and Courland), with the social fabric of German elites, Russian administration, and local peasantry. Latgale or the eastern part of Latvia was part of Vitebsk Governorate. After the abolition of serfdom, which took place in the various regions of Latvia between 1817 and 1861, the Latvian national awakening began in the 1850s after descendants of wealthier peasants obtained higher education at the universities of Dorpat (Tartu), St. Petersburg, and Moscow. Rather than being a political movement, the national awakening was a cultural meaning-making project by which, with "'inventing' Latvians from the peasant population of Russia's periphery … native peasant culture was transformed into such national symbols as folk songs, folk wisdom, myths, language and national history" (Zaķe 2007: 308). In these settings, folk ornament as a subject of interest surfaced in several cultural nationalism-related activities that centred around identity formation based on traditional culture and folklore. Three such undertakings in the second half of the 19th century were the question of national folk costume, the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition of 1896, and the establishment of the first Latvian museum (Pujāte 1994), all of which set the scene for a more explicit exploration of folk ornament during the interwar period.

One of the richest sources of folk ornament is traditional folk textiles and clothing. The practical need for a national folk costume that would represent ethnic affiliation arose with the choral singing movement and Latvian Song Festivals (Karlsone 2013), with the first All-Latvian Song Festival taking place in Rīga in 1873. Traditional folk clothing was no longer worn as daily dress, therefore the development of Latvian national costume was the result of purposeful activity by intellectuals and artists (Karlsone 2015: 135). The first versions of the national folk costume were combinations of the fashion of that time and a romanticised version of peasant life. Only gradually with the accumulation of ethnographic knowledge and growing collections of material culture artefacts, did costumes come to include more traditional elements, and examples of ornament came to be closer to traditional ethnographic material (Karlsone 2015: 136).

The attention to and collection of ethnographic material was considerably advanced by the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition that took place in 1896 in Rīga as part of the Tenth All-Russian Congress of Archaeology. It was one of the pivotal events of the national awakening, and also a major turning point in the study of Latvian folk art as "[i]t inspired Latvians as well as other ethnicities to assess the local ethnographic heritage alongside folk art" (Sirica 2019b: 337). Not only the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition but also the preparatory work beforehand were of importance as extensive work on collecting ethnographic materials was carried out through ten expeditions in various rural regions in the territory of Latvia, with the exhibits acquired for the exhibition today being "among the most ancient and

valuable objects" in the museum collections (Stinkule 2016: 167). Two such exhibits were musical instruments – Baltic psalteries or *kokles*, – dated to the 17th and 18th centuries. In the context of ornament, they stand out because of the bizarre and curious signs carved on them.[1] In the spirit of romantic nationalism, they were interpreted by the ethnographer, cartographer and teacher Matīss Siliņš (1861–1942) as the Latvian runic script (Priedīte 1992). At the outset, this might seem just a weird case, although when placed into broader contexts, it represents one of the issues in the debate on ornament form and content, i.e. the ideological malleability of visual forms. Interpreting these visual forms as runic script represents what Ieva Zaķe has called the "restless sense of inferiority" which served as a driving force for intellectuals engaged in cultural nationalism. The sense of inferiority felt by the early nationalists towards the dominant Russian and German cultures was combined with "heightened aspirations to enter intellectual elites of the world on equal (i.e., nationalistic) terms" (Zaķe 2007: 308). As the written Latvian language only appeared in the 16th century in the form of religious texts produced by the Baltic German colonial powers (cf. Jansone & Bušs 2018), the possible discovery of the ancient Latvian runic script would mean an exciting version of alternative history that would affirm cultural ancientness and thus uncover the true value of Latvian culture. Brastiņš's idea of ancient mythological meanings preserved in folk ornament was based on the same logic as the 'discovery' of the ancient Latvian runic script. In reality, the mysterious signs on *kokles* are most likely a version of property signs.

Apart from his runic script theory, Matīss Siliņš was involved with folk art and ornament in broader contexts, as he actively took part in the formation of the Latvian Museum,[2] later on serving as its director from 1902 to 1934. The museum was established in 1869 by the Science Committee of the Rīga Latvian Society,[3] in opposition to the existing museums organised and managed by Baltic Germans (Ķencis & Kuutma 2011: 509). Despite the early difficulties of exhibiting, museum collections grew, especially when preparing for the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition mentioned above. The museum collection formed the basic material for the researchers, and folk art samples have continued to influence the development of professional applied art in subsequent historical eras (Sirica 2021a: 227). The valorisation and collection of folk art and its preservation in museums served as a base for further ornament uses. This process echoes Joep Leerssen's discussion of cultural nationalism and the "cultivation of culture" (Leerssen 2006). He describes the cultivation of culture as a three-stage process: first, the inventorying or salvaging of cultural artefacts; second, new cultural productivity; and third, propagandist proclamations, meaning that what is salvaged and perpetuated is

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[1] Image of the oldest of *kokles* is available at the digital resources of the National History Museum of Latvia: https://emuzejs.lnvm.lv/resursi/galerijas-un-virtualas-izstades/galerijas/latviesu-etnografiska-izstade/17.

[2] The museum changed its name several times during the different political regimes; today it is the National History Museum of Latvia. See more in Ķencis & Kuutma 2011.

[3] Rīgas Latviešu biedrība. The first Latvian society, established in 1868.

employed in the building of national identity (Leerssen 2006: 570–571). In this case, the fragmentary surfacing of ornament-related questions in the second half of the 19th century is the first part of the cultivation of culture, with new cultural productivity reaching its peak during the interwar period.

The first public discussion devoted entirely to the topic of Latvian ornament was initiated in artists' circles in 1913 after artist, designer and one of the most ardent ornament proponents Jūlijs Madernieks (1870–1955) published a sample book, *Ornaments* (Pujāte 1994: 101). With samples of Art Nouveau influenced Latvian geometric ornament, the book was "the first of its kind in Latvian applied art" and received both praise and condemnation in reviews (Sirica 2021a: 227). The publication wasn't intended as research, rather, it was a tribute to the creative potential of folk ornament. It most certainly achieved its goal as both the popularity of Madernieks and his style of ornament increased, especially during the interwar period when through the publications of his design samples in women's magazines, "the style of Madernieks entered almost every Latvian apartment, wherever a woman was engaged in handicrafts, becoming part of popular culture" (Sirica 2021b: 64). Another prominent artist whose work focused on creative uses of folk ornament was the designer, graphic artist, and painter Ansis Cīrulis (1883–1942). Similar to mythology-themed works by the artist Jēkabs Bīne, discussed in article II, Cīrulis' decorative manner is characterised by folk ornament-covered, anthropomorphised, deities in stylised folk costumes. The cases of Madernieks and Cīrulis present a different mode of engagement with ornament than that of Brastiņš as they did not aim to theorise ornament, rather, their contribution was creative. Even though Brastiņš was an artist himself, an alumnus of the Stieglitz Technical School of Drawing, just like Madernieks and Cīrulis, he was not nearly as successful on the art scene. His contribution to the interpretation of folk ornament was both theoretical and ideological, and has left a considerable mark on the broader contexts of interpretation of traditional culture and folk art.

After the First World War, Latvia became an independent parliamentary republic in 1918, and the nation-building enterprise gained new momentum and meaning. When Brastiņš published his work in 1923, it had been only five years since the declaration of independence. Many of the initiatives that had been started during the national awakening ceased or were put on hold due to the social turbulence of the 1905 revolution, the First World War, and the War of Liberation (1918–1920). However, interest in ornament started to increase in the early 1920s with the research by archeologists and ethnologists, and also with previous creative uses of folk ornament with Art Nouveau stylisations changing to Art Deco (Vaska 2017: 15). Part of the legitimising of the new Latvian nation-state was a demand for national style and culture since "the new nation-state was competing in the international arena of representation with similar entities, as well as building its ethnocultural ideology at home" (Ķencis 2019a: 6). Promotion of the national style built upon the idea of the distinctiveness of culture mixed with the need to prove its antiquity. The interwar period, particularly the 1930s, was a time when "national peculiarity was sacralized and declared a nation's mission" (Bula

2000: 49). The excitement with ethnic visuality led to intense uses of folk ornament from official to everyday contexts.

The best-known edition on folk art, especially on folk costumes and textiles, is the richly illustrated three-volume set *Latvju raksti* (*Latvian Designs*), edited by graphic designer Rihards Zariņš (1869–1939). It was published around the same time as Brastiņš's work, i.e. from 1924 to 1931. The scientific quality of the edition was questioned by Zariņš's peers, especially in terms of material selection and lack of an organising system, therefore it has been characterised as being popular rather than academic (Jansone 2009: 112). Despite this, Zariņš's volume "significantly contributed to preserving Latvian cultural heritage and promoting it in the young republic, particularly reviving interest in 19th-century folk costumes" (Sirica 2024: 317–318), and it continues to shape today's ornament practitioners' perception of ornament, as I discuss in article IV. *Latvju raksti* was followed by more academically directed research (for example Karnups 1933; Dzērvītis & Ģinters 1936a, 1936b; Karnups & Kivicka 1938), including periodicals such as the magazine *Latvijas Saule* (1923–1931), which was the first devoted specifically to Latvian folk art and material culture.

This status quo of folk ornament research when Brastiņš took up the topic, was part of what enabled his version of the story to adhere and endure: the early stages of academic enquiry mixed with the ideological weight of the topic were ideal soil for romanticised versions of folk art interpretation. Another aspect mentioned by contemporary authors is the flaws in the collection and documentation process of folk art. Apart from the lack of a unified vision for collecting materials and systematic work in describing them, one of the problematic issues in ornament research was the fact that linguistic materials and folk artefacts were collected separately (Karlsone 1994: 78; also Vaska 2017). This meant that the visual materials were collected independently from the specific ornament names people used. This is especially relevant as Brastiņš assigned not only mythological meanings but also specific mythological names to each ornament. Further on, as noted by ethnologist Anete Karlsone, the work with folk ornament was corrupted by the "unprofessionalism of the collectors" because already in the collections of the 1930s collectors had used the mythology-related names that Brastiņš proposed, not the ones that people used (1994: 78). Regarding traditionalisation, the human tendency to turn experiences into traditions through repetition and symbolic attribution of pastness (Hymes 1975; Bauman 2004; Mould 2005) of the ornament and mythology nexus, this is a very valuable observation as it shows how quickly the idea of the connection between mythology and ornament had gained ground.

When it comes to mythology, Brastiņš relied entirely on the work of the influential linguist, sinologist, and folklore scholar Pēteris Šmits (1869–1938) and his 1918 publication *Latviešu mitoloģija* (*Latvian Mythology*), which with its reworked edition of 1926 has remained the most comprehensive overview of Latvian mythology to date (Reidzāne & Laime 2018: 113). As no distinctive genre of myth has been documented in Latvian oral tradition (Ķencis 2012; Reidzāne & Laime 2018: 109; Pūtelis 2000), the object of this specific area of research is

inevitably a reconstructed one based on folklore, mainly folk songs, historical documents, linguistic data. With the malleability and interpretative elasticity of folklore, and ideologically charged historical sources such as church visitation protocols, the reconstruction of Latvian mythology even as an academic enquiry has inevitably implied a certain degree of improvisation and debatable generalisation. For example, even though Latvians as an ethnos consolidated around the 16th century, the concept of Latvian mythology is chronologically understood as located in the pre-Christian time when the Baltic historical ethnic groups of Latgalians, Selonians, Couronians, Semigallians, and the Finno-Ugric Livs inhabited the territory of Latvia. Instead of reconstructing the particular mythologies of these groups, a generalised version of pre-Christian ancient Latvian mythology is the accepted version of this reconstruction: "[A] belief system and a pantheon which, in fact, never existed" (Reidzāne & Laime 2018: 110). This scholarly reconstruction has implied a selective attitude towards the already scarce source material, especially in terms of folklore, excluding those with recognisable Christian influences: "This layer has even been regarded as a kind of rubbish, despite popular beliefs having been syncretic over the past seven hundred years" (Reidzāne & Laime 2018: 111; see also Lielbārdis 2018). Instead, it has been more appealing to link Latvian mythology with a more ancient Indo-European belief system.

To add another layer of contention, the topic of mythology itself has always belonged to multiple discursive realms as the academic pursuit has been closely connected with lay interpretations making mythology a contested realm of knowledge production: "[T]he invented mythological beings exist in the public realm with the same epistemic status as deities discovered by academic researchers. Mythological images, surviving from the times of tribal society or invented just recently, circulate between different domains of knowledge with or without scholarly claimed authenticity" (Ķencis 2012: 77). This is both true today and was also true at the time when Brastiņš introduced his version of mythological ornament as Latvian mythology had then already gone through the creation and deconstruction of a pseudo pantheon inspired by Prussian and Ancient Greek examples (Ķencis 2012: 74). Apart from the conditions of folk ornament and mythology research mixed with the settings of cultivation of culture during the national awakening, which became the interwar period cultural nationalism described above, it was Brastiņš' personality, experience, and involvement with the Dievturība pre-Christian revival movement that affected his version of the folk ornament and mythology nexus.

1.2. Intellectual Biography of Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942)

With an education in art, and military training, Ernests Brastiņš (see Figure 1) was a creative personality with diverse interests. Although without formal education in history, archaeology, or folkloristics, he had a considerable influence on how particular subjects within these disciplines have been perceived by the general public. Despite the criticism that some of his theories have received, both from his peers and contemporary authors, he has been described as a charismatic personality who captivated others with his ideas and attracted "artists, writers, and cultural workers like a magnet" (Kursīte 1990: 12). The general acceptance of the idea of the connection between folk ornament and mythology, which is behind most ornament practice today, is one of the examples of how long lasting his ideas have turned out to be.

In the circles of historians and archeologists, Brastiņš is best known for his pioneering work on the archeological explorations of hillforts in Latvia. As a director of the Latvian War Museum, and later affiliate of the Board of Monuments, from 1922 to 1927 he spent his summers with a small team of colleagues travelling through Latvia in a horse-drawn carriage locating, describing and measuring hillforts (Urtāns 1989). These efforts resulted in the publication of four books[4] which still are a part of archeologist's curriculum today. One of the facts that testify to the influence of his ideas is that these books, like most of his other works, despite being banned during the Soviet occupation, continued to influence the work of archeologists, with information passed on orally (Vaska 2017: 19).

During his hillfort explorations Brastiņš did a bit of folklore collecting, and these materials are deposited at the archives of Latvian Folklore, collection LFK [50]. In addition, folklorists know him because of his unpublished work on the mythological index for the Krišjānis Barons' *Latvju Dainas* (1878–1915), the first comprehensive scholarly publication of folk songs. On a more contested note, Brastiņš is known because of the impression that his ideas on the connection between folklore and his imagined ancient Latvian religion have left on the interpretation of folklore. In art history, he is known as a graduate of the Stieglitz Technical School of Drawing where he studied from 1911 to 1916, and as a member of several artists' organisations, such as the Independent Artists' Union and the Mūksala Artists' Society.

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[4] Brastiņš, Ernests 1923. *Latvijas pilskalni. I. Kuršu zeme*. Rīga: Vālodze; Brastiņš, Ernests 1923. *Latvijas pilskalni. Vidzeme*. Rīga: Pieminekļu valdes izdevums; Brastiņš, Ernests 1926. *Latvijas pilskalni. Zemgale un Augšzeme*. Rīga: Pieminekļu valdes izdevums; Brastiņš, Ernests 1928. *Latvijas pilskalni. Latgale*. Rīga: Pieminekļu valdes izdevums.

Figure 1. Ernests Brastiņš with his firs wife Milda Brastiņa in the 1920s. Photo by M. Lapiņš. Source: RTMM 841228, E. Brast. F 2/4, Latvian Literature and Music Museum.

Brastiņš's most lasting legacy are his activities in the field best described in emic terms as the ancient Latvian religion. Brastiņš was the founder of the Latvian pre-Christian revival movement Dievturība (see Figure 2), formed in the first half of the 1920s among intellectuals who envisioned a restoration of the "ancient religion" of Latvians using folklore (Misāne 2000; Ozoliņš 2013; Stašulāne & Ozoliņš 2017; Stašulāne 2019). The consolidation of ideas leading to the formation of Dievturība and its development cannot be seen as a separate phenomenon outside the ideological contexts of the interwar period. Describing the somewhat quaint relationship that Dievturība had with nationalism, Agita Misāne has stated that Dievturība is "a phenomenon that belongs equally to two realms – the world of religions and nationalism, i.e., to political ideology, and this dual affiliation has given it a unique place in Latvian social and religious history" (Misāne 2005: 101). Adherence to his own created ideologies and attempts to bend archeological and folklore material to those ideologies, or to romanticise them, is behind most of the criticism he has received. As described by archeologist and folklorist Juris Urtāns:

> Even though Brastiņš had mastered a wide range of material about Latvia's ancient history, still he was not a historian by education. It seems that is the reason why in his works there are some artistic and romantic strands, some flashes of thoughts without providing a chain of causal relationships mandatory for historians. Nevertheless, it has made Brastiņš's works on ancient history more colourful, although an unbiased and knowledgeable critic could argue against his proposed ideas (Urtāns 1989: 47).

In trying to explain and in a way advocate for Brastiņš, but at the same time maintaining a critical stance, folklorist Janīna Kursīte has proposed looking at his works as an artistic way of knowing, led by logical intuition:

> The weak part of his work is the scientific analysis, as it is overshadowed by intuition, guesswork, and inner feelings. Is it bad? Depends on how one takes it. If the scientific language is the point of reference, then it is bad. Not in vain the research works of Brastiņš have been scolded as nonscientific or pseudoscientific. And these indeed are not scientific works in our sense, they are closer to art, partially taking from the kind of knowledge contained in the folklore itself (Kursīte 1990: 12).

Judging by the reception of his work on folk ornament among the general public or the currently increasing interest in contemporary society in the ideas of Dievturība or the ideology behind it in a broader sense, Brastiņš's ideas as a form of intuitive knowledge have appealed greatly to the general public, despite criticism from academia.

Figure 2. Dievturi wedding ceremony performed by Ernests Brastiņš. On the left Latvian artist Jēkabs Bīne. Photo by Krišs Rake, 1930s. Digital archives of Latvian Dievturi congregation.

Brastiņš's view on ornament was formed by his education at the Stieglitz School of Technical Drawing in St. Petersburg, in the Russian Empire. In fact, many of the Latvian artists who were interested in ornament had studied there, for example Jūlijs Madernieks (1870–1955), Rihards Zariņš (1869–1939), Ansis Cīrulis (1983–1942), Jānis Sudmalis (1887–1984). The "grammar of ornament", too, was one of the subjects taught at the Stieglitz School (Hilton 2011: 223–224). As is evident from the references in his publications, Brastiņš, among other authors, was familiar with the works of Russian art critic and publicist Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906), who was passionate about folk art. Stasov was one of the founders of the folk art revival in the 1870s and 1880s, which "was an attempt to encourage and preserve the physical manifestations of the supposedly authentic Russian culture of the rural masses" (Warren 2009: 748). In 1872, Stasov published a detailed and elaborate study of the ornament in Russian folk art, *Russian Folk Ornament: Embroidery, Weaving, Lace*, in which he "presented folk embroidery and lace as a ready-made grammar of ornament for a revival of national art in all its forms" (Salmond 2016: 4). Regarding the meaning of folk ornament, Stasov wrote:

> Do the images in our embroidery have any significance? Are they not simply the products of fantasy and an arbitrary game of lines? Never. The ornaments of all new peoples in general come from the deep past, and for the peoples of the ancient world an ornament never contained a single superfluous line: each stroke has its meaning here, is a word, a phrase, an expression of well-known concepts, ideas. The series of ornamentation are a connected speech, a coherent melody, having its fundamental cause and not intended for the eyes alone, but also for the mind and the feelings (1872 [2016]: 193).

When Brastiņš introduced his ideas on ornament, he referred to Stasov, saying that "all the ornaments come from the ancient past and even the smallest line has its meaning, that expresses certain concepts and images of folk" (Brastiņš 1922: 41).

Even though Brastiņš's contribution to the ornament and mythology nexus became the best-known and best-practiced and was developed further, and indisputably it is the most concise work that laid the foundation of the current practice of mythological ornament, he wasn't the first to express the view that mythology and ornament were connected in the Latvian context. In 1914, Arvēds Švābe (1888–1959), a historian, lawyer, writer and folklorist, published a relatively little-known article on Latvian folk song that included a part about folk ornament. With minor changes, this article was republished in 1923, the same year that Brastiņš's book on ornament and mythology came out. In the initial article, with reference to art historian Ernst Grosse's (1862–1927) book *The Beginnings of Art,*[5] Švābe proposed the idea that Latvian geometric folk ornament initially had more religious than aesthetic significance (Švābe 1914: 282). By

[5] First published in 1897, although Švābe was referring to the Russian translation published in 1899.

illustrating his case with examples from folk songs, Švābe discusses the elements of herringbone, stars, the sun, and the cross. The closest Švābe comes to matching the elements with mythological entities is when discussing the swastika, or ugunskrusts, as the symbol of thunder, the sun wheel as a symbol of the sun, and the protective abilities of the morning star and the cross of the night hag. By asking what the purpose of "inscribing these sacred signs onto clothing" was, Švābes mentions the benevolence of the ornament, stating that since its beginnings, ornament served the magical function of protecting the wearer's life and health from evil. He also mentions that later on this mythological meaning had faded away and ornament became aesthetic only (Švābe 1914: 285). This means that the ideas of the benevolent abilities of folk ornament that are so pronounced in contemporary practice have been part of the discourse surrounding ornament since the first half of the 20th century.

1.3. Cultural and Political Agendas of Folk Ornament Revival

Revivals are a "world-wide phenomenon, highly complex and rich in form and meaning" (Ronström 1996: 7), with various local manifestations. However, as processes of constructing meaning and producing change, revivals are in most cases motivated by overt cultural and political agendas (Livingston 1999: 66). In highlighting the activist nature as one of the defining characteristics of revivals, Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill have stated that "[w]hile it is possible that this motive may be aesthetic, in the majority of cases there are clear (if sometimes unspoken) agendas linked to contemporary social, cultural, and/or political circumstances" (2014: 10). In the case of the folk ornament and mythology nexus, the ideological agenda behind Ernests Brastiņš's work was explicit, which is one of the reasons why I conceptualise his and his followers' efforts as revival. Brastiņš's vision of the rebirth of elements of folk art through applied arts and crafts was motivated by the aspiration to develop a national visual style and culture for the newly independent Latvian state. However, his revivalist endeavour reached further than ornament and mythology. His first revivalist effort of ornament was organically fused into a religious effort as the practice of mythological ornament became part of the Dievturi doctrine. Revivals of both ornament and religion were guided by Brastiņš's sympathies towards nationalist thought, which the second part of the interwar period took on an extreme right-wing character (Stašulāne 2012).

The interwar period in Latvia, which followed the proclamation of independence in 1918 and two years of the Latvian War of Independence (1918–1920), was the era of establishing and strengthening Latvian statehood, for the first time allowing self-determination for the Latvian people. This relatively short period of twenty years has been described as one of the most important in articulating nationalist ideas and producing Latvian nationalist political philosophy; in many respects it "came to define the cultural and political meaning of Latvianness"

(Zaķe 2007: 291). When describing types of motivation behind revivals, apart from dissatisfaction with aspects of the modern world and political agendas employed for both left-wing and right-wing purposes, Bithell and Hill have emphasised concerns over reinforcing the identity of an ethnic or minority group, or nation, often together with a distancing from foreign ethnic or cultural elements (2014: 10–12). Both the concerns over identity and national culture, and also distancing from foreign ethnic or cultural elements were a part of Brastiņš's work. Brastiņš was among the most pronounced nationalist intellectuals – poets, writers, academics, publicists, journalists – who were involved in the formation and dissemination of nationalist ideas and symbols during the interwar period (Zaķe 2005; 2007). The agenda for nationalist intellectuals was guided by belief "in creating a perfect statehood of national culture that would be focused on protection of Latvian ethnic difference" (Zaķe 2005: 97), meaning language, traditions, lifestyle, and history. Nationalist intellectuals envisioned how, if the new state focused on strengthening Latvians' cultural uniqueness, they would be able "to join the old nations on (culturally) equal terms" (Zaķe 2005: 104).

When proposing the ornament and mythology nexus, Brastiņš was working based on the part of nationalist ideology that emphasised the uniqueness of Latvian culture. This emphasis often went hand in hand with hostile attitudes towards foreign cultural elements. Thus, for the revival of national art, with ornament as an integral part, to take place, in Brastiņš view, Latvian culture had to be cleansed of alien elements:

> This [renaissance of folk art] could happen when we treat every foreign product of French or German material culture that has come across our border as a guest, but not as a citizen. All fashions in life and art dictated by Paris, Berlin, or Moscow should no longer be coveted. It remains awkward and somewhat shameful to live off the achievements of foreign nations when great and peculiar artistic possibilities at our home have remained uncultivated. It is a crime not only against our nation but also against the rest of humanity…. Let's beware of Europe. Let's admire it, but not get carried away. We have the right to a specific culture of forms equivalent to Europe (Brastiņš 1925: 87–88).

This quote illustrates that indeed Brastiņš was aiming at cultural uniqueness achieved by the rejection of foreign cultural elements as a way to enable the newly established state to join those same old nations whose cultural elements needed to be cast aside. With the belief that "the decorative styles from Old Europe" should be dropped in order to develop an ethnic style that would be characteristic specifically of Latvians, Brastiņš cited Finland and Germany as examples, explaining that:

> Other countries whose art had been at similar conditions as Latvians is now, have already gone through such an awakening. Nations lacking their applied arts forms, were not shy to create them artificially, to avoid the worn-out forms of historical styles. To create their style, even the tiniest bits of ancient traditions and practices were used (1923: 9).

The concerns over external cultural pressure were directed at his peers and fellow artists, but they also reached further back in history. Brastiņš's criticism, in post-colonial overtones, was directed at Baltic German cultural influence whose colonial dominance had extended over Baltic territories since the 13th century. Therefore a truly Latvian folk art had its roots in the time before the arrival of Christianity. The following quote by Brastiņš shows the idea of flourishing folk art among prosperous societies living in harmony with nature and deities as well as his intention to actively form the perception of prehistory as the Golden Age of the Latvian people:

> It was easy for art to breathe when Dievs[6] in the broad grey coat wade Latvian fields, and when white Laima[7] laid the paths for little orphan girls, and when Kurbads and Kalējpuika[8] fought with miscreations and perpetrators; in other words – when the beliefs of the folk were alive. By the sound of the Christian church bells, age-old deities one after another left the fields, homesteads, and hearts of ancient Latvians taking the content of art with them. Even though there were attempts to fill the shortage of content that monks dragged in, art couldn't find its real means of manifestation, and the stylistic elements of folk art … had to end (1922: 53).

This interpretation of history became particularly explicit after the coup by Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942) in 1934 which ended the short period of parliamentary democracy in Latvia and established an authoritarian regime. Part of the authoritarian cultural policy was aimed at strengthening this kind of understanding of history, with nationalist intellectuals actively participating in installing a vision of prosperous and highly organised Latvian society before the arrival of Christianity: "Their mission was to portray Latvians as a heroic nation and discover their mythical Golden Age" (Zaķe 2007: 295). The idea of the mythological interpretation of ornament was based on this national narrative and in return mythological interpretation legitimised it.

1.4. Revival Shifts

The transfer of selected elements of the past to the present is inevitably a process of de- and re-contextualisation (Bauman & Briggs 1990). Even when treating the source material with strict accuracy, the revived cannot be the same as the point of supply. On a more poetic note, "[t]he already alive resists revival", as put by Owe Ronström, thus "in as much as life is a prelude to death, remembering is a prelude to forgetting. Revivals owe their existence not to life and remembrance so much as to death and forgetting because it is from the dead and forgotten that

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[6] In Latvian the name 'Dievs' designates both the mythological pagan deity and the Christian God.

[7] Laima is the deity of destiny in Latvian mythology, responsible for the course of human life.

[8] Kurbads and Kalējpuika are heroes from Latvian folk tales.

revivals are produced" (2014: 43). This relationship between forgetting and remembering echoes with Ernests Brastiņš's evaluation of the state of folk ornament when he took up the topic: "Today we can talk about the Latvian ornament as long gone because in general it is no longer practiced among the people and some artists consider it low-value peasant art. For these and other reasons, the real Latvian ornament is completely forgotten" (1923: 8). Thus the forgotten and absent in folk art was what paved the way for revived mythological ornament. In Brastiņš's proposition to explore the stylistic elements of Latvian folk art by drawing parallels between mythology and ornament, he wrote: "When starting to work on this, first there is an impression as if walking in a dark cellar where one can't see anything. Nonetheless, later the eyes get used to the dark and it is possible to distinguish objects and contours" (1923: 22). In his book *Latviešu ornamentika* (*Latvian Ornamentation*, 1923) the contours he managed to distinguish were ten folk ornaments each representing a mythological entity. The logic behind coupling a specific ornament with a mythology was based on the wish to establish a connection between the visual representations of natural phenomena connected with a mythological entity and descriptions of the specific functions of that entity. The bond was established by the evidence of folklore, specifically folk songs, riddles, legends, and beliefs.

The combinations between mythology and ornament proposed by Brastiņš deserve scrutiny for, as I show in article IV, they continue to shape contemporary ornament practice, and have generally gone unchallenged. The elements of ornament Brastiņš discussed were from archeological artefacts and folk crafts, which he knew well due to his experience with archeology and work with the museum collections. However, the combinations of visual elements and mythology were a product of his creativity (See Figures 3 and 4 for visualizations of folk ornament). The following description of specific ornaments and their mythological meanings is given as imagined by Brastiņš in his *Latviešu ornamentika*. The oldest of the Latvian deities, and also the main one, according to Brastiņš, is the **Father of Heaven** or the God (Debesstēvs, Dievs), who created the rest of the celestial deities and whose origins reach back to the mythology of the Indo-European ancestors. By connecting heaven as a natural phenomenon and mythology where heaven is imagined in the form of an arch or housetop, then the ornament of the Father of Heaven is in a similar form – i.e. a triangle or a semicircle. Father of Heaven is paired up with his female counterpart **Mother Earth** (Zemes māte), visualised as a horizontal line. However, most of her functions are taken over by a more recent goddess of destiny, **Laima**. In the household, Laima resides near the threshold, and in folk songs often her attribute is a broom. Thus, Brastiņš established a visual connection between the broom and the motif of herringbone which is often a motif of feminine textiles. **Jumis** is one of the fertility deities. Imagined to dwell in the last unharvested sheaf of grain or flax and connected with harvest rituals, he is symbolised by two crossed ears of grain. In geometric ornament, Jumis takes the shape of what could best be described as an upside-down letter W. From celestial deities, the most popular both in ornament and folk songs is the **Sun** (Saule). All the round motifs, circles, wheels, and also square

forms represent the Sun. Brastiņš believed that the Sun was the most characteristic element of Latvian ornament for it might have been the only symbol whose meaning through the centuries has not been forgotten. A close counterpart of the Sun is the **Moon** (Mēness). As the Sun is imagined as feminine, and the Moon as masculine, then the Indo-European inherited motif of the heavenly wedding has been preserved in Latvian folk songs, according to Brastiņš. The Moon in the ornament looks like an angular letter C, representing his crescent form. **Stars** (zvaigznes) are depicted as crosses with four or more branches. These emerged independently of any Christian symbolism that this depiction might evoke visually. A specific type of star is the **Cross of the night hag** (Lietuvēna krusts) which has five or more rays and has to be drawn with a single line. The Latvian version of the Indo-European aurora or dawn is **Austra**. Based on a folksong motif about the Sun dawning in a special tree with golden branches, roots of copper, and silver leaves, Brastiņš proposes that Austra's ornamental form is an angularly shaped tree. The motif of the swastika (ugunskrusts) is assigned to the **Thunder God** (Pērkons) based on its visual resemblance to lightning.

I.

„Latviešu ornamentikas" pirmajā daļā vispārējos vilcienos tika uzmests apraksts latviešu raksta saturam. Šim saturam visā vairumā bija saskatams mitoloģisks pamats, kā tas parasts ari ikvienas citas tautas ornamentam, kuram vēsture ļāvusi vaļu savdabīgi izveidoties. Aplūkotais saturs izvirzīja motīvu virkni, kura kā vairāk vaj mazāk negrozīga elementu kopa bija saistijusies ar attiecīgām grafiskām zīmēm jeb zimboliem.

Latviešu ornamenta satura elementi, kas saistīti ar seno mitoloģisko pasaules uzskatu, savās vienkāršotās zīmēs varēja tikt sagrupēti piem. šādi: Šās zīmes tika uzlūkotas, kā latvju raksta **vecakais kodols**. Viņas vairs neļāvās tālāk vienkāršoties, jo tad tās tūdaļ zaudētu savu etniski-mītisko jēgu. Saules vai zvaigznes zīme pušu pārdalīta, nesaistītos vairs ar jēdzienu par sauli vai zvaigzni, bet pārvērstos gluži neko nesaturošā punktā vai līnijā.

Latvju rakstu satura iztirzāšana bija vajadzīga, jo grafisko zimbolu nozīme bij sākuse aizmirsties un līdz ar to gājusi zudumā iespēja orienteties ari šo zimbolu mākslinieciskā izlietošanā. Sevišķi nācās baidīties no varbūtējiem bojajumiem un kropļojumiem, kuŗi nesakristu ar centieniem **latviski** rotat.

Latvju raksta satura apskate stiprināja iespēju ar lielāku noteiktību tuvoties izziņas nolūkā latvju raksta pašai svarīgakai pusei, proti, gluži ārišķīgi-konstruktīvai. Šī ārišķā puse, jeb kodola čaula, kā zinams, nēsā sevī tīri mākslinieciskas vērtības un tāpēc šķitās sevišķi rūpīgi ņemama. Viņa solīja uzrādīt savas uzbūves noslēpumus un savstarpējo attiecību

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Figure 3. The basic elements of Latvian folk ornament according to Ernests Brastiņš. Page from *Latvju raksta kompozīcija* (*The Composition of Latvian Ornaments*, 1925).

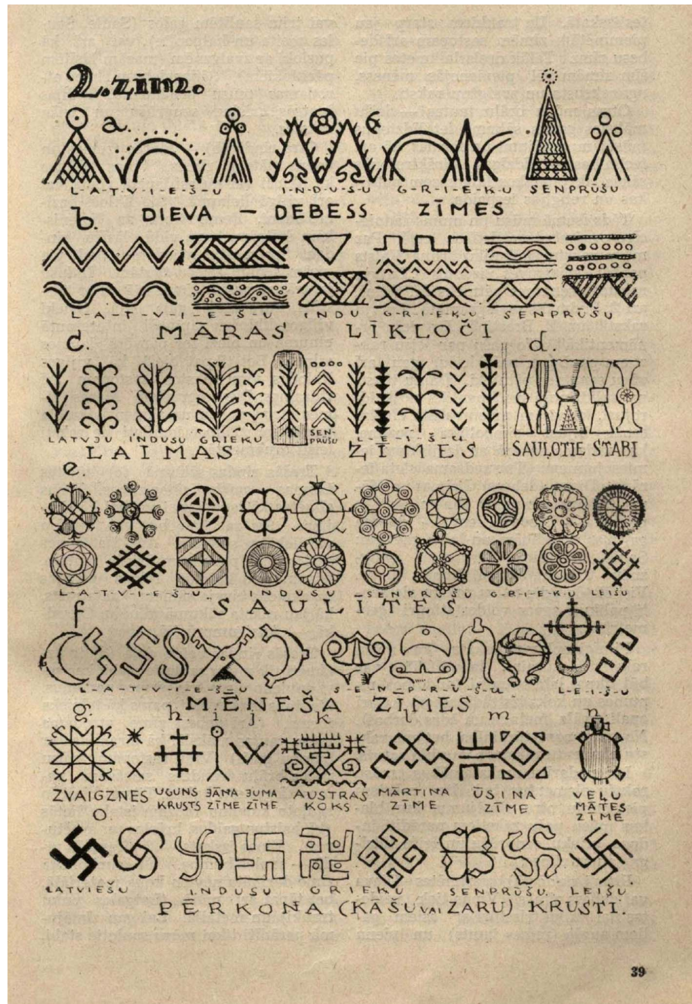

Figure 4. Latvian folk ornaments according to mythological interpretation. Drawing by Jēkabs Bīne, 1936. Published in *Sējējs*, No. 1, January 1.

Brastiņš was using the prevailing scholarly theories of his time, according to which Latvian mythology was part of a broader stratum of Baltic mythology with roots in Indo-European culture. He relied almost entirely on the work of Pēteris Šmits and his book *Latviešu mitoloģija* (*Latvian Mythology*, 1918). Šmits' reconstruction of Latvian mythology was based on comparative linguistics emphasising the linkage between Baltic and Indo-European languages. As the Baltic languages closely resembled the hypothetical ancient Indo-European language, then Baltic mythology must be similar to Indo-European mythology (Ķencis 2012: 65). These ideas were combined with Brastiņš's interpretation of folklore and folk ornament. Inevitably this process included a certain degree of selection. For example, the deities chosen by Brastiņš did not exhaust the sources of Latvian mythology. According to him, the lowest-ranking mythological beings such as

various mythological mothers mentioned in Latvian folk songs had no place in ornament since the relationship with them was purely practical and didn't involve any ceremonies (Brastiņš 1923: 77). This was possibly because Šmits had written that "the cult of Mothers is a recent phenomena in Latvian mythology" and was most likely a borrowing from the Finno-Ugrians (Šmits 1918: 85–86). While *Latviešu ornamentika* was the first and also the most concise book on the mythology and ornament nexus, the process of coupling ornament and mythology did not end with it and many of the elements that form the canon of mythological ornament today were established later on. For example, during the 1930s, artist Jēkabs Bīne added to the list of mythological ornament the patron of horses, Ūsiņš, and deities connected with seasonal celebrations such as Jānis representing the midsummer celebration, Mārtiņš representing the autumn harvest, and others.

The source material that Brastiņš used was from different historical periods. The oldest ornaments date back to the Palaeolithic era, for example the zigzag. The newest arrival to the mythological interpretation is probably the eight-pointed star, which was present in the territory of contemporary Latvia from the 16th century. Ornamented material culture artefacts range from the oldest Stone Age archeological discoveries to 19th-century folk art. This blend of historical time periods and mix of material sources in a unified vision of a timeless ethnic ornament represents what in the context of revivals is conceptualised as shifts. To return to the idea that the revived cannot be the same as the point of supply, shifts are central to understanding the operational logic behind revivals: "A way to conceptualise this phenomenon [revival, D.Ū.L.] is as shifts between different historic, geographic, social, and cultural contexts, between the individual and collective, private and public, informal and formal, and between different mythical geographies" (Ronström 2014: 45). Through this historical shift of blending centuries of sources into a time-unbound folk ornament, each of the elements is ripped from its own history, its use through different historical epochs, and its historical styles. This includes changes in visuality. Both in archeological material and folk art the specific elements of ornament are always closely connected to the form of the decorated object. However, by extracting specific elements, they become detached from the objects they used to decorate and the specific materials used in each case. This visual extraction and individualisation are both symbolic shifts that outline the change from folk art as a romantically imagined communal creation by the anonymous spirit of the folk into art as a subject of individual authorship, created in correspondence to the needs of national identity formation.

Apart from the historical shift, a social shift within the context of discovering and defining folk art also took place. The interest in folk art that began with the Latvian national awakening at the second half of the 19th century and continued during the interwar period brought folk art from rural to urban contexts, from one social strata to another not only as objects in museum collections but also as objects consumed by the educated urban middle classes. Their meaning from vernacular artefacts created and consumed in rural communities shifted to storages of national symbolism. As folk art meant peasant art (Sirica 2019a: 363), it was

the rural population that "truly embodied Latvian ethnos and thus the farmer lifestyle became identified as the 'organic' repository of the national essence" (Zaķe 2007: 316). It was up to urban intellectuals to transfer the extracted essence of folk art back to the folk themselves taking on a new status as a national symbol: "[O]ld rags that had little value to their peasant-class owners bore diverse and colourful treasures of folk ornament for researchers and other enthusiasts" (Ķencis 2019a: 8). By emphasising the role of outsiders in conceptualising and defining folk art, Ewa Klekot has stated that "folk art is, in fact, less a creation of the folk … than of the elites, including the folklorists and ethnographers, as the sense-giving process has been dominated by them" (Klekot 2010: 72).

During this shift from rural to urban, the source material not only went through a process of selection but was also tuned up to meet the demands of the national narrative of the glorious golden age of the Latvian ancestors. For example, although Brastiņš introduced new mythology-related ornament names, this does not mean that there were no names for the ornament used among the creators of rural vernacular art. In comparison to mythological names introduced by Brastiņš, the names of specific ornaments preserved in folklore and still in use at the time were poetic reflections of nature, like wax rolls, cartwheels, ram horns, hawk claws, flies, crows, piglet eyes, etc. (Sudmalis 1971: 240). The tradition in such a form as imagined by Brastiņš and his followers did not and had never existed among the folk. Even if there had been any ancient layers of mythological belief manifested in the names of the ornament, there is no documented evidence of that in strictly academic understanding. For example, in her study of ornament in folk costume of the Kurzeme region, historian Velta Rozenberga has stated that she sees no connection between folk ornament and elements of pre-Christian religious beliefs. Even though Rozenberga does not deny the possibility that such a connection might once have existed, she writes that "in the living memory of the folk no evidence has been perceived of the connection between ornament and mythological entities, and there is no sources that would confirm this assumption, I see no scientific justification to connect ornament in the 20th century with the names of the mythological deities" (1997: 20). However, even those ornament researchers who criticised Brastiņš admit that folk ornament tends to have benevolent meaning, and it was used for protective purposes (Zemītis & Rozenberga 1991; Karlsone 1994; also Welters 1999 for examples from elsewhere). Thus, through the social shift from rural vernacular art to ethnic folk art used for identity building purposes and defined by urban intellectuals, what was practised among the folk, was tuned up to fit the imagined tradition of ornament that represents mythology.

The mythological interpretation of folk ornament has received criticism both from Brastiņš peers and contemporary authors. After *Latviešu ornamentika* was published, it was reviewed by the aforementioned Arvēds Švābe. Even though it seems that Brastiņš had probably built his work by developing Švābe's ideas, in the review Švābe concluded that Brastiņš attempt to interpret ornament had failed. Švābe's main objection was the fact that Brastiņš had used mythology to explain ornament, even though the academic enquiry into the Latvian mythology

and religion was itself still in the process, thus "the unknown cannot be explained by the nonexistent" (Švābe 1923: 613). Another point of criticism came from the poet and doctor Andrejs Kurcijs (1884–1959), who objected to the exaggeration of the uniqueness of Latvian folk ornament and called Brastiņš's approach inappropriate and unconvincing since "it is clearly visible that all the elements of the Latvian ornament found by Brastiņš are not specifically Latvian, but universal. A square or any other geometric shape is neither Latvian, nor French, nor Spanish" (Kurcijs 1925: 617). The most academically elaborate criticism from present-day authors is presented by historian Guntis Zemītis. Without belittling the positive effects that this national romanticism-inspired approach has had on promoting interest in local history and heritage, Zemītis sees Brastiņš ideas as erroneous because the connection between elements of ornament and deities are based mainly on Latvian folklore, but as folklore is hard to date, this creates false combinations. Further on, in line with the previously mentioned review by Kurcijs, Zemītis explains that many basic elements of the geometric ornament, such as the slanted and straight crosses or the broken zigzag can be traced back to the Mesolithic, and to early and middle Neolithic periods, when they cannot be connected with the deities later found in Baltic mythology. It is also impossible to prove that all elements of ornament that could correspond to certain deities existed in a given territory at the same time (Zemītis 2004: 31; also Zemītis 1994).

After the foundation of Dievturība hardly any of Brastiņš works can be evaluated without considering the ideological agendas that he was pushing for, thus from the academic point of view, the mythology and ornament nexus as proposed by Brastiņš and his followers is an artificially created system. Despite the criticism from academia both shortly after it was created, and in the works of contemporary authors, the traditionalisation of this individual creativity was so successful that the mythological perception of ornament is today accepted as traditional and self-explanatory. A telling example of this is the dissertation of one of the most prominent academic ornament researchers in Latvia, Baiba Vaska. In her dissertation, she uses some of the names of ornaments derived from mythological interpretation, doing so with the pretext that while she distances herself from the origins of these names, she still uses them because they are already established among the general public (Vaska 2012: 8). In defence of Brastiņš, Vaska has written that there is a tendency to reduce the importance of Brastiņš or even to discredit his contribution to the research of Latvian ornament because "as the founder of the Dievturi movement [Brastiņš, D.Ū.L.] tried to revive the old Latvian deities, using motifs of ethnographic and archaeological ornament as symbols. It is this aspect of Dievturība that has completely overshadowed his real contribution to the analysis of Latvian archaeological and mainly ethnographic ornament" (Vaska 2017: 15).

As a researcher in folkloristics, not history or archeology or art history, I have never felt the need to object to or confirm the ideas Brastiņš was proposing, nor have I ever felt the urge to provide my own reading and interpretation of the folk ornament. Just the opposite, I have always avoided this because ornaments and symbols carry meaning only as far as it is assigned to them by certain actors under

certain cultural and social conditions. Thus, my interest in this has been to follow how these ideas have found fertile ground, what have been the reasons and conditions behind that, and how these ideas have developed into the flourishing tradition that is evident today.

1.5. Post–revival: Commodification and Contemporary Spirituality

When discussing the stages of development of revivals, Carorine Bithell and Juniper Hill have noted that logically there comes a certain moment when the original motivation behind the revival loses its impulse because the revival has either failed or succeeded (2014: 29). Various scholars have proposed different opinions about the lifespans of revivals. Some suggest that after revivals experience a certain boom, there follows an inevitable breakdown; others see revival as a "recurring, cyclical process that is part of the natural ebb and flow of culture" (Bithell & Hill 2014: 28–29). Instead of either of these poles, Bithell and Hill invite us to consider post-revival as the next phase of revival, characterising it as "the recognition that a revived tradition has become firmly established in a new context where it can no longer be described as either moribund or threatened and is therefore no longer in need of rescue" (2014: 29). Post-revival then means that the revival ideas and practices gradually settle into mainstream discourses or, alternatively, acquire "a niche identity apart from the mainstream but with their future seemingly secure in the hands of a new subculture or affinity group" (Bithell & Hill 2014: 28). In the current post-revival phase of the ornament and mythology nexus, both variants are valid, as parts of the nexus are keenly absorbed by mainstream culture, making this one of the most popular expressions of ethnic visuality in Latvia. At the same time there are nuanced niche practices and products for those with a more pronounced interest. The post-revival phase is characterised by a pronounced commercial motivation fuelling large parts of ornament practice today. There has also been a shift from local and national to global, meaning the globally circulating ideas have influenced interpretation and practice of ornament. With globally sourced ideas I refer to contemporary spirituality as an important part of the ornament and mythology nexus in the current post-revival phase. This approach continues the ideas of ornament's benevolence expressed during the interwar period, although in contemporary practice it has gained a strong addition in the form of a global component, for example the advent of the influence of Eastern religious ideas, as I have discussed in article IV.

One of the earliest examples of contemporary spirituality affecting ornament practice is the spin-off of the folk ornament and mythology nexus – the contemporary myth of the Lielvārde belt. This belt, which is part of the folk costume of a particular region in Latvia, has become a mythified object carrying information on "the origin of the universe and human DNA", its crimson and white geometric ornaments promising to provide its "wearer with protective powers from evil" (Gross 2015). This story originated in 1979 when Estonian artist Tõnis

Vint (1942–2019), who was interested in the ornaments and symbols of different cultures, published an article, and a year later co-produced a film called *Belt of Lielvārde* (*Lielvārdes josta*, 1980) (see more in Misāne 2016: 169–176). Vint expressed the idea of the possibility of "reading" the messages encoded in the ornament on Lielvārde's belt (Vint 1979). Notwithstanding the criticism from academia (Bička 1991), with several additions this version has become so appealing and traditionalised to the extent that today it is included in the cultural canon of Latvia (Gross 2015).

As mentioned before, ideas of the benevolence of ornament were present during the interwar period, although they have certainly intensified in contemporary settings with traditional cultural practices being saturated with magic-like beliefs, most explicitly present in the many non-academic publications on folk ornamentation. With this interpretation, benevolent and even magical qualities are ascribed to ornament, proposing that ornament attracts good luck and money, brings fertility, assists with business, and protects from various evils and misfortunes. In interpreting this kind of post-revival shift towards contemporary spirituality and belief in the benevolence of folk ornament in article IV, I have relied on works by Alessandro Testa, who in my reading has detected similar kinds of change in traditional practice as part of a larger societal process which he has described as the "reconfiguration of tradition" in Europe, meaning re-enchantment, ritualisation, and heritagisation (Testa 2020; Isnart & Testa 2020). In the theorisation of these reconfigurations, Testa uses re-enchantment as a concept to account for the changes in contemporary Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe, where along with such phenomena as new religious movements, contemporary Paganism, magical practices, and contemporary forms of spirituality, one of the forms re-enchanted is vernacular tradition, i.e. the "re-appropriation of autochthonous religious representations and practices that had existed and/or are held to have existed before the modernisation" (Ładykowska, Teisenhoffer & Testa 2024: 11). Based on case studies of carnivalesque festival traditions in Italy (the revitalised carnival pantomime of the 'deer-man' in Castelnuovo al Volturno village in the Central Apennines), the Czech Republic (Masopust, a carnival-like festivity in Hlinsko v Čechách, Bohemia), and Spain (the carnival of Solsona, Catalonia), Testa describes changes brought on by the re-enchantment of traditions: "[A] rather striking one is the emergence – or re-emergence – of beliefs in their power to induce good luck and fertility through the ritual performances. As a consequence, a set of magical or pseudo-magical acts from times past have been invented, re-invented, or re-enacted" (Testa 2020: 23–24, also Testa 2017). The ornament and mythology nexus shows that similar cultural processes can be observed in Latvia as well, the most visible manifestation of this being the belief statements describing the benevolence of ornament. Testa sees this process as a blend of local and global inspiration and re-enchantment as "[d]rawing its strength from local traditional tropes, global imaginaries and representations of magic, primitiveness, and folkloric authenticity" (2020: 24), which is clearly visible in the hybrid ornament practices in contemporary Latvia. As I have discussed in article IV, Latvian folk ornament practice draws inspiration from globally sourced ideas, resulting for

example in Latvian folk ornament used in mandalas and images of chakras (see Figures 5 and 6). "[M]agical and/or quasi-religious traits can co-exist with secular and post-secular ones rather unproblematically," argues Testa (2020: 26), this conclusion is certainly true also for the Latvian case. To sum up, the contemporary practices of the folk ornament and mythology nexus in their post-revival phase includes several contradictory aspects, i.e. balancing tradition and innovation, ambiguous attitudes towards the commodification of traditional culture and spirituality for sale, and a rhetorical wish to position oneself against the tendencies of globalisation and act on nationalist sentiments, at the same time being open to the spiritual ideas and influences that come from global flows of information and other depositories of world cultures, hence entailing ongoing negotiations that shape the tradition.

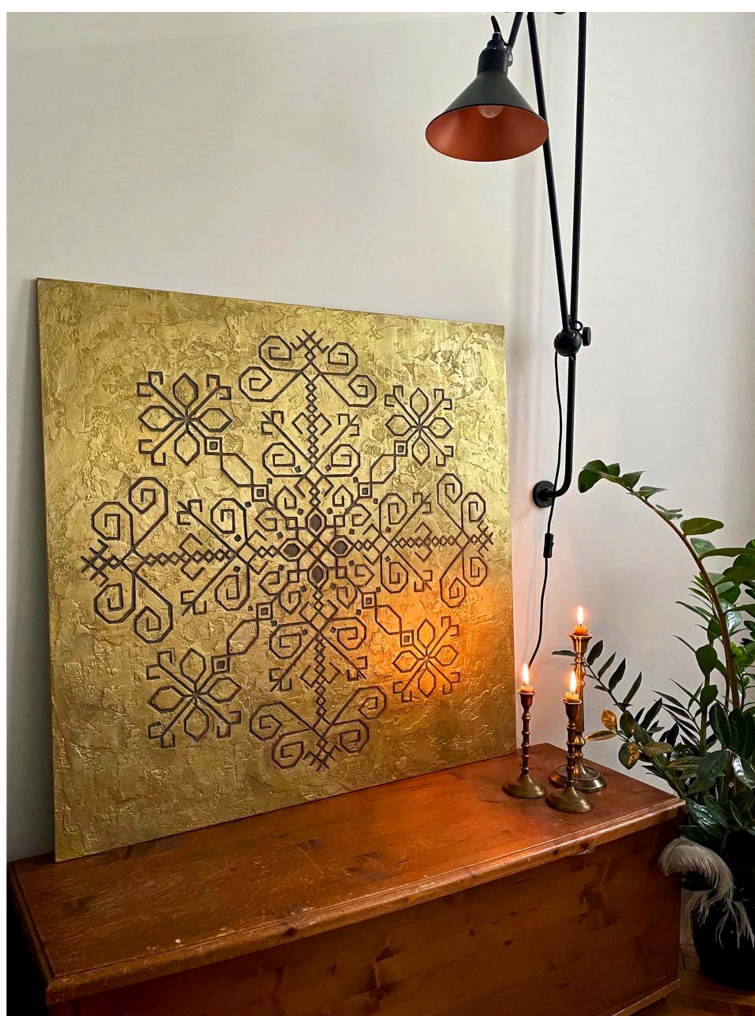

Figure 5. Mandala of the Heart. Composition of Latvian folk ornaments. Work and photo by Inga Skrastiņa, 2021.

Figure 6. Tree of Chakras. Each chakra is represented by a Latvian folk ornament. Work and photo by Inga Skrastiņa, 2021.

2. THE DEBATE ON FORM AND CONTENT IN FOLK ORNAMENT HISTORIES

The most common emic designation referring to folk ornament interpreted through mythology is 'Latvian signs' (latvju zīmes), although there are others with various degrees of vernacular poetics such as 'Latvian signs of strength' (Latvju spēka zīmes), 'Latvian designs' (Latvju raksti), 'ancient Latvian signs of protection' (seno latviešu aizsardzības zīmes), 'signs of ancestors' (senču zīmes), 'Latvian symbols' (latviešu simboli), or broader names such as 'Baltic signs' (Baltu zīmes), 'Baltic signs of strengths' (Baltu spēka zīmes). All of these emic names to a greater or lesser extent imply the presence of semantic content in folk ornament. Valuing the aspect of vernacular theorising in this (Briggs 2008), but at the same time aiming to present my research through analytical categories, I have intentionally chosen to use the more neutral, although not entirely etic, term, 'folk ornament'. Using this label allows me to account for the process of assigning content to geometric shapes through the formation of the ornament and mythology nexus.

To provide historical context and draw parallels with interpretative and creative practices regarding folk ornament elsewhere, I conceptualised these discussions as a debate on form and content. I aim to show that this debate, as regarding Latvian the folk ornament and mythology nexus created by Ernests Brastiņš, draws parallels in its underlying structural composition with similar ideas that have been present elsewhere. Furthermore, the form and content debate, even if not explicitly framed so, has been relevant to specific case studies that I have discussed in the dissertation articles. For example, in article II, which arose out of a question of what the Soviet policy toward folk ornament was, considering restrictions both in the creation and interpretation of culture, interconnection of form and content, was one of the avenues to explore because, with some exceptions, forms of folk ornament did not change and were not changed, although the possibilities of assigning content changed drastically. As Elo-Hanna Seljamaa has put it, native cultural forms were "temporary vehicles for spreading socialist ideology on the way to communism" (Seljamaa 2017: 276). The Soviet regime encouraged national imagery in the form of traditional folk elements, but only through appropriation, and with Soviet content embedded. Therefore, based on Seljamaa's work, an important conclusion that can be drawn also beyond the scope of article II, is that forms tend to outlive contents, therefore permitting different, even ambiguous, messages (Seljamaa 2017: 287). The form and content debate was also relevant in article III, with its analysis of how the same visual form – the swastika – represents a reservoir of clashing opinions that debate its content. My focus was on those arguing for a benevolent reading of the swastika with the intention of reclaiming and rehabilitating it for artistic and spiritual reasons based on belief in its benign nature. These claims are positioned against much widespread conviction, according to which the same visual form is the embodiment of unprecedented crimes in the history of humanity and is therefore despised and beyond redemption. In this case, those arguing for the benevolent reading of the visual

form are confronted with the impossibility of clearing the previously embedded contents.

Based on the emic labels and mythology-related content assigned to Latvian folk ornament, it could be argued that folk ornament functions as a symbol when perceived through the ornament and mythology nexus. Visual symbols by their definition stand for something beyond their literal appearance, representing ideas, concepts, or objects visually rather than words, and conveying meaning through a shared understanding or cultural association. Ornament is usually understood as something where aesthetic visuality dominates content and meaning. Art historian James Trilling defines ornament as "elaboration in which the visual appeal of form takes precedence over the emotional or intellectual appeal of content", thus "ornament is elaboration that relies primarily on the appeal of stylized or non-representational form" (Trilling 2001: 12–14). When classic historical art styles of ornament are analysed, for example rococo or baroque ornament, the emphasis on visual appeal does not raise questions. In contrast, as the ornament and mythology nexus in Latvia demonstrates, and as examples in the following paragraphs show, folk ornament is often perceived and interpreted as having symbol-like properties. This means that folk ornament is perceived not just in terms of form, but also content; it is not just merely visually pleasing decoration, it also has a story to unravel to those literate in understanding visual language. In this particular view, the visual aesthetics of folk ornament is only the outer shell of content conveyed by folk art, with ornament often being the main vehicle carrying meaning. Even though there are certain situations in which visual forms with roots in folk art become or are made into symbols, for example the swastika, this form – content relationship cannot be attributed to all cases of folk ornament.

This line of thinking, which assigns content to folk ornament, has been ingrained in the history of ornament research since the 19th century. Ornament as a subject of research is connected to different disciplines, such as art history, architecture, design, and archeology, and under the broader concepts of folk art and folk craft in anthropology, ethnology, cultural heritage studies, and folkloristics. Within art history, in the second half of the nineteenth century, ornament had become so important that it occupied "the center stage in the debates about art practice and art history" (Vandi 2017: 40). Back then scientific and applied interest in various forms and styles of ornament was so heightened that it has been called "nearly obsessive" (Necipoğlu & Payne 2016: 2). The 19th century in ornament research was also the age of eclecticism, because "[s]tyles of ornament from virtually every place and time were available, and many were in daily use. Antiquarian curiosity was inseparable from the search for new design ideas and applications" (Trilling 2001: 60). Both interest and eclecticism were echoed in encyclopaedia-type publications, one of the most popular still being *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856) by Owen Jones (1809–1874), an architect and design theorist who played a crucial role in popularising the study of ornament.

Part of the interest in the non-Western and indigenous folk art and ornament emerged from the idea that what historically under the colonial gaze was labelled 'primitive' and 'savage' art could offer answers to the origins of ornament, and

even art itself. Nineteenth-century scholars "[s]teeped as they were in the evolutionist creed they were convinced that we had an easy access to the remote past of our civilization…. The study of the decorative art of the 'savages' would therefore provide the key to our understanding of the origins of ornament" (Gombrich 1984: 222). Adding to that, like folklore in the 18th century, a Herderian understanding as an expression of the *Volksgeist* or 'spirit of the people', folk art was seen as the gateway to particular societies: "ornamented artifacts were understood to reveal the DNA of cultures and as such were the objects of scrutiny" (Necipoğlu & Payne 2016: 2). When introducing his ideas on the ornament and mythology nexus, Ernests Brastiņš drew on a similar line of reasoning, establishing parallels between language and ornament: "If people who are united by a common language are called a nation, then ornament can also be a determinant of nation. Just as there are no nations in the world that do not have a more or less distinctive language, there are no nations without ornament" (1923: 11).

However, the question of content turned out to be problematic when symbolism was perceived as a universal and essential characteristic of folk ornament, and especially when Eurocentric modes of analysis came into conflict with indigenous emic conceptualisations of folk art. James Trilling has pointed out that the human impulse to interpret visual motifs as representational and having content is very pronounced, and also undeniably satisfying because "it gives the sense of having broken through appearances to the motif's 'real' nature" (2001: 92). Art historian Ernst Gombrich has described this urge for 'content behind visuality' so eloquently that it will be quoted here at length:

> From the observation that decorative motifs can have a symbolic meaning, it was only too tempting a step to conclude that all motifs were originally conceived as symbols—though their meaning had been lost in the course of history. If that conclusion was justified a rich harvest beckoned to the historian who deciphered the symbolism of far distant ages. Once the meaning of these designs was established the monuments would again speak to us. There is no spell more potent than that cast by mysterious symbols of which the meaning has been forgotten. Who can tell what ancient wisdom may be embodied in these enigmatic shapes and forms? The aura surrounding Egyptian hieroglyphs before they could be read is but one example of this appeal of the unknown to the human imagination. The search for origins, for primeval knowledge and wisdom, seeks the support of any visible token with which it can be associated (1984: 218).

For Ernests Brastiņš, Latvian folk ornament presented a "riddle to be solved" (Brastiņš 1923: 11). Even though he approached this task with a healthy dose of scepticism, still some of the criticism his work received called his proposed ornament and mythology nexus an imaginary falsification (Dunsdorfs 1982: 204). Throughout the histories of ornament research, the over-exaggeration of the search for content in visual forms has caused debate and controversy. Some of this was carried out on an academic level as part of scholarly discussion, while others balanced on the line of pseudoscience and pure imagination, today serving as cautionary tales against essentialising the symbolism of folk ornament. To mention some examples, Ernst Gombrich describes 19th-century Dutch artist and

author Humbert de Superville's unpublished manuscript on the visual motif of the Medusa head, which he used as evidence for his theory that the "moon had only appeared in the sky very recently, causing a cosmic catastrophe of which he found traces all over the world" (Gombrich 1984: 220). James Trilling criticised art historian Rudolf Wittkower (1901–1971) diffusionist study *Eagle and Serpent: A Study in the Migration of Symbols* (1939). Wittkower traced the motif of the eagle in combat with a snake in ancient Mesopotamia, Western Europe, Northeast and Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, among the Aztecs, and elsewhere with the idea that the dispersion of the motif implies cultural contact and symbolises the conflict between good and evil. Trilling believes that Wittkower has not taken into consideration a simple biological fact that eagles really do eat snakes and that it is not possible to know "whether people in a given culture took up the theme out of a desire to emulate their neighbours, or independently, because they had been fascinated by the sight of eagles attacking snakes in real life" (2001: 111–112). A more academic and extended debate on whether textile patterns carry symbolic and 'readable' meaning relating to the woven ritual textile production of the Iban, an ethnic group in Borneo, living in the Malaysian state of Sarawak, is yet another example of how the question of form and content has played out in ornament research. In 1936 a study of Iban textile patterns was published by Alfred Cort Haddon (1855–1940), an influential British anthropologist and folklorist, whose view that Iban designs constitute a readable iconographic language became generally accepted. However, subsequent research by anthropologist Traude Gavin contradicts Haddon's interpretation. Gavin's argument is based on the fundamental differences between oral and literate cultures. For the Iban as an oral culture, the names of design motifs function as a mnemonic device (Gavin 1997: 284), so for example, designs that have the names of animals do not necessarily depict or represent these animals. For Haddon, Iban designs were pictographs, or a primitive form of language, and design motifs formed a story that could be 'read'. But as Gavin notes, "the notion of 'reading' an image in this way is not part of orally based thought" (1997: 283), therefore "[t]he presuppositions of the ethnographer whose frame of reference inevitable is rooted in literacy can lead to misunderstanding when studying art forms that were created within an oral culture" (2022: 2). Haddon had been interested in the topic before taking up Iban textiles. His book *Evolution in Art: As Illustrated by the Life-Histories of Designs* was published in 1895, and proposed an evolutionary look at ornament with the idea that "geometric motifs are the end result of an evolution by which a naturalistic picture was simplified beyond recognition" (Gombrich 1984: 222). Haddon was a proponent of "history of every form and pattern", and was convinced that there is 'readable' content in folk ornament:

> What is wanted is an interpretation of the form, of the meaning of odd little details of contour, of indentation, or of projection. No apparently insignificant superfluity is meaningless, they are silently eloquent witnesses of a past signification like the mute letters in so many of our words. Almost every line or dot of every ornament has a meaning, but we are without understanding, and have eyes and see not (Haddon 1895 [2020]: 245).

Just how pervasive these ideas were is demonstrated by the fact that they were also present in the part of the world that had a direct influence on the formation of the tradition of interpreting Latvian folk ornament. As discussed earlier, when Ernests Brastiņš introduced his ideas on Latvian folk ornament, he referred to Vladimir Stasov, whose works he probably encountered during his studies at the Stieglitz Technical Drawing School in St. Petersburg, Russian Empire. Stasov was a proponent of the idea that folk ornament carries content.

Another example relevant to the debate on the form and content of ornament is one of the Pennsylvania Dutch hex signs. Although geographically quite distant from the Latvian mythology and ornament nexus, in terms of how the interpretation of traditional culture, creation, and consumption of folk aesthetics and visual ethnicity has taken place in both cases allows me to dwell on the curious similarities of both cases. Pennsylvania Dutch or Germans are an ethnic group of settlers who emigrated to the United States in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries from German-speaking areas in Central Europe such as Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, forming a culturally distinct community in the state of Pennsylvania. As a part of their culture, emigres brought with them symbols and motifs from their homelands. The most often used were geometric designs with circular motifs, such as the six- and eight-pointed stars, whirling swastikas, wheels of fortune, and others, applied to household items, furniture, and tombstones, representing small and intimate expressions of ethnic visuality. However, at some point toward the middle of the 19th century, "an innovative folk artist in the Dutch Country performed a final creative step in the evolution of the hex sign by transferring the old geometrical patterns, in enlarged format, to the exteriors of the barns" (Yoder & Graves 2000: 7). From intimate and personal, these motifs became public.

Don Yoder and Thomas E. Graves (2000) distinguish two phenomena regarding the hex signs. First, the historical practice of painting geometrical designs on barns within the traditions of Pennsylvania Dutch folk art. Second, more recent, is the hex sign myth with the attribution of meanings to each symbol and the creation of new hex signs. Without precise knowledge of who was the first to paint geometric designs on barns, it is believed to have started in the 1860s, whereas the mythology about the hex signs has roots in the 1920s (Yoder & Graves 2000). The first to introduce this idea was journalist Wallace Nutting (1861–1941) in his book *Pennsylvania Beautiful* (1924), where he stated that the "barn stars had some sort of superstitious significance" (Fooks 2004: 2). Basing his information on one informant only, as it later turned out, Nutting wrote: "They are supposed to be a continuance of very ancient tradition, according to which these decorative marks were potent to protect the barn, or more particularly the cattle, from the influence of witches…. The hexafoos [hex sign] was added to its decoration as a kind of spiritual or demonistic lightning-rod" (Nutting 1924, quoted in Yoder & Graves 2000: 11). In popular understanding even to the present day, these geometric decorations on the facades or gable ends of Pennsylvania barns have been interpreted as representing Germanic antiquity and are believed to carry symbolic meaning according to the specific motifs used, and bring protection

or good luck.[9] As stated by David Fooks: "Although hex sign painting may have begun with misleading and commercial motives, there is no doubt that it has established itself as a unique, indigenous, American folk art, exhibiting high quality workmanship and unique artistic styles" (2002: 7).

The approaches to interpreting hex signs divided the scholarly community to such an extent that Yoder and Graves call this "the scholars' war" – "an acrimonious and ongoing controversy in the world of Pennsylvania Dutch scholarship" (2000: 11). One group of scholars drew inspiration from the mythological orientation of the Grimm brothers, especially the *Germanic Mythology* (*Deutsche Mythologie*, 1835) by Jacob Grimm, thus viewing "the geometrical patterns on folk objects as ancient symbols of magical and protective power, with deep roots into the pre-Christian religions of Europe's past" (Yoder & Graves 2000: 10). Whereas the second group "took the practical view that geometrical designs were simply pleasing patterns, easy to draw or carve or paint, the underlying purpose of which had nothing to do with magic", thus interpreting hex signs as grown out of the techniques of working with certain media and as being used by folk artists to fill blank spaces (Yoder & Graves 2000: 10). Clearly in favour of the second approach, Yoder and Graves have proposed treating this subject as a question of ethnic identity and as a reaction to the 19th-century cultural and political tensions, as the Pennsylvania Dutch, "like all ethnic groups positioning themselves in relation to their American neighbours, developed symbols to denote their ethnic identity" (2000: 19). Despite their criticism of exaggeration of assigning magic properties to hex signs, Yoder and Graves have conceded at least when it comes to the name of the designs, 'hex', because, as they explain, this is how they are known to the rest of the nation. They argue that their use of the 'hex sign' therefore is neutral as "that is what the world now calls them. Our use, therefore, is void of any connection with Germanic antiquity, witchcraft, protection, or good luck.… The meanings we find in the hex signs are ethnic identity, ethnic pride, and the pure joy of colorful decoration" (Yoder & Graves 2000: vii). A similar realisation that vernacular voices are louder and more pervasive than academic claims to truth has taken place in the Latvian case. As discussed in section I, to a certain extent the ornament and mythology nexus has been accepted by academia,

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[9] In comparison, Ernests Brastiņš wrote about the star pattern in Latvian ornament: "Star-like ornaments in the folk belief have the magical meaning as they protect from the evil. According to folk beliefs, when the sun sets, various misfortunes and diseases walk around and attack people. As a repellent of evil in the dark nights, when there is no light from the stars, the symbol of the star is handy" (Brastiņš 1923: 59). A similar belief about the benevolent qualities of folk ornament was expressed by artist Jēkabs Bīne: "[I]f the ancient Latvian decorated his tools, weapons, or other useful objects with ornament, then it was done to multiply their meaning. Decoration with ornaments was similar to the chanting of the good. The Latvian strongly believed that it is possible to chant the divine and good not only with words, but also with the signs of the ornament, and held that what is chanted becomes established. Therefore we can find sacred signs even on everyday objects because together with cult objects (which were destroyed by the Crusaders) they were supposed to exalt the divine. Latvian men and women chiselled, skived, and adorned all their surroundings with sacred ornaments in order to obliterate the evil and install the good" (Bīne 1937).

especially when it comes to specific names of ornaments that were introduced by Ernests Brastiņš.

When discussing the question of how the two opposing approaches to interpreting folk design played out, Yoder and Graves note that there were more connections with the scholarly and pseudo-scholarly research on symbols in Germany before and during the Nazi regime than most contemporary scholars would like to admit (2000: 14). Both symbol research and the use of symbols played a significant role in the propaganda and ideology of the Nazi regime, with the use of the swastika being the most blatant but by no means only appropriated symbol to have its roots in folk art. The Nazis were adept at utilising various symbols to convey their political and racial messages, often drawing on ancient or historical imagery to create a sense of continuity with a perceived Aryan past. Already before the Nazi regime and their notorious appropriation of symbols there had been heightened concern for the designs of folk art. Combining this with an interest in runes, "[a] whole school of overenthusiastic symbol researchers developed, who carried the Germanic symbolism to ridiculous lengths" (Yoder and Graves 2000: 15), this being an example of pseudo-scholarship mixed with dangerous ideology. Folk art and ornament were part of National Socialist *Volkskunde* with one of its most visible examples being the Weigel symbol archive, named after its creator the symbol enthusiast Karl Theodor Weigel (1892–1953). Starting in 1912 book dealer Weigel travelled through Germany photographing examples of folk art, to start the archive for runes and symbols. By 1943, his collection consisted of 55,000 photos (Brednich 1994: 105). Among others, Weigel was inspired by Austrian occultist, journalist, and writer Guido von List (1848–1919), whose ideas on Germanic mythology, occultism, and mysticism, emphasised the alleged Aryan race's spiritual and cultural superiority, and later influenced certain aspects of Nazi ideology. As described in the detailed study by German ethnologist Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, Weigel's obsession with the symbolism of ornament motifs was "the worst [outbreak] of symbol mania" (1994: 107). Weigel's methodological amateurism led to criticism from elite academic circles before the overall post-war denazification of National Socialist *Volkskunde*: "The incredible dilettantism which prevailed in symbol research provoked a number of critics between 1933 and 1945, all of whom were concerned with the bad image being given German scholarship" (Brednich 1994: 107).

Regardless of the many misconceptions and exaggerations through the course of ornament histories, and despite the continued misappropriation of symbols within the roots of folk, ethnic, and indigenous cultures, precisely because of the valence of folk art and folk ornament to attract narratives steeped in romantic nostalgia and imaginary pagan pastness, the apotropaic-belief-imposed approach to folk art is still attractive. Part of the attraction, at least in contemporary conditions, lies the fact that these visually appealing parts of traditional culture can be marketed and commodified extremely well. Even though folk art should always be interpreted context-specifically, often this is missing. The ease with which content and meaning is assigned to folk art, magic-like properties included, seem to operate on the same global logic everywhere.

3. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND DISCIPLINARY REFLECTIONS

3.1. Theory in Folklore Studies

When writing about the role of theory in folklore studies, anthropologist and folklorist Kirin Narayan has said concisely that it has three types of source: disciplinary training, interactions in fieldwork, and interdisciplinary conversations with both of those bringing in a different perspective from the social worlds they represent (Narayan 2008). Following this lead, I next outline the theoretical paths that form the grounding of this thesis. Apart from my obvious academic affiliation with the University of Tartu, my disciplinary training has taken place within the academic dwelling of Latvian folkloristics, and consequently I cover aspects that have been formative for the ideas of thesis articles, and which have influenced my thinking about theory and its place in folkloristics. Interdisciplinary conversations have been relevant as following the research questions guiding this dissertation, three of the four articles forming this thesis have led me to reach outside the disciplinary boundaries of folklore studies and draw links with collective memory studies, Soviet postcolonial theory, and theory connecting visuality with social movements. The third component of the theory sources, interactions in fieldwork, is covered in the next section focusing on methodological considerations.

With roots in the first Baltic German interest in the vernacular culture of Latvian peasants, and folklore collecting campaigns inspired by the ideas of the National Awakening, folklore studies in Latvia as an institutionalised, academic discipline took shape during the interwar period, which as "in most European countries, was a formational era for folklore studies when collecting and publishing folklore – patriotic duty in the age of nation-building – gradually grew into an academic discipline" (Bula 2017: 46). Oldest among similar institutions in the Baltic countries, the Archives of Latvian Folklore were founded in 1924 on the initiative of Anna Bērzkalne (1891–1956), a student of the prominent folklorist Walter Anderson (1885–1962). However, this thriving era for folkloristics with institutionalisation and international collaboration (Treija 2011; 2017), was violently disrupted by the Soviet occupation "and the five decades of Latvian-Soviet folkloristics were spent in a closed territory that was largely cut off from the international exchange" (Bula 2017: 45). In Soviet folkloristics, the interpretation and definition of folklore were shaped to convey political messages of Marxism-Leninism, at the same time folklore was one of the most pronounced fields of cultural resistance even before the Singing Revolution had begun, as the state-supported and enhanced activities within the framework of amateur art allowed the nurturing of anti-Soviet attitudes (Ķencis 2021; 2023b). The return to the intellectual space of international folkloristics after the fall of the Soviet regime has been described by Dace Bula "almost like discovering a foreign country" (2017: 45). Bula recalls a conference in Turku, Finland, in 1992, intended to renew the pre-Soviet scholarly community. For Baltic scholars "the conference was also a

disturbing experience because it brought the discovery that it was possible to speak radically different professional languages within the confines of the same discipline", therefore the following decades were "a period of building bridges, relocating destinations, and restructuring spaces of belonging" (2017: 45). A large part of this process has been devoted to analysing the disciplinary history of folkloristics in Latvia, motivated by the need to explore one's past after the forced withdrawal from the international intellectual space. In 2015 when I became a staff member at the Archives of Latvian Folklore, the disciplinary history of the interwar period was at the focus of attention resulting in publications intended both for local (Bula 2014) and international readers (Bula 2017; Bula & Laime 2017). In the following years, explorations in the form of several research projects turned to a more recent period of Soviet folkloristics and folklore movement during the Singing Revolution, both of which I had the chance to be a part of, and this involvement has shaped the content of the thesis articles. Article II was written while I was part of the *New Approaches to the History of Latvian Folkloristics* project, exploring the disciplinary history of Latvian folkloristics in the second half of the 20th century. With my participation in the *Folklore Revival in Latvia: Resources, Ideologies, and Practices* project, I had the chance to develop further the ideas that I started in article I.

Despite this primary location of theoretical belonging in the Latvian academic space, it seems hardly possible to write about theory in folklore studies without mentioning numerous waves of disciplinary revisions that have taken place in American folkloristics with such key publications as *Towards New Perspectives in Folklore* (Paredes & Bauman 1972) marking the new paradigm of performance studies; *Theorizing Folklore* (Briggs & Shuman 1993), a special issue of *Western Folklore* focusing on the connection between folklore and politics of culture; *What's in a Name*, a special issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* (1998) debating whether the word 'folklore' was still an appropriate designation for what folklore scholars are doing "[i]n an era when 'we are all the folk' and 'lore' denotes a boundless range of genres" (Harlov 1998: 232); and the *Grand Theory* (2008) in the *Journal of Folklore Research* (JFR), theorising about theory in folkloristics. Offering a range of opinions, the JFR articles went from lamenting the lack of a grand theory in folkloristics to challenging the question of theory as such. For example, Charles Briggs criticised theory production in academia, arguing that theoretical discourse can be exclusionary, and reproduce social hierarchies. To democratise the process would imply paying attention to vernacular theorising and looking at how knowledge is created by vernacular intellectuals within different communities (Briggs 2008). Richard Bauman proposed the philology of the vernacular as the prevailing theoretical orientation of American folkloristics (2008), and Dorothy Noyes coined the catchy term of humble theory, arguing that folklorists "are better equipped to criticize grand theory than to build it", therefore the "middle territory between grand theory and local interpretation" should be the concerns of folklorists (Noyes 2008: 41). As argued by Michael Dylan Foster and Ray Cashman, the original JFR issue and the ideas discussed in it "has made remarkably expansive ripples in the disciplinary pool

of folkloristics" (Foster & Cashman 2016: vii), reaching beyond the scopes of American folkloristics. With the rich histories of folklore research in the Baltic countries (for example Kuutma & Jaago 2005; Daugirdaitė 2015; Bula 2017) the question of what intensity theorising about theory, and other discussions coming from North American circles, have formed dialogues or left an impression on scholarly practices and academic politics in this part of the world. My rationale for devoting a paragraph here to reflecting on these discussions is that even though the topics covered in this thesis are not directly connected to this grand theory debate or discussions of disciplinary anxiety, these works have been part of my study curriculum at one point or another. Therefore, they have formed my particular view of the theoretical questions in folkloristics and formed my very understanding of what contemporary folkloristics means.

To what extent is folkloristics an international endeavour and what have the directions of knowledge flows been in this particular academic field very much depends on the historical circumstances and particular national histories. When it comes to theoretical questions in Latvian folkloristics, and building bridges with international scholarship, the contribution by Dace Bula to the involvement of the international intellectual space has been paramount. A crucial source of theory in folkloristics is her monograph *Mūsdienu folkloristika: paradigmas maiņa* (*Contemporary Folkloristics: Paradigm Shift*, 2011), which covers the paths of theoretical thought in North American and North European folklore studies starting from the 1970s. Rather than being a chronological account, the monograph, inspired by the author's research visits to the Institute of Ethnology in Stockholm, Sweden, and the University of Indiana, United States, is arranged around theoretical ideas and concepts with chapters covering such topics as definitions of folk and folklore, conceptualisations of tradition, theory and methodology, contextual approaches, performance studies, and so on. From first reading to the moment of writing the introductory chapter for this thesis, it has been my primary source for any theory-related question as it is rich in references and parallels to intellectual thought in Latvian folklore studies. The monograph was a part of the syllabus for a course on contemporary folkloristics, taught by Bula, that was part of my undergraduate studies at the Latvian Academy of Culture. As the introduction to international scholarship, theoretical concepts, and intriguing case studies through the assigned readings this course both paved the way for me to confront the romantic notions of folklore that had attracted me to the subject matter in the first place, and opened the intellectual field more broader than I could have imagined. It was in my final essay for Bula's course that I first took up the topic of folk ornament in contemporary culture.

I have taken this lengthy introduction to explain the specific intellectual grounding in scholarly space and time which has shaped my particular take on engagement with theoretical questions. To sum up, this approach is moulded by the current state of folklore studies in Latvia, which is still dealing with its disciplinary history while at the same time carving its place in the international arena by addressing such current issues as digital folkloristics (Reinsone 2018; 2020; Reinsone & Laime 2022), urban narratives (Ozoliņš 2024); climate change

(Laime et al. 2024); the Covid pandemic (Reinsone, Matulis & Ļaksa-Timinska 2022); symbolic support for Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 (Grīnvalde 2024); as well as continuing the work with classical folklore genres. Somewhat self-evidently it is of course also the international flow of knowledge in Tartu with the ethnically diverse environment that the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folkloristics offers that has formed my understanding of theoretical questions.

Despite the capacity of the intellectual infrastructure of folkloristics in both Rīga and Tartu, or maybe due to it, during the process of writing my articles I arrived at a point where I questioned what makes one belong to a discipline; more specifically what makes one a folklore scholar, and what is the role of theoretical choices in this process. "The theorist's job is to build bridges, allowing colleagues to recognize the commonalities between projects and preventing folklore from becoming an archipelago of islands of knowledge", writes Gary Alan Fine (2008: 16). Apart from theory as a link between empirical projects, Fine emphasises the role of theory in creating a scholarly community, and by using one of the basic concepts in the folklorist's vocabulary argues that "[o]ne of the effects of successful theories is to create a network – a folk community" (2008: 15). My experience with participating at international conferences, being a member of professional organisations, and discussing matters with fellow folklore scholars, has indeed made me feel like part of the community. However, while working on article III, I realised that in none of the thesis articles thus far are the core theoretical ideas based on the concepts of folkloristics. With article I, I was looking to explain the popularity of distinct visual forms in particular historical circumstances. What made the eight-pointed star so pervasive and ubiquitous during the Singing Revolution? What historical uses of this symbol loaded it with the meanings that made it so potent during the non-violent resistance movement? The quest to answer this led me to social movement theory and the concept of cultural resistance. By looking into what enables contemporary uses of such a highly contested visual form as the swastika in a historical location with a painful Holocaust history, in article II I arrived at memory studies and collective memory of the Baltic states shaped by the violence of two totalitarian regimes, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, including the 50-year Soviet occupation. In continuing with the Soviet occupation, in article III, I was interested in what the theoretical framework could be for writing about individual experience under occupying and oppressive political regimes, while at the same time moving beyond individual grievances. How does oppression affect intellectual creation in artistic and interpretative matters? What is the form and content relationship in visual materials when previous frames of interpretation do not fit the ideological demands of a forced political regime? The answers for me lay in the theory of Soviet post colonial studies.

Keeping in mind that theory is the conceptual basis of a field of study and the underlying framework for how something is understood and studied, the theoretical destinations I had reached by following my research questions came with a feeling of my version of theory anxiety. The questions that I had in combination

with the empirical data that I had gathered, had not led me to answers in the form of the theoretical concepts of folklore studies. Apart from the theoretical ideas of the discipline, disciplinary belonging, however incomplete, can be constituted by the source material or in this case what gets to be defined as the folk and as the lore. For folklore scholars, this is ever-evolving along with societal, cultural, and technological advancements. However, I was not concerned with classical genres of folklore such as folk songs, riddles, proverbs, and others, nor with such confident newcomers as the "digital vernacular" (Blank 2009; 2012), so the empirical material could also not constitute my belonging to folkloristics because folk ornament could and was studied by scholars from other disciplines as well. Arguing against the idea of defining folkloristics by listing the "types of cultural expressions that a folklorist might examine" Jesse Fivecoate, Kristina Downs, and Meredith McGriff have emphasised a specific outlook on the world as a more appropriate way of conceptualising a disciplinary subject:

> [C]ontemporary folklorists are, in fact, best defined by the perspective with which we engage with material, not solely by the material itself. Folklorists are notable because they acknowledge that the vernacular knowledge held by small groups of people is valued, valuable, and worthy of serious academic attention. That vernacular knowledge is not limited to specific kinds of verbal arts, material objects, or customs; the fact that folklorists are continually finding new types of folkloric texts to engage with (such as memes and other forms of digital folklore) is proof of this. Folklorists are drawn to that which is noninstitutional, that which often lacks power in larger social, economic, governmental, or academic structures. As a whole, folklorists are attentive to issues of power, authority, and marginalization, and folkloristics is a tool for countertrivialization (2001: 1).

When looking at a practice of mythological ornament at the time of my ethnographic work, such designations as marginalised communities and practices were not an issue for me as I was looking at the flourishing, nationwide practiced tradition which is by no means excluded from dominant culture, but rather is part of it. Still, I could relate to the vernacular, noninstitutional, and everyday; in some instances also the stigmatised (Goldstein & Shuman 2012) and this together with fieldwork as the main method of data collection is what grounds me in folkloristics. Positioning the proficiency to change the scale from small to large as one of folklore studies' great strengths, Margaret Mills has stated that folklorists have "the ability to spring from considerations of the micro, the detailed acts of everyday expressive life, of particular artifacts and verbalizations, to the macro, to the larger significance of what might seem to be the very small and ephemeral" (2021, x), with this emphasising that folklorists are well equipped to show how seemingly small, everyday, matters and experiences carry deeper meaning. Sympathising with the micro–macro idea, I also strongly agree with Mills that everyday expressive acts are infused with the extraordinary (2021, x) both in terms of narrative and material cultures. My interest in folk ornament has always gone hand in hand with the belief that folk ornament, as a seemingly small part of expressive culture, reveals way grander stories that are deeply embedded in the

historical narratives, national sentiments, and social imaginations. For example, the puzzling suggestion to change the geometric forms of Latvian folk ornament to stylisations of doves of peace, the hammer and sickle or the cogwheel and knife reveals not only the story of an individual desperately trying to adjust to the ideological pressures of the totalitarian regime but also the reorientation of the whole knowledge creation system to fit the official discourses of Soviet colonial domination (article II). Or a small enamelled metal pin in the form of an eight-pointed star carrying the story of cultural resistance, memories of the emotional upheaval of the Singing Revolution, and the aftermath of this with the harsh realities of the process of re-building democracy (article I).

Summarising the aforementioned, the conceptual framing of folkloristics as holding a unique position by which focus on the small and everyday, and on the value of the individual voice as the entry ticket to stories that form the fabric of social life, is what constitutes my belonging to this discipline. I recall a short exchange with the supervisor of this thesis Elo-Hanna Seljamaa. I asked her if she didn't think that the quotes from the people I had interviewed and included in the article were too long. Her answer was that folkloristics has the unique possibility to give voice to people whose lifeworlds we are looking into.[10] Since then this has become one of the guidelines for me, even when discussing such contested questions as the contemporary uses of the swastika or through work with distant voices in the diaries kept at the Archives. Apart from this, the moment of self-questioning and theory anxiety was resolved with article IV. With this article I was interested in how individual creativity turns into a tradition and gets to be interpreted as coming from time immemorial, and community mechanisms for selecting parts of artistic practices for traditionalisation, and how it interacts with such realities as commercialisation and contemporary spirituality. With these questions, I finally touched upon one of the most theorised concepts in folklore studies, tradition, with a focus on its more recent counterpart traditionalisation. I could finally tick the folklore theory box with this, although since one of the aims of this introductory chapter is to account for the theoretical questions, I have to report on the disciplinary boundaries that I have crossed.

Creative expressions defined as folklore are not withdrawn from the rest of the social world, but deeply embedded and spread through all human activities. In my way of looking for meaning behind the uses of folk ornament in different historical periods, and with the idea that ethnographic data is speaking theory, one of the possible answers for the need to look for theory beyond the borders of folkloristics in my simplified version of interpretation is that the social world is too complex to fit the theory of one discipline. Just as folklore-related phenomena in real life rarely fit into neat boundaries of genres drawn by scholars, why should the theories used to explain these phenomena stick with the boundaries of one discipline? The question of evaluating the borrowing from other disciplines can

[10] While discussing the draft of this chapter, she added that apart from giving voice, "it's also about *how* people talk about things, and longer quotes help to show this", Seljamaa, 12 August 2024.

therefore be viewed with different attitudes. It can be connected with the question of disciplinary anxiety, as for example, folkloristics has been described as a "field chronically insecure about its academic identity, habitually borrowing pieces of theory from other disciplines in the absence of its own unified body of theory" (Baron 1993: 227). However, in the current situation in the humanities, links across disciplines are viewed as an advantage. In a bit of a historical detour, in 1996, Richard Bauman argued against aggressive boundary maintenance and advocated for a transdisciplinary dialogue between folklore studies and other disciplines: "The great strength of folklore at its best lies in the principled upholding of the transdisciplinary, integrative perspective that comprehends human expression, society, culture, history, and politics within a unified frame of reference" (1996: 15). In 2012, outlining the state of folklore studies internationally, Regina Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem described folklore studies as interdisciplinary and in dialogue with other fields:

> [I]n the present, academic folklore studies find themselves situated among a number of other fields and sharing large portions of discourse with them. With its inconclusive situation between the humanities and the social sciences, folkloristics has lost its maverick status by being joined in this hybridity by many other fields such as large elements of, for instance, geography, psychology, archeology, and even history. The rise of inter-disciplinarity itself – in some places growing into a veritable norm of good research – has renewed the vision of folklore studies in the eyes of its practitioners and others (2012: 2).

As with each of the four articles, I had different research questions, looking into specific historical settings and also into the uses of different visual forms, each of the articles has a different theoretical framework. Therefore, I proceed by outlining the connections with research on visuality in social movements, collective memory, and Soviet postcolonial studies. At the end of this section, I return to folkloristics by outlining the theoretical considerations of commodification of folklore and folk art.

3.2. Visuality and Social Movements

Based on the historical context of the reinstitution of national independence in the Baltic states, and scholarly literature framing it as a non-violent resistance movement (Šmidchens 2014; Škapars 2005; Clemens 1997; Driefelds 1996; Lieven 1994; Gerner & Hedlund 1993; Eglitis 1993), as well as my fieldwork data, in article I, I have analysed the uses of folk ornament in cultural opposition, drawing theoretically from visuality and social movement research. Through conceptualisation of the role that visuality has in social movements, part of its significance is based on the premise that "[w]hen a political regime suppresses free speech and the expression of alternative political goals, symbols take on a special role", furthermore symbols are "a subtle form of communication with tremendous suggestive and emotional power" (Karklins 1994: 67), and thus have the potency

to mobilise for collective action. This type of cultural resistance against the Soviet regime was typical to the Baltic states, especially in the second half of the 1980s:

> Symbolic reclamation of the nation was a centrepiece of collective action in the early opposition period. Although overt political demands were still risky, and few in the opposition were prepared to ask for full national independence, symbolic demands, like those related to environmental protection, or symbolic deeds, such as commemorating the Stalinist mass deportations of Balts, were important because they laid bare problems widely believed to be symptomatic of a larger problem, the Soviet regime itself (Eglitis 2002: 37).

The social and political activities of the independence movement, covering the years from 1987 to 1991, became possible after the USSR's general secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, initiated the political reforms of perestroika and glasnost ('economic restructuring' and 'openness' respectively). The emergence of grass-roots social movements, such as environmental and folklore movements, contributed significantly to the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Karklins 1994; Schwartz 2006; Šmidchens 2014). In 1989, approximately two million Baltic people joined hands to form the Baltic Way, a nearly 700-kilometre chain through the Baltic countries, connecting the three Baltic capitals Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn, thus demonstrating solidarity in efforts towards independence. This epitome of activism and collaboration between the Baltic states is one of the iconic symbols of the non-violent nature of the independence movement.

As a tribute to the unifying force of singing in the mass events of those days, the independence movement in the Baltic States both in popular discourse and scholarly literature is known by its poetic name, the Singing Revolution, coined by the Estonian artist Heinz Valk in 1988 (Šmidchens 2014: 3). The soundscape of the Singing Revolution is covered in several publications (Kudiņš 2019; Martinelli 2017; 2019; Šmidchens 2014; Vesilind, Tusty & Tusty 2008), whereas the visual aspects of the independence movement have not gained scholarly attention, apart from the often-mentioned restoration of the national flags, which were forbidden during the Soviet occupation.

In Latvia, the 'Third Awakening' (Trešā Atmoda, see Stradiņš 1992) is another poetic name used to mark the events of those days. It emphasises political continuity and creates symbolic links with the first national awakening of the second half of the 19th century, which paved the way for the second in the inter-war period beginning with the proclamation of Latvian independence in 1918. These poetic designations – Singing Revolution and Third Awakening – accentuate the non-violent nature of the process and point to the importance of culture in the independence movement: "The pioneers of grass-roots activism in Latvia had to create new forms of social organization in addition to overcoming psychological barriers of apathy and fear created during Soviet rule. National cultural traditions as well as political symbols from the history of the Latvian nation became important catalysts for achieving this" (Karklins 1994: 69). As the case with the Baltic states shows, there is a correlation between the the political regime's use of non-violent forms of dissent and control, as the "more closed citizens'

access to legitimate participation has become, the more sensitive citizens are to the meanings of symbolic forms of protest" (Tarrow 2011: 103). Political scientist Sidney Tarrow has pointed out that in non-democratic regimes where an open protest would be violently repressed, "opposition movements have become skilled at mounting unobtrusive, symbolic, and peaceful forms of disruption that avoid repression while symbolizing contention" (2011: 103). In Latvia as in other Baltic States, "[t]he national flag, anthem, and other attributes of the interwar state were additional symbols of patriotism attaining new significance beginning in 1986"; apart from national state symbols, "folk traditions provided additional means of cohesion and communication, crucial resources for the mobilization of social movements" (Karklins 1994: 67). This is the historical context for exploring the uses of the eight-pointed star, which, apart from the flag of the independent Republic of Latvia, was the most popular of the visual symbols used by various fractions of the grass-roots social movements, and represents the above-mentioned skilful forms of unobtrusive, symbolic, and peaceful ways of expressing dissent. Apart from being an official symbol of the first NGO set up to protect the environment in Latvia, the Environment Protection Club (Vides aizsardzības klubs), it was widely used by different actors within the independence movement, and sparked significant individual creativity among a general public sympathetic to the ideas of the Singing Revolution (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Children's folklore group "Auseklītis" participating at the Baltica '88 folklore festival. Eight-pointed star in the background. Digital archives of Latvian folklore, garamantas.lv, LFK [2264, 389]. Photo by Alfrēds Stinkuls, 1988.

In social movement studies, focus on the visual aspects was inspired by the visual turn in the humanities in the early 1990s (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2013: xii). The visual turn, also called the iconic or pictorial turn (Mitchell 1994), emerged by challenging the dominance of verbal language and text. Reaching further than just 'reading' images for their hidden meanings, the analytical discussion of the visual turn was based on the idea that "images are not mere signs, representations or illustrations. They have a power all their own that seems to elude language" (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 245). Defining visual as a site of struggle with a life of its own reveals how "images are associated with a complex stock of cultural knowledge and experiences, frames and identifications, and that they are interpreted, framed, and reframed by political actors" (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2013: xii). Thus, analysis of the visual expressions of the social movements contributes to understanding the processes within these movements as well as contributing to the question of the movements' visibility in broader society.

Another considerable theoretical contribution to the study of social movements is linked with the cultural turn and its effects on exploring the role of culture in collective expressions of dissent (Ullrich, Daphi & Baumgarten 2014; Johnston 2009; Johnston & Klandermans 1995). The ideas connected with cultural turn have focused attention on the processes of meaning-making, the creation of solidarity among potential movement participants, and their mobilisation. This is analysed by exploring such components as collective identity construction, shaping of emotions, and framing (Tarrow 2011: 142). The latter refers to "the generalization of a grievance" and to defining "the 'us' and 'them' in a movement's structure of conflict and alliances" (Tarrow 2011: 31).

To explain the popularity of the eight-pointed star and explore the ways it was used as a tool for cultural resistance during the Singing Revolution (article I), I based my analysis on three theoretical ideas conceptualised in visuality and social movement studies, on which I expand here also beyond those authors discussed in article I. First, there is general agreement among scholars about the overall importance of symbols and visuals in social movements (Doerr & Teune 2012; Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015). As visual symbols have had a long-standing relationship with revolutions and social movements, they contribute to calling societies to action: "Whether in largely illiterate nations or in the computer-savvy media age, the power of revolutionary symbols comes from their ability to encapsulate, in graphic form, the anger, aspirations, and commitments of the revolution" (Tarrow 2014: 473). Paying attention to visuals, therefore, is an integral part of understanding and interpreting social movements. The visual repertoire of the social movements is formed of various particulars such as images, clothing, photos, graphic design, posters, leaflets, videos, gestures, and others, all shaped to demonstrate and promote activists' causes: "The production of images and the development of visual codes is thus one of the battlefields for social movements and their environments" (Doerr & Teune 2012: 44). What particularly stands out in the case of the eight-pointed star is that the uses of this symbol went beyond the classical repertoire of visual attributes of the social movements, involving a lot of individual creativity with various hand-made objects being

produced, influenced by the popularity of do-it-yourself practices in the Soviet Union. Today small mementos of the eight-pointed star, such as pins, are kept in private possession and museum collections, although those made from more lasting materials are still present in contemporary public environments, such as flag posts, window bars, and tombstones and others (see Figures 8, 9 and 10). The second theoretical idea refers to the argument that for visuals to work and resonate with people, the symbols have to echo culturally and have to be historically embedded (Tarrow 1998: 121). At the same time, the process of selecting and using symbols that express the ideas of social movement is not as straightforward as just using those inherited from the past. Rather it is a "paradox in the bricolage of inherited and creative" (Tarrow 2011: 147) because symbols have to be dynamic to invite change while at the same time evoking the familiar. Third, the use of visuals has both internal and external effects on the social movement (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015: 563). Internally "visual codes serve to underline connections between activists, expressing their shared attachment to a certain movement" (Doerr & Teune 2012: 46), meaning that visuals are employed as a resource for building and consolidating identity within the movement. At the same time, images make the movement and its followers recognisable to outsiders and form the movement's representation.

Figure 8. Eight-pointed star pins from the Museum of the Latvian Popular Front collection. Photo by Digne Ūdre, 2018.

Figure 9. Tombstone with the eight-pointed star in Jelgava Forest Cemetery. Photo by Digne Ūdre, 2021.

Figure 10. Window bars with the eight-pointed star in the Vestiena parish administration building. Photo by Digne Ūdre, 2021.

3.3. Soviet Postcolonial Studies

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence in the Baltic states in 1991, rereading Baltic history from the postcolonial perspective has gradually developed, mainly in the works of scholars from this region. The reason to reevaluate Baltic history through postcolonial theory is based on the premise that the Soviet Union and its relationship with its occupied territories represents internal European colonialism, thus "undercutting the conventional colonial opposition of European superiority and overseas inferiority, the European self and the colonial 'other'" (Göttsche 2014: 29). Notwithstanding reservations and criticism of whether indeed postcolonial theory was applicable to Soviet and post-Soviet contexts, scholars have continued to look for intersections between the theoretical approaches of postsocialism and postcolonialism (see Ķencis 2021; Ştefănescu 2013) with the idea that this pursuit can be beneficial for analysis of both 'posts'.

Considerable effort has been devoted to developing a theoretical framework that would contribute to pushing research beyond the established canon of Anglophone postcolonial studies, not just straightforward copying the vocabulary of postcolonial theory onto postsocialist histories. These efforts have resulted in theoretical concepts that, while based on classical works and concepts in postcolonial theory, are grounded in the experience of the Soviet western borderlands. The latter term itself is one example of this extended theoretical vocabulary referring to those European countries occupied by the Soviet Union or affiliated through the Warsaw Pact (Ķencis 2023b: 33, based on Annus 2018).

In describing the Baltic experience under the rule of the Soviet Union, Epp Annus, one of the leading scholars in Soviet postcolonial studies, has argued that the term 'colonisation' is not apt when describing the process of annexing modern nation-states, which all of the Baltic states had become in the relatively short period of political self-determination during the interwar period, as subjects of international relations and recognition, with established national cultures, and developed economies. Therefore, rather than colonisation, Annus uses 'occupation' when referring to the takeover of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union, however, this "was followed by the gradual institution of a colonial matrix of power" (Annus 2016: 2). Following this, Soviet colonialism in the Baltic context is defined as a regime "forced from the outside and brought with it, in addition to economic imbalance and long-distance political supervision, also specific ethnic and cultural tensions, related to the effort to privilege a non-local cultural tradition" (Annus 2016: 3).

In the next parts of this section I focus on those theoretical concepts in Soviet postcolonial studies that have been relevant to the topics covered in this thesis, covering the themes of historical layers of colonial rule, cultural resistance, and hybridity. However, apart from just providing a larger framework for topics discussed in article II, I have aimed at deepening the overall links between Soviet postcolonial theory and histories of mythological ornament, and the topics covered in the other articles.

3.3.1. Historical Layers of Colonial Rule

One of the theoretical concepts distinctive to exploring the experience of the Baltic states through a postcolonial lens is consideration of the historical layers of colonial rule (Annus 2014; Kangilaski 2016; Kalnačs 2016; Ijabs 2014). The Baltic region has a history of domination by various empires, starting from the period of the Northern Crusades in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which aimed to convert local pagan populations to Christianity. Over the course of centuries, different parts of Latvian territories were ruled by various powers: Swedish ruled in the Vidzeme region during the 16th and 17th centuries; the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ruling the Latgale region from the 16th century. The Baltic German nobility, however, maintained their status even when, in the 18th century, the territory of Latvia was conquered by the Russian Empire. Epp Annus uses "historical layers of colonial rule" (2016: 6) to address this history of domination and 'double-layered colonialism" (2018: 145) when referring to the simultaneous influence of "two distinct ideological structures of domination" on the Baltic lands that began in the 18th century when the Russian Empire conquered the Baltic provinces and met with German-speaking nobilities. In order to understand Soviet colonial rule after World War II, previous colonial layers should be considered, because "coloniality is rooted in history" and "it is not just a synchronic matrix of power, but also a diachronic network of mirror-imagings, wherein established power relations and local perception of political regimes form a chain of reactions and continuities that stretch over centuries" (Annus 2018: 142).

Attention to historical layers of colonial rule can bring to light previously neglected aspects of history. For example, when analysing the birth of Latvian nationalism in the mid-19th century, Ivars Ijabs argues that the previous research on nationalism with the primordialist and modernisation approaches missed the fact that Latvian nationalism was born in a distinctly multi-ethnic setting, and to a large extent was due to colonial mimicry (Ijabs 2014). National awakening activists, while opposing the domination of Baltic Germans, at the same time borrowed cultural resources from the dominant German culture. Annus calls this a 'typical colonial paradox', "meaning that the colonized country used the culture of the colonizers in order to assert cultural independence from the very culture that provided them with their models of independence" (2018: 148).

When political independence became a reality for the Baltic countries at the end of World War I, with the People's Council of Latvia declaring the establishment of a Latvian state on November 18, Baltic Germans retained their role as the colonial other. Moving beyond article II to the wider context of topics covered in this thesis, analysis of the perception and interpretation of the historical layer of Baltic German colonial rule is relevant as the ideas behind the mythological interpretation of ornament echo anti-German attitudes, which were relevant during the interwar period. Behind the mythological ornament, and even more explicitly behind the pre-Christian revival movement Dievturība, both initially and largely products of Ernests Brastiņš creativity, this earliest layer of colonial rule, which

brought Christianity to the Baltic lands, was seen as disastrous for the imagined prosperous and flourishing pagan culture, the golden age of the Latvian ancestors. At the same time, the creation of mythological ornament was enabled by the colonial rule of Tsarist Russia where Brastiņš and other Latvian artists with a deep interest in folk ornament obtained their higher education. This interpretation of history with a golden age in the pagan past dovetails with what David Chioni Moore has called 'postcolonial compensatory behavior', meaning the type of behaviour by which subalterns search for cultural forms in their past that could contribute to positive identity formation in the present (2006). Compensatory behaviour manifests in the "exaggerated desire for authentic sources, generally, a mythic set of heroic, purer ancestors who once controlled a greater zone than the people now possess" (Moore 2006: 20). The "authentic sources" in this case were Latvian folklore, archaeological artefacts, and folk art. The "purer ancestors" were the historical ethnic groups inhabiting the Latvian territory before the Northern Crusades. However, through Brastiņš's reading of Pēteris Šmits's works on Latvian mythology, and theories of comparative linguistics that aligned Baltic peoples with Indo-Europeans, the question of the "greater zone" went even further back in history to align with the Indo-European past. In this particular view of history, the injustice done by the Crusaders and their heirs – Baltic German nobility – could be undone by dismantling the colonial layers and unearthing pagan culture. According to Anthony Smith, the myth of the golden age is an essential component of nationalism, formed in response to modernisation, when social change and disruption of traditional routines were accompanied by discoveries in history, archaeology, and philology as well as reconstructions of past epochs (1997). The main reason though for the "spur to the proliferation of 'Golden Ages' was the nationalist intellectuals' drive to rediscover the past of every ethnic community for which they wished to secure political recognition" (Smith 1997: 41). As I argue in article IV, the idea of the mythological interpretation of ornament is embedded in this particular view of history based on the myth of the golden age in the pagan past, and in return, mythological interpretation legitimises the national narrative.

The interwar period, as the first period of national independence, "came to define the cultural and political meaning of Latvianness", therefore many of the ideas first introduced during the interwar period reemerged during the Singing Revolution (Zaķe 2007: 291). During the interwar period, Ernests Brastiņš argued for the need to create a Latvian national style based on folk ornament to prove the worthiness of Latvian culture; with the independence movement, these ideas reemerged not only because the aim of the political aspirations was to symbolically return to interwar Latvia, but also because postcolonial compensatory behaviour was part of the decolonial attitudes.

3.3.2. Cultural Resistance

Another weighty question in Soviet postcolonial studies is that of anticolonial attitudes and resistance to the colonial matrix of power. The relatively widespread resistance to the Soviet occupation in the first decade after World War II, which involved armed resistance, later turned into a conditional acceptance or "the gradually developing feeling that there was no escape from the established order" (Kalnačs 2019a: 499). On the one hand, "the fear wrought by decades of repression seemed to make oppositional collective action very unlikely" (Eglitis 2002: 22). On the other hand, despite the seeming reconciliation in society with a Soviet regime, "the subaltern was never fully silenced; instead, decades-long negotiations unfolded within the society over what, where, and how opinions could be heard" (Annus 2018, 17–18). As put by Mark Beissinger, "[r]esistance to Soviet occupation never entirely ceased among Balts, but by the mid-1950s a significant portion of the population had come to accept Soviet rule as an unalterable fact of life" (2002: 168). When the Baltic states were occupied by the Soviet Union, the period of national self-determination had been a relatively short one. Only 22 years stand between 1918 when the independent republics were declared and 1940 when the first Soviet occupation took place. At the same time, this period had been long enough for national self-consciousness to be established and in some forms maintained through the years of Soviet domination. This previous experience with political self-determination and the aggression of the Soviet annexation with the violent Stalinist repressions that followed has come to frame the interpretation of the Soviet period as "a fundamental deviation from what was perceived to be the normal course of national, state, social, and economic development. Latvian society, like the societies of other East European states, was powerfully affected by the belief that the Soviet system was both alien and unnatural, because it had been brutally imposed by an outside force" (Eglitis 2002: 12).

Soviet control of local culture was not homogeneous throughout the 50-year-long rule. The period of Stalinism in Baltic states has been described as one of "the most outspoken periods of transformation" (Kalnačs 2019b: 260), with the shift from national independence to Soviet hegemony as "a traumatic rupture, experienced in all spheres of society, from politics and economy to the most intimate spheres of people's everyday lives" (Annus 2018: 4). It was marked by intense Sovietisation, repressive methods, and close control which is the focus of article II. Stalinism was in many ways different from late socialism, even more so from the late 1980s with its active grassroots activities, as explored in article I. Referring to Annus' statement that the Baltic subalterns were never fully silenced, folklore-related cultural practices within the Soviet framework of amateur art and its related fields have been a particularly fruitful space for exploring the negotiations that took place between the colonial centre and local populations, and the ambivalence of messages that this framework facilitated. In Annus' words: "The Soviet official concept of a cultured life coincided happily with local efforts to sustain and develop national culture" (2018: 121). Toms

Ķencis has described this as "the hybridity of the folklore field" as it simultaneously allowed opposing messages, both enabling "the cultivation of national resistance and ethnic self-expression under the banners of folklore studies, folk art, and traditional culture", while it also "successfully accommodated communist propaganda and socialist internationalism" (2023b: 34). From today's perspective, the narrative on amateur art activities during the Soviet era is dominated by an expressed need to account for it in terms of resistance and cultural opposition. Arguing against the black-and-white interpretation of the Soviet period amateur art system, Philipp Herzog has eloquently described its dual nature, stating that:

> [It] was a bit of everything; it was both national and socialist, it was communist propaganda and ethnic self-expression, it was internalisation of communist ideology and it was national resistance – all at the same time. Even for the most extreme poles in the spectrum of "folk art" – the "anti-Soviet" proponents of the folklore protest movement on the one side, and the officially acknowledged showcases of "Soviet folk art" most trusted by the communist regime on the other – this distinction can not be drawn as sharply as is often claimed (2010: 115–116).

Folklore-related activities marked one of the most pronounced fields of resistance, especially with the folklore movement, as one of the first harbingers of the Singing Revolution. Folklore movement is a term used to describe the increased interest in folklore and Latvian cultural heritage in large parts of Latvian society at the end of the 1970s and through the 1980s and early 1990s. The establishment of folklore ensembles was one of the most visible activities but the circle of interests was much wider and interwoven with other areas of Latvian traditional culture like folk art, craft, and regional studies. Aimed against staged folklore performances promoted by the Soviet cultural policy of amateur art, the folklore movement became a powerful expression of countercultural creativity, civic engagement, and alternative lifestyle (see Weaver et al. 2023; Šmidchens 2014; Muktupāvels 2011; Klotiņš 2002; Boiko 2001). Discussions on the resistance and anti-Soviet attitudes of the people of the former Soviet western borderlands who engaged in autonomous or non-conformist cultural activities have led to the conclusion that it is possible to speak about two forms of cultural resistance: first, the deliberate dissent expressed in open political resistance and, second, autonomous exercises of cultural freedom, meaning cultural groups with no explicit political program, such as hippies, avant-garde artists, youth cultures, or alternative religious communities (Apor et al. 2018: 10–11). The folklore movement in the Baltic states started out as a clever use of state-supported and even state-enhanced activities that allowed the nurturing and development of anti-colonial attitudes without expressing overt dissent, however, with the advent of the Singing Revolution the movement gained the outlines of open political resistance. The question of the agency among the Baltic populations and mobilisation of opposition movements during the Singing Revolution is an often-debated question that has gained scholarly attention: "How to account for the sudden explosion of mass protests in 1987, how to explain the success of mass mobilization against Soviet rule, decades after all active opposition had been crushed?" (Davoliūtė &

Rudling 2023: 31). Through the lens of Soviet postcolonial studies, Annus argues this was possible due to ‘everyday dissensus’: “small acts of difference which in the end contributed to the breakup of the Soviet Union and real social change in its former Western borderlands” (2018: 18).

3.3.3. Hybridity

Hybridity, as one of the key concepts in postcolonial theory, is often seen as a space where the colonised and the coloniser meet, leading to the creation of new, mixed forms of culture and identity that resist the binary distinctions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. With roots in nineteenth-century biology, initially, it was a racially charged concept, although due to its reconceptualisation in postcolonial theory, hybridity “has been used to describe the fertility of cultural mixing as opposed to the assumed positive effects of cultural purity” (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 141). Elaborated in the works of critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha, hybridity refers to the “creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2000: 108). “Hybridity represents a counter-concept to essentialist ideas about culture, nation, individual, religion and ethnicity – ideas that are frequently used (and abused) to distance oneself from and exclude ethnic ‘others’” (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 144). Hybridity can therefore be applied in order to understand the cultural dynamics between the colonial centre and peripheries, and ways in which local cultures were simultaneously repressed and celebrated through incorporation into a broader Soviet identity.

The argument that I make based on the previous research on cultural expressions affected by Soviet ideology, as well as on my own case study of folk ornament in article II, is that some cultural phenomena are more compliant to hybridity than others. In folklore and related fields, hybrid cultural practices in their Soviet-imposed forms were part of Soviet cultural colonialism. A glaring example is the so-called new Soviet folklore. This was co-created under the pressure of Soviet ideology between local people and folklorists during the first decade of Soviet Latvia by enforcing Soviet content upon local forms of folk culture (Ķencis 2017; 2019b). A similar pattern was found in Estonia when Seto singers needed to adjust their repertoire by adding themes that praised life under the Soviet regime. Even though later on these songs were regarded as “unambiguously ridiculous or perverse examples of the authorities exploiting less-educated rural women or even as shameful instances of collaborationism”, this does not exclude singers’ agency, and “the very specific Seto women’s voice still resonates in the majority of the songs” (Kalkun & Oras 2018: 42). ‘Socialist traditions’ or ‘Soviet traditions’ is another example of Soviet-imposed hybridity. As part of the anti-religious campaign in Latvia it was intended to eradicate religious rituals from everyday life (Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2017; 2019). It was aimed at the rituals found in the individual’s private sphere, for example, baptisms, weddings, and funerals, as well as the annual calendar cycle. Most of the newly introduced celebrations were not successful, although some did indeed spread their roots and became internalised, for example, March 8, Women’s Day. In the independent

Baltic states, March 8 "survives despite efforts in the three Baltic states to get rid of 'everything Soviet' during the process of regaining freedom including rituals and calendric practices" (Bula 2021: 44). As argued by Dace Bula, the main reason for the return of the March 8 celebrations after a period of decline in the 1990s was the resilience of Women's Day traditions at the grassroots level:

> Any attempt to erase nearly fifty years from people's memories and experience is possible only in theoretical terms, and it would be quite devastating. Therefore, no matter how negative the overall image of the Soviet era might be, it is not discarded totally; instead it is incorporated into the present via processes of fragmentation and selection (2021: 51).

If the meaning and interpretation of March 8 are still contested, there is no doubt that staged folk dance has become internalised. Despite Soviet-imposed changes, it is one of the contemporary cultural practices embodying the essence of national sentiment. The hybridity of this genre is explored by the Estonian scholar Sille Kapper, who has described Estonian stage folk dance as an example of a successful hybridisation of Estonian and Soviet forms. Russian ballet technique-based choreographies that were completely foreign to traditional folk dance became part of the hybridisation and the "[i]nfluences of Soviet colonial rule have remained deeply embedded in Estonian collective bodily memory" (Kapper 2016: 100). Therefore this hybrid dance style has turned into a vital and sustainable national tradition through which national identity and patriotic feelings are currently expressed. A similar process has taken place in Latvia (Gailīte 2023), and Lithuania (Rudling 2018).

In my reading of the research conducted under the theoretical framework of Soviet postcolonial works, hybridity seems not to be among the favourite research concepts. Even though it is one of the key concepts in classical postcolonial theory, in Soviet postcolonial works it has gained considerably less attention. One of the possible explanations could be that in the postcolonial aftermath, positive self-identification rejects the cultural layers created under and in collaboration with the Soviet regime, thus hybridity seems to contest the de-colonial narratives. Interpreting the Baltic experience in terms of resistance rather than hybridity has been more important both among the general public and scholars. This attitude certainly has intensified after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and resulted in new waves of dismantling Soviet layers.

3.4. Memory Studies and Collective Memory in the Baltic States

Increased attention to memory and commemoration both in scholarly and public discourse, sometimes referred to as the "mnemonic turn" (Tamm 2022; Olick 2023), has laid the foundations for the interdisciplinary field of memory studies. With its origins traced to classical works by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and

historian Pierre Nora, and with influential contributions from contemporary authors such as Jan and Aleida Assmann, Astrid Erll, Michael Rothberg, Jeffrey Olick, and others, memory studies has been one of the available conceptual frameworks for analysing conflicting versions of contested pasts in the Baltic states as well as elsewhere. The layers of changing occupation regimes of the 20th century, along with the histories of violence and state terror mixed with periods of national self-determination are why scholars in the Baltics have been keen to engage with the theory of memory studies (for example Jõesalu & Kõresaar 2013; Kõresaar 2007; Kattago 2009; Mihkelev & Kalnačs 2007; Andrejevs 2018). In the Soviet Union the public sphere was dominated by the Soviet narrative of the past with histories of its various republics being rewritten to fit this official story. To support the legitimacy of Soviet rule, representatives of power "invested much energy and violence into subjugating cultural memory to official history" (Blacker & Etkind 2013: 3). This involved suppressing and altering pre-Soviet histories and traditions as well as attempts and efforts to acquire these new narratives. As I have analysed in article II, the imposition of Soviet power propagated a discursive confusion, since "society cannot replace, suddenly and completely, its dominant value systems" (Annus 2018: 123) thus the lines between discursive confusion, attempts to adjust to the Soviet cultural and intellectual fabric, and expressions of dissent are not always straightforward. As established in the previous section, Soviet subalterns were never fully silenced, thus the official dominant discourse on history differed from the personal, which was based on individual memories of the previous period of Latvian independence.

Two major shifts in collective memory regimes[11] (Kubik & Bernhard 2014) have been relevant to this dissertation. The first memory regime shift took place during the Singing Revolution when memories silenced by the Soviet regime could be retrieved. Towards the end of the Soviet era, both individual and collective memory emerged as spheres where Soviet dominance was challenged. The reclaiming of historical memory and the public voicing of individual memories suppressed during the Soviet years contributed immensely to the mobilisation of dissent during the Singing Revolution, which was part of the decolonisation process. The first grassroots public demonstrations centred around important dates commemorating painful historical events, such as the 23 August marking the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (1939) with its secret protocol establishing Soviet and Nazi German spheres of influence in Europe, thus deciding the fate of the Baltic states; or 14 June and 25 March, the dates of mass deportations to Siberia in 1941 and 1949 respectively.

The second memory regime shift coincided with Latvia's integration into European institutions, which necessitated changes in local memory politics.

[11] As defined by Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard, 'memory regime' refers to "a set of cultural and institutional practices that are designed to publicly commemorate and/or remember a single event, a relatively clearly delineated and interrelated set of events, or a distinguishable past process" (Kubik & Bernhard 2014: 15–16).

While acknowledging the complexities of personal experience and how it needn't match the dominant collective memory regime, and taking into consideration that the five decades of Soviet rule were not all homogeneous in people's attitudes towards the regime and thus also produced varied reflections of it (cf. Jõesalu & Kõresaar 2013), dominant collective memory in Latvia frames the Soviet occupation as a rupture and a trauma, a period of oppression, of deportations and cultural suppression. These traumatic memories have continued to shape contemporary attitudes in society and to affect political decisions, as well as being reflected in cultural practices.[12] Regaining independence involved reclaiming pre-Soviet histories, reviving national symbols, and reestablishing connections with those parts of Europe that had been on the other side of the Iron Curtain. It also meant negotiating identities by balancing the specific historical experiences of occupation with aspirations for European integration, as well as dealing with the legacy of Soviet-era populations, for example Russian-speaking minorities. With integration into the European Union, the dominant collective memory narratives in the Baltics have been challenged (Perchoc 2015; 2018; Onken 2007), at the same time they have represented a challenge to the concept of 'European memory' (Assman 2013; Neumayer 2019). As Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind put it:

> The transition from the long socialist decades of secrecy and servility, to the neoliberal twenty-first century, with its mobility, crises, and corruption, has made East European memory challenging, even explosive. Not only does East European memory have its own mnemonic dynamics and foci, but the cultural material of that memory is also different from what has become commonly accepted in Western Europe (2013: 4–5).

The argument put forward by Blacker and Etkind that cultural material for collective memory is different in various geopolitical locations aligns with the conclusions that I present in article III when analysing the discrepancy between how swastika-like forms were interpreted in Latvia and how this symbol was perceived elsewhere. One of the arguments voiced in public discussions against the benevolent reading of the swastika is that in Latvia, due to it being a country where the Holocaust took place with the involvement of the local people, this symbol cannot be separated from the history of violence. In order to provide a framework to analyse these interpretations, theoretical literature discussing the collective memory of the Holocaust in Latvia has been of crucial importance. In those parts of Europe that were not under Soviet influence after World War II, the Holocaust has played an important role in consolidating memory (Leggewie 2008; Assmann 2007; Judt 2010), while in the collective memory of Latvia, the Holocaust and the commemoration of Jewish victims were silenced and ideologised topics during the Soviet years (Zelče 2014: 203), and have continued to

[12] These traumatic memories have been brought back with a new intensity by the recent Russian war against Ukraine. See for example Dzenovska 2022.

be challenging as the focus on national victimhood tends to go hand in hand with the lack of critical assessment of collaborationism with the Nazi and Soviet totalitarian regimes (Zaķe 2017). As argued by Siobhan Kattago, "particularly in the Baltics, the Holocaust is seen as peripheral to national suffering due to war and dual occupations" (Kattago 2009: 382).

Attention to the different collective memory regimes in the regions formerly occupied by the Soviet Union has brought awareness of different understandings of the historical narratives, leading to European-level calls for an equal condemnation of Communism and Nazism made by "anti-communist memory entrepreneurs"[13] from territories formerly occupied by the Soviet Union (Neumayer 2019: 8), therefore challenging "the paradigm of the singularity of the Holocaust against which Europe has been defined" (Onken 2007: 30). This led Siobhan Kattago (2009) to state that, regarding World War II, three different narratives shape collective memory in Europe: Western, Soviet/Russian, and (since 1989/1991) a post-Soviet/post-Communist narrative. In the post-Communist/post-Soviet narrative, both Communism and National Socialism are seen as equally disastrous, although the crimes of the Soviet regime outweigh those committed by Nazi Germany, meaning that "the real end" of World War II "is neither 8 May nor 9 May 1945 but the restoration of independence and end of Soviet occupation in 1991" (Kattago 2009: 382; cf. Oberländer 2011).

In particular, memory studies theory focusing on the different collective memory regimes dividing contemporary Europe has helped me to build the argument in article III, where my aim was to demonstrate that the interpretations of swastika-like forms in Latvia correlate with different interpretations of the World War II and post-war world, confirming what Aleida Assman has written regards the memory of World War II: "[I]t is still very much present as an involuntary one and a subliminal but firm reference point for many Europeans, not for those of the older generation alone" (2013: 26). Going beyond the analysis of symbol use, I aimed to contribute to academic discussions on the divided collective memory of Europe, as I believe the case study on contemporary uses of the swastika shows explicitly the contested pasts and conflicting memories, and thus has the possibility to go deeper beyond the state of art observations that the collective memory in Europe is divided.

[13] Based on the work of Michael Pollak, Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu, Laure Neumayer defines 'anti-communist memory entrepreneurs' as "the actors interested in bringing the past to public attention" (Neumayer 2019: 8). They call for accountability for communist crimes and collective remembrance at a transnational level. See also the discussion in Kubik & Bernhard 2014 on mnemonic actors and four ideal types of such actors: mnemonic warriors, pluralists, abnegators, and prospectives.

3.5. Folklore and Commodification: A Faustian Bargain?

A Faustian bargain, a cultural motif with roots in Germanic folklore, and its best-known literary adaptation in Goethe's drama *Faust* calls to mind someone who trades their moral or spiritual values for worldly, material benefit. Thus, "Faustian bargains are by their nature tragic or self-defeating for the person who makes them, because what is surrendered is ultimately far more valuable than what is obtained, whether or not the bargainer appreciates that fact" (Britannica 2024). This metaphor of Faustian bargain was used by Jean and John Comaroff in their work on the commodification of ethnicity which discusses the expanding presence of the identity economy where "commodity exchange and the stuff of difference are inflecting each other, with growing intensity: just as culture is being commodified, so the commodity is being rendered explicitly cultural" (2009: 28). According to the Comaroffs, one of the aspects of the dark side of cultural commodification is that "the intensive marketing of ethnic identity may well involve a Faustian bargain of sorts, leading to self-parody and devaluation" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009: 26). People in many parts of the world engage in identity economics, even to the extent that "[c]ultural survival … has given way, in many places, to survival through culture" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009: 19). As commodification of culture alters identity there is a risk of being trapped in one's own commodified version of it; such are the Faustian bargains the Comaroffs have in mind. However, it would not be much of a bargain if, on the other side of the scale, there wasn't something that made it worth taking the risk. On one hand, many examples from tourism to folk art for sale demonstrate the enthusiasm with which people engage in these activities. Scholars, on the other hand, have generally remained cautious and critical when engaging with these topics.

In folkloristics, until recently traditional culture for sale and the commodification of folklore were somewhat uncomfortable topics. If they are explored at all, then it is with an inevitable touch of criticism. The terms fakelore and folklorism are some of the best-known and debated theoretical paths that mark this judgemental attitude. Richard Dorson's neologism fakelore was aimed at amateurs engaged in both the popularisation and commodification of folklore. In 1950 Dorson wrote: "In recent years folklore has boomed mightily, and reached a wide audience through best-selling books, concert and cabaret folksingers, even Walt Disney cartoons. But far from fulfilling its high promise, the study has been falsified, abused and exploited, and the public deluded" (Dorson 1950: 335). Fakelore was "an attack on the growing popularization, commercialization, and resulting distortion of folk materials" (Dorson 1976: 5). Reflecting on the fakelore debate, Regina Bendix has stated that fakelore was seen as "a bulwark against the evils of commercial contamination of pure folklore" (1997: 156–157). Folklorism, meaning second-hand folklore and folklore outside its primary context, first coined by German scholar Hans Moser in 1962, was aimed at both commodification and political manipulation of folk culture, and historically marked what "academic folklorists considered fake, spurious, or ideologically perverted"

(Bendix 1997: 13). Although far from the obstinate attitudes of these mid-20th century ideas, commodification is still perceived rather as a disruptive and negative force, and "[t]he use of 'mass-mediated' and 'commodified' as a negative defining characteristic, what folklore is *not*, typifies much of the writing in folklore from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first" (Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 10). What is it exactly that makes this an uneasy topic? Is it because folkloristics is somehow still trapped in the 19th-century romantic ideas of folklore as stemming from those living at the margins of contemporary society? Is it because of the dangers of cultural appropriation? Is it indeed a Faustian bargain where the possibility of having a commercial value makes folk culture and folklore lose its vernacular value as an expression of creativity? Does commodification imply the loss of vernacularity and authenticity? As to my observations, there is a disproportionate relationship between the commodification of folk culture and academic literature addressing it. For example, there are no publications explicitly addressing the topic of folklore and commodification in Latvian folkloristics that I am aware of.[14]

A recent exploration of folklore and commodification was carried out in the 2019 edited volume *The Folklorist in the Marketplace: Conversations at the Crossroads of Vernacular Culture and Economics*. Grounded in the observation that folklore sells both small and large, from handmade, locally based products to products intended for globalised mass markets, editors of the volume Willow G. Mullins and Puja Batra-Wells call for a new consideration of how folklore and economics are connected. Based on an overview of the previous research and the premise that "[e]conomics has always been folklore's not-so-silent partner" (Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 3) the authors analyse how the relationship between folklore and economics has been explored along three primary paths: the macro level, the micro level, and the marketplace itself as a place of economic transactions and as part of folklife. On the microlevel, where folklorists have felt most comfortable, the focus has been on individuals and small communities, looking at how "folk products, both tangible and intangible, made within one folk tradition are commodified, used, and sold sometimes to people from other cultural backgrounds" (Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 9), with most of the contributions looking at material culture, and folk art and craft. Even though macro level accounts of folklore and economics have rarely been discussed directly, the indirect implications of this relationship have had a profound influence on the discipline, because they are directly connected to how folk and folklore have been perceived. Macro level conceptualisations mean looking at how the folk have been defined within larger economic systems by relying on "socioeconomic status as a marker of folk status as a way to bound or propel the field" and "using the overlay of class and occupation to further delineate what counts as folklore" (Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 4–9). Associating the folk with

[14] In 2020, the 14th conference of the SIEF Ritual Year working group *Commerce and Traditions* took place in Rīga. However, the proceedings of the conference have not been published at the time of writing this chapter.

lower socioeconomic status is part of the reason why commodification is seen as problematic and a threat to what was perceived as "authentic" folklore because "[i]f the folk may not be of high status, their lore must also not hold economic value. Commodification, by contrast, revalues cultural products, giving them monetary value where they once held primarily cultural value" (Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 10). This leads Mullins and Batra-Wells to conclude that the folk are still largely defined outside of modern modes of economic exchange or even in direct opposition to neoliberal capitalism: "Refugees, evacuees, prisoners, global indigenous, and ethnic Others" (2019: 9). To provide a broader perspective and expand on the macro level considerations, the authors invite us to explore the relationship between larger economic systems and local communities and to address concerns over the negative effects of commodification by considering also those aspects of the folklore and commodification alliance that are potentially generative and empowering, as commodification and consumption as forms of agency is at the other end of the scale in the Faustian bargain.

In line with the call to explore the macro level interactions between global flows and local practices, the increased commodification of folk ornament as characteristic of the contemporary ornament practice is indeed influenced by larger macroeconomic processes in Latvia and beyond. After five decades of Soviet occupation and integration into the Soviet economic system, with the restoration of national sovereignty and independence in 1991 a transition to parliamentary democracy, neoliberalism and the market economy took place. The extremely rapid economic growth in the first years of the 21st century (Brīvers 2011: 214) was followed by the harsh consequences of the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. Latvia was one of the countries hit hardest by the crisis, suffering "the greatest fall in GDP of any country in the world" (Hilmarsson 2013: 9). There were painful budget cuts, bankruptcies, dramatic job losses that resulted in unprecedented emigration, and "persistent unemployment, a weak social security system and lost perspectives converged to make emigration a real option in the minds of Latvia's residents, even for those who had not considered it before" (Hazans 2019: 64). Even though in around 2010 the economy started to recover and the handling of the economic crisis in Latvia has been called a success story (Åslund and Dombrovskis 2011), the human costs of the crisis have been evaluated as high and damaging to the social fabric of the country (Hilmarsson 2013: 13). Notwithstanding the negative consequences, the 2008–2009 financial crisis in Latvia moved parts of society towards the appreciation of local culture, traditional crafts, the handmade and the locally produced (Butāne 2015). The crisis to many was an impulse to become creative: "In a situation where welfare indicators fell sharply, a large part of society focused on the search for stability in another area – folk heritage" (Butāne 2015: 32). This went hand in hand with the establishment of small businesses and people becoming self-employed in order to find new means of income, as well as making people reevaluate their ways of life (Butāne 2015: 55).

Despite the fact that not all aspects of contemporary ornament practice in Latvia fall under the label of craft, many certainly do, and therefore it makes

sense to look at some of the broader societal and economic processes elsewhere in the world, more precisely the craft revival, the "renaissance of the handmade" (Luckman 2015) and the "third-wave craft movement" (Miller 2017), as in part they are echoed in the creativity scene in Latvia. One of the indicators is the establishment of the contemporary crafts fair in 2011. Since 1971, the largest traditional crafts market in Latvia has been the Traditional Applied Folk Art Fair, organised annually at the Ethnographic Open Air Museum. In 2011, the museum decided to organise the first contemporary crafts fair in response to the growing popularity and diversity of creative expression among Latvian artisans. As stated by the representatives of the museum: "The products at the fair should be both a mirror of modern society's demand for unique products, as well as should shape the taste of the visitors and demonstrate the opposition to mass production" (Eriņa 2011). Looking for reasons behind the significant growth of the handmade economy in anglophone parts of the world, and drawing on examples of craft research, Susan Luckman has stated that it is an established fact that "self-employment rates grow during periods of economic downturn" (2015: 120). In a study of craft entrepreneurs during the global financial crisis, Doreen Jakob writes that the "resurgence of crafting during an economic crisis should come to no surprise" as craft "is a form of resistance to the dominance of capitalism and technology in everyday life and search for authenticity" (2012: 128).

Apart from the economic process, there are other factors that contribute to the third-wave craft movement, with the contemporary craft scene described by Luckman as a response to both economic and cultural shifts with a "growing awareness of the environmental and social costs of the circulation of cheap consumer goods is giving rise to concerns about large-scale industrialization" (2015: 24). In design, this has been labeled a fascination with "culturally significant designs", a trend caused by the over-saturation of global consumer goods in local markets and the homogeneity brought about by globalisation resulting in an interest in local cultures: "Around the world, we are seeing relearnings, re-appreciations and revivals of practices that are culture-specific, placebased, often ancient, and deeply meaningful. These exist alongside and, perhaps paradoxically, because of and in concern with globalization, international trade, and homogenization" (Walker 2018: 2).

As my ethnographic observations and interview materials reveal, financial crises have indeed urged ornament practitioners to start their own entrepreneurship. However, despite the upheaval in ornament-related entrepreneurship after and during the crisis, not all entrepreneurship activities have been sustainable enough to last, especially those with narrower specialisation. To give an example, the production of herbal tea with Latvian folk ornament started in 2012 with the idea of tea in special packages from recycled materials, decorated with folk ornament. The added value of the product was folk ornament, which was branded as having "effects and magical abilities" (Jansone 2013). Its 100% local provenance was aimed at foreign guests, but just as importantly it had to work locally to remind people of Latvian traditions and heritage:

> At a time of ever growing technological development, we have quite undeservedly forgotten about the older values. Our ancestors believed that Latvian deities would help them not only in various jobs but in almost all life situations. Signs symbolizing the deities were widely used. They are very unique to Latvian culture, and we must not allow these signs to be forgotten, because in this way we will lose an important part of our history. We hope that the teas we produce will not only be an excellent souvenir but will introduce people to Latvia's ancient values…. Presenting such a souvenir will clearly show that you want the recipient to know that you care about your country and that you are a Latvian patriot (Jansone 2013).

Even though the business tried to diversify with images on tea bags depicting the iconic buildings of Rīga and images of amber, and even aiming to export to China, the business seems to have exhausted itself, with the last activity on their Facebook page in 2017. This brings up a question of the relationship between the producers and consumers of folk ornament-inspired goods and how the supply is affected by demand.

Beyond the financial crisis an even broader macroeconomics-related aspect that has affected ornament practice is economic and societal integration into the European Union (EU), or rather the "return to Europe" with the pro-Western policy both in domestic and foreign affairs being the political goal after the reinstitution of Latvia's independence. With Latvia becoming a member state of the European Union in 2004, apart from de-Sovietisation of the state, there were hopes of "economic growth that would see Latvia eventually catch up with the older West European member states" (Auers 2020: 13). The current outcomes of these hopes in the broader context of all three Baltic states have been evaluated positively: "The expectations that the Baltic peoples had for EU membership have largely been fulfilled, be it in terms of political integration, economic advancement, national security, or European identities" (Pettai 2019: 49). A separate topic on the influence of the EU on local memory politics is discussed in article III. I argue there that despite pressures from the EU, it is still the specific collective memory of the Baltics that dominates and forms Latvian identity with the national victims of communist crimes at the centre of collective memory. And this then is the larger framework that makes tolerable the use of swastika-like visual forms framed as local cultural heritage.

One of the aspects that connect ornament practice in contemporary Latvia with the framework of societal and economic changes in broader European contexts is projectification, which has been described as "[t]he growing reliance on projects and project management techniques to structure activity" (Hodgson et al. 2019: 2). As a temporary mode of organising economic, public, and cultural processes, projectification has become part of everyday lived experiences and realities in different spheres of life and with various actors involved in the process with projects becoming the "symbols of efficiency, innovation and adaptability" (Sjöblom & Godenhjelm 2009: 170). The European Union has been driving projectification since the beginning of the 1990s "with more than 60% of the entire EU budget now managed through different project funding systems regarding research, social, and regional development" (Hodgson et al. 2019: 5). The effects

on specifically tradition-based projects of locality in Hungary are studied by Ágnes Eitler. Some of her observations, that projectification affects representations of staged traditional culture and the "process of local culture building is becoming project-based" (Eitler 2022: 39), are relevant in Latvia as well. In the context of contemporary uses of ornament, it is themed ornament parks that reveal the enhancing effects of projectification on local practices. As examples of folk heritage and landscape engagements in local, mainly rural or small city communities, themed ornament parks are places with ornament-shaped environmental objects or objects with ornaments installed in the natural landscape. Places like these combine management of the surrounding landscape, for example creating nature trails or parks with surrounding infrastructure and greenery, with the interest and popularisation of folk ornament and folk culture in broader terms (see Figures 11, 12, and 13). In the creation of such places, enthusiastic local residents are usually the ones driving these ideas by investing their time and energy. As these kinds of engagement with the landscape require financial means to carry them through, it is through projects that funds are attracted from private contributors, local municipalities, NGOs, and the EU. However, as the topic of themed ornament parks has only been mentioned briefly in article IV, this is one of the topics for further research.

Figure 11. Dzīvības zīme (sign of life) at the Brīvkalni trail at the Veselava parish. Photo by Digne Ūdre, 2019.

Figure 12. Zvaigznes zīme (sign of the star) at the Park of Latvian Signs in Leimaņi parish. Photo by Digne Ūdre, 2021.

Figure 13. Zalktis (grass snake) at the Alley of Latvian Signs in Krimūnas village. Photo by Digne Ūdre, 2019.

As discussed by Willow G. Mullins and Puja Batra-Wells, the macro view of folklore and economics has focused on defining who the folk are in the larger class formations and how that has determined what counts as folklore. However, they invite scholars to move beyond these early constructions and to focus on how "the macro level offers a way to reveal how folk groups participate in, respond to, and resist larger economic systems" (Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 9). They believe this broader lens to be crucial in the current age of globalized capitalism as "[t]he macro shows how large economic networks can have impact for small, localized groups of people, and how those people can also send ripples of influence out into the globe" (Mullins & Batra-Wells 2019: 9). Following this suggestion, looking at the macroeconomics reveals factors that have to a greater or lesser extent affected ornament practice, both in cases of individuals engaged in entrepreneurial activities and of those gaining from international flows of ideas and funding. Even though discursively most ornament practice is framed as local traditions with a lot of national sentiment attached, and often positioned in direct opposition to global influences, by identifying the actors involved in these processes and looking at the surrounding tensions it is apparent that people are more than willing to use the opportunities provided by the conditions of globalisation. Similar observations have been made by Ágnes Eitler: "[T]he production of locality is not based on the successful exclusion of the effects of globalisation but on their active integration and on applying them as patterns" (2022: 33). This dovetails with observations I make in article IV, where I analyse how Eastern religion-related concepts such as chakras and mandalas have found resonance with Latvian folk ornament as a way of locality being expressed in globally established ways which then accounts for the commodification and influx of spiritual ideas and their addition to local practices.

At the other end of the global–local equation there are local communities that also send ripples of influence out around the globe. Just like the themed ornament parks, in general, this is a question for further research, but to outline some of the potentials of the topic, I want to briefly mention one of the local ripples sent out globally – the inclusion of Latvian folk ornament in the Symbolikon, a digital selection of worldwide symbols. This is relevant as it is not just a story about a small nation's folk heritage made visible globally, but also because the web page itself presents a contested example of ethnic visuality for sale. Symbolikon advertises itself as a digital encyclopaedia and "an extensive library of Ethno-Esoteric-Mystic-Magical symbols", claiming to be "a collection of symbols taken from historical, global civilizations" which are "given a new life where ancient culture meets modern design" (Symbolikon 2023), whereas in reality it is a commercial product selling digital design versions of these symbols. It aims to profit from what seems to be very close to cultural appropriation (Jackson 2021; Brown 2003). Latvian folk ornament on Symbolikon is presented among symbols with a notoriously long history of misuse, such as Norse Runes and Celtic symbols; historical symbols from Sumerian and Persian cultures, and Greek Mythology; symbols from Eastern religions like Chakras and Yantras; spirituality-related symbols from anthroposophy, Reiki, Feng Shui, Tarot; more exotic ones like

Crop Circles, Angels, Sacred Geometry, Templars, Alchemy, mixed with those from native and indigenous cultures with colonial histories like Lakota Sioux, Mapuche, Hopi, Maori, Sami. Apart from the creators of the Symbolikon profiting from the cultures of native and indigenous communities, I find the misrepresentation and oversimplification of symbols problematic, especially judging by some faulty representations of Latvian materials there. Rendering symbols that come from specific historical conditions into a generalised global ethnic visuality, where each culture can be flattened down to four basic designs and unifying colour schemes applicable to everything from Maori to Maya, strips them of the very uniqueness that was the reason they were included in the selection.

I will conclude this part with some observations on contested issues relating to commodification and folk culture. These have arisen through my ethnographic observations of the situation in Latvia and how it has changed since my initial interest in contemporary practices of folk ornament emerged. When I first became interested in the topic around ten years ago, the commodification of folk ornament in all sorts of forms, shapes, and creative expressions was embraced with great enthusiasm by the general public. However, over the years the market, and also beyond-consumption uses of folk ornament, have become so over-saturated that inevitably the practice has in some ways exhausted itself causing negative attitudes among those same parts of the general public. This in a way is history repeating itself. As I have covered in article I, the extensive use of the eight-pointed star during the Singing Revolution led to rejection and mockery of the symbol during the first years of independence. Critical attitudes in contemporary society towards folk ornament are directed at several issues. First, there is the previously mentioned over-saturation of the market and public space in general with folk ornament. As quantity does not always come with quality, the second point for criticism is the price–quality balance, especially since many of the ornament goods marketed as design items are of a relatively high price. And the third point is the exaggerated marketing narratives, especially those overdoing the aspect of ornament benevolence or elements of contemporary spirituality. There are many ludicrous examples, but two of my personal favourites are the mobile phone cover with the Cross of Thunder, which by association with thunder and lightning promised to keep the phone's battery charged for longer, and men's linen underwear decorated with a combination of folk ornaments that assured the wearer he was protected from nightmares.

These considerations in combination with observations beg the question of whether there is such a thing as cultural self-appropriation? Are there any aspects that appropriation of other cultures shares with disrespectful and exploitative ways of treating one's own culture? Where is the border between commodification as a generative power and source of agency and commodification as a Faustian bargain? What are the mechanisms within communities to deal with the misuse of traditional cultural items? One of the answers to the last question in the Latvian case plays out in humorous and mocking responses in an online environment as a way of reacting to over-saturation. One example is a Facebook page called *Koka sūdiņi ar latviešu zīmēm* (Wooden Shit with Latvian Signs). Most of

the posts on the page are photos of wooden debris, pieces of firewood, or planks with sketchy drawings of folk ornament offered for sale at very high prices. The page has around ten thousand followers and regular engagements with the posts. Occasionally there have been playful descriptions of offered items mocking real belief statements that advertise mythological ornament. One of the last posts featured a large log with the ornament of Zalktis (grass snake) on it:

> Finally, the MEGA LOG with the sign of Zalktis is for sale! Perfect for sitting during cold autumn evenings and thinking about life, and what exactly are you doing wrong… As soon as you sit down, you will immediately become not only smarter but also more conscientious! Time to change! Price – very expensive, you will probably have to take out a loan! (Koka sūdiņi ar latviešu zīmēm 2019).

As is evident from the posts, the page was established in 2015. The last posts in 2020 were contemporary to the absolute peak popularity of contemporary uses of folk ornament.

4. REFLEXIVE CONSIDERATIONS, METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHTS, AND POSITIONALITY

4.1. Reflexivity: The Awareness of Looking at Oneself Looking at the Other

The title of this section is part of the quote by Pertti Anttonen. He states that "[t]he awareness of looking at oneself looking at the other" means that "these simultaneous gazes qualify and construct each other", therefore "ethnography is in a fundamental way an act of representation that cannot be independent of the discursive processes" (2005: 22). In my reading, Anttonen is inviting folklore scholars to take a critical and reflexive look at both the process of data gathering as well as interpretation of those data. Turning the researchers' gaze to myself, in this section I explore my positionality as part of reflexive and methodological concerns in relation to the research subject of this thesis, research participants, and the research context and process.

As with many engaged in folklore studies, my interest in my research topic grew out of fondness for and fascination with the creative processes I noticed taking place around me. As someone who shared the cultural background and ethnic and national belonging but was not an insider when it came to practicing any of the ornament-related activities, I was genuinely intrigued by the abundance of ethno-design goods with folk ornament for sale and the wealth of marketing narratives that connected this practice with Latvian mythology. Narratives invoking ancient Latvian deities concerning such objects puzzled me. This led me to questions about the contexts of authenticity, the commodification of folklore and traditions, and the uses of the rhetorics of tradition in marketing. The initial enthusiasm gained more analytical outlines along with the advancement of my knowledge in the history and theory of folklore studies. Authenticity-related concepts such as folklorism, fakelore, and invented tradition encountered in my study curriculum came to guide my approach to the practices I was observing. Before having actual fieldwork experience and a chance to look into the voices of those individuals whose creativity intrigued me, these theoretical concepts shaped my attitudes, urging me to interpret the lively but very commodified scene of folk ornament practice as somewhat inauthentic. This initial presumption changed once I started conducting interviews and talking to people face to face. The discrepancy between my predisposition and what I encountered in the field made me rethink how I position myself regarding the practice I was interested in. Thinking back, I have found echoes of what Kirin Narayan has written about theory: "While theoretical concepts can illuminate, holding on to particular concepts too emphatically can blind" (2008: 86). Thus, she urges us to remain attentive to multiple levels of theory, when contemplating empirical materials. I would turn around Narayan's quote and say that when contemplating theoretical ideas, it is useful or rather crucial to remain attentive to fieldwork material.

Folklore studies as a discipline has always relied on first-hand encounters with what at different times and under different theoretical conceptualisations has been defined as 'the folk'. Since the 19th century, in European scholarship under romantic nationalism, folkloristics was "characterized by a gaze away from modernity into the cultures of the lower classes, the *vulgus in populo*, the uncivilized, the illiterate, the non-Whites and the 'ethnics', which all became the designated reference point for the concept of folk" (Anttonen 2005: 51). Folklore fieldwork under this theoretical and ideological thinking mainly involved the collection of isolated texts focusing on specific folklore genres. Methodological concerns about the reflexivity of disciplines practices were not part of this kind of ethnographic encounter as the focus was on saving what was believed to be vanishing. Folklore collections created under these premises during the early stages of the folklore discipline confirmed "the political distinction drawn between the moderns and the non-moderns, the educated and the folk, the civilized and the exoticized others, the West and the rest" (Anttonen 2005: 52). In Europe, the extensive folklore collecting initiatives that began in the second half of the 18th century and were later crucial in establishing folklore archives were largely carried out by lay enthusiasts (Reinsone 2018; 2020). In Latvia, the "[p]articipatory efforts gained momentum during the second part of the 19th century and culminated in the Latvian folk song project carried out by Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923), which involved a multi-level network of almost nine hundred volunteer folklore collectors" (Reinsone 2018: 191). However, it would not be entirely true to assert that the role of the folklore collector even in the early stages of collection went unquestioned. In a study on 19th-century and early 20th-century folklore collectors in Swedish-speaking Finland, Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch has revealed that concerns over the identity of fieldworkers and fieldwork conditions were indeed part of the practice. Travelogues and field diaries reveal how collectors used "bodily techniques" to manage their appearances "in order to not alienate potential folklore contributors" by dressing simply and behaving unpretentiously to not give away their education and social standing (Österlund-Pötzsch 2014: 260). Collectors discovered the merits of socialising, spending longer periods of time with the villagers joining them in their everyday tasks, or bringing small gifts (Österlund-Pötzsch 2014). Such intuition rather than theory or methodology-driven practice can by no means be attributed to this case only. For example, concerns of a similar nature can be found among the fieldwork diaries of the interwar era folklore collectors held at the Archives of Latvian Folklore.

Most significantly discussions over reflexivity as a matter to consider have taken place in folklore scholarship in the United States (see Stoeltje, Fox, & Olbrys 1999). Performance theory directed the folklorist's gaze from archive-based philological research toward folklore as encountered and enacted within the community (Bauman 2012). The shift in folkloristics to explore the role of the self in the research process was in tune with the general directions in the humanities. The reflexive turn (Bachmann-Medick 2016: 103–130), with its roots in the intellectual debates of the 1970s and 1980s, especially in anthropology, but

also feminist theory and postcolonial studies, raised awareness of the researcher's subjectivity and led to the realisation that scholarly and ethnographic representations are tied to power inequalities. In connection with the crisis of representation this led to the acknowledgment that only partial truths (Clifford 1986) can exist and ethnographic accounts can only always be incomplete. Both the major reorientations in folkloristics and the intellectual and academic climate in the second half of the 20th century brought consciousness to folklore fieldwork and awareness that the researcher's self is a methodological concern that needs to be addressed: "No longer is it possible to assume that an ethnographer can walk into other people's lives as if they represented 'a field' and work that 'field', ploughing and harvesting the data in the process known as 'fieldwork'" (Stoeltje, Fox, & Olbrys 1999: 176).

It must be noted though, that these discussions, as with most of the international scholarship during the second half of the 20th century, in Latvia as in other geopolitical spaces separated from the United States by the Iron Curtain, could only enter the folklorist's field of vision after the fall of the Soviet Union and reinstitution of independence. The Soviet legacy has left its mark on folkloristics as a discipline, and as argued by Toms Ķencis "postsocialist scholars have inherited conservative and past-oriented nationalist discourse and a corresponding image of the national disciplines as primary recovering treasurers of the past", therefore risking "marginalization in the broader academic landscape" (2023a: 8). Various concerns over reflexivity have gained attention at differing speeds and intensities, varying from place to place. The degree to which the continuous role of the self is explored and reflected in the academic writing of folklore studies today varies depending on each researcher's individual choices and research topics.

When discussing reflexivity in her own work, and following the partial truth argument, Andrea Kitta has commented on the inevitably elusive nature of fieldwork ethnography: "Ethnography is always incomplete. Analysis is always incomplete. There's always something we will miss, something that we will not understand, something that cannot be understood, and something that is too close to understand" (2021: 45). Acceptance that all knowledge is subjective should not lead to a pessimistic debunking of that knowledge, as emphasised by David Hufford; rather, "[r]eflexivity in knowledge-making involves bringing the subject, the 'doer' of the knowledge-making activity, back into the account of knowledge" (1995: 58). Keeping these concerns in mind, the productive approach to reflexivity then is looking at it as something that must go beyond the mere acknowledgment that the self intrudes ethnography: "We need to view the 'intrusive self' as a resource; one that constrains the temptation to generalise and simplify other people's lives" (O'reilly 2009: 191; also Davies 2008: 11). Understanding of the world is inevitably filtered through specific perspectives, it is important to recognise and acknowledge them by keeping in mind that the researcher "is not some kind of virus which contaminates the research. On the contrary, the self is the research tool, and thus intimately connected to the methods we deploy" (Cousin 2010: 10).

4.2. Methodological Concerns: From Fieldwork to Ethnographic Interviews

Fieldwork in folklore studies takes a variety of forms. Some of them have grown out of the historical conditions of the discipline, such as field collection where folklore texts or performances are documented for archival purposes, or repertoire collecting with its focus on individual creativity within the tradition, whereas others have developed in interaction with neighbouring disciplines, such as sustained fieldwork as folkloristic ethnography with both performance-centred and ethnological approaches (Buccitelli 2019: 83–87).

I have often referred to my data-obtaining method as fieldwork, however, this has come with unease because of the apprehension that my methodological approach did not strictly fit into the description of a classical understanding of what fieldwork means and implies. For me, carrying out ethnography meant that everything was potential data, from unexpected encounters to informal discussions both in face-to-face and virtual encounters, partially in line with what Richard Wilk has called 'disorderly ethnography' (2012). At the same time, while I was indeed 'in the field' all the time, I wasn't doing fieldwork all the time, and my main data collection method was pre-arranged interviews. Therefore describing my methodology as fieldwork seemed too broad and far-fetched, whereas calling what I was doing qualitative semi-structured interviews seemed insufficient because it did not capture the nuances that come with folkloristic ethnography as a way of seeing with a focus on the vernacularity of cultural practices.

Criticising overly loose approaches when defining fieldwork in European ethnology and folkloristics, Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber argues against calling one's practices fieldwork whenever the researcher is in the 'field' with any form of contact. She notes that "fieldwork in ethnology or folklore entails more than a researcher's mere presence during data collection or short, one-time contacts with people.… In the strict sense, however, the mere presence of the researcher should not be defined as fieldwork" (Schmidt-Lauber 2012: 564). Therefore, instead of calling these kinds of data collection practices qualitative interviews, Schmidt-Lauber suggests the term 'ethnographic', "[i]n keeping with the reflexivity, openness, and processuality of these interviews" (2012: 568). Two aspects that characterise ethnographic interviewing are, first, the focus on encouraging narratives on a specific theme and, second, the interview should provide an in-depth understanding of the interviewee's life world and perspective (Schmidt-Lauber 2012: 569). In line with Schmidt-Lauber's reasoning, ethnographic interviews best describe my method of qualitative data gathering.

Apart from the methodology, another reason why I struggled with the term 'fieldwork', was because ornament practices that I was interested in were dispersed over various fields, and it was impossible to put those all under the label of community. The connecting theme of all the articles for this thesis is folk ornament, however, the different aims, as well as the timeframes and theoretical architecture for each article, determined the reasoning behind the choice of people to be interviewed, ranging from those who were witnesses to historical

events to those contemporarily engaged in ornament related practices whether it be a one-time specific event related engagement, or more prolonged engagement as a lifestyle choice. The first interviews were conducted in 2017 when I started to interview people for my Masters thesis, exploring contemporary uses of the swastika in Latvia; the last interviews took place in the summer of 2023. To account in numbers then, the ethnographic interview material for this thesis consists of twenty interviews, with the audio files for one interview on average ranging from two to three hours in length. Most of the interviews and their transcripts are part of my personal collection, however, there were cases when they were carried out under a larger framework of research conducted at the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art; the University of Latvia; and the Archives of Latvian Folklore. Unlike the interviews that I did individually, these are part of the archival collections at the Archives of Latvian Folklore.

Apart from ethnographic interviews as crucial sources of data, a substantial part of this dissertation is based on published sources, including both books and periodicals, especially relevant to the history of the ornament and mythology nexus. In article II where I explored the intellectual biography of artist Jēkabs Bīne, I relied on archival materials, both his unpublished manuscripts and personal diaries kept at the National Archives of Latvia. When exploring the eight-pointed star and its uses during the Singing Revolution, I worked with the collections of the Popular Front Museum in Riga. Even though I have used online sources to a considerable extent, for example, online news publications that were a valuable source when exploring the contemporary uses of swastika, or particular homepages intended both for advertising the produce of contemporary ornament practitioners and popularising their opinions for article IV, I do not position this as digital ethnography as I was not applying these methods on a systematic basis.

Visual ethnography was also part of my methodological toolbox, especially considering the specifics of the topic. As an outcome of documenting contemporary ornament practices, I have created two online exhibitions, aimed at the general public and available on the homepage of the Archives of Latvian Folklore. The first, *Zīmju parki Latvijā* (Ornament Parks in Latvia), explores themed ornament parks, places in local, mainly rural or small city communities with ornament-shaped environmental objects or objects with ornaments installed in the natural landscape.[15] The second, *Zīmes vidē* (Signs in the Environment) documents the diverse use of Latvian ornament in the contemporary environment, covering both the commercialised and spirituality-imbued aspects of ornament practice,[16] topics which I have covered in article IV. Apart from the visual materials that I created, an important source for exploring folk ornament related visuality in different historical periods was materials held at different memory institutions, namely, the Latvian State Archive of Audiovisual Documents and the Museum of Literature and Music.

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[15] Zīmju parki Latvijā (Ornament Parks in Latvia). Available at: https://lfk.lv/zimju-parki/

[16] Zīmes vidē (Signs in the Environment). Available at: https://lfk.lv/zimes-vide/

4.3. The Insider/Outsider Perspective in Domestic Ethnographies

One of the elements to consider in relation to the researcher's position and the people involved in research, is the insider/outsider position, which is based on the idea that the researcher is either an insider or an outsider to the community that she or he studies and that both statuses carry certain advantages and disadvantages. The potential advantages of insider ethnography, such as easier access because of linguistic and cultural competency, the assumption that because of the familiarity with the culture studied one will be more trusted, will be able to ask more meaningful questions, and accordingly produce a more in-depth representation, is contrasted with possible disadvantages, such as hidden biases or an inability to provide an external perspective (Gilman & Fenn 2019). The insider/outsider question in folkloristics, when viewed through the lens of disciplinary history, takes into account the historically close but also unsettling relationship between folklore and nationalism, as the folklore scholarship in Europe has been labelled as "a form of domestic ethnography" (Ó Giolláin 2022: 13) and there is a "prevailing sentiment among folklorists to deal with something of 'our own'" (Bendix & Hasan-Rokem 2012: 3). Focus on national matters becomes especially visible when disciplinary borders are marked. For, example, in an often-quoted article by Elli Kongas-Maranda in which, based on anthropology's close ties with colonialism, and folkloristics with nationalism, she draws a robust distinction between folklore studies and anthropology, stating that "[a]n anthropologist studies the other, a folklorist studies his own" (1982: 53). As the up-to-date disciplinary historiographies show, this divide no longer stands, although I have still not escaped this and thus my research and this thesis contribute to the many examples of domestic ethnographies carried out in folkloristics.

Even though I position my research as a domestic ethnography, when looking at the diversity of the ethnographic material behind this research, I argue that this does not bestow an insider's status on me. Beverly Stoeltje, Christie Fox, and Stephen Olbrys have proposed that rather than looking at insider and outsider positions in exclusive terms, a more fruitful approach would be to consider the dynamics of the self in the field: "The very activity of fieldwork places us somewhere on a continuum between familiar and strange, self and other, domestic and foreign, same and different" (1999: 160; see also Gilman & Fenn 2019). My experience also aligns with the idea that even in familiar contexts, doing research generates a distance, and "every insider as well as outsider should remind themselves frequently that the process of conducting research defines one as an outsider, whatever one's identity might be" (Stoeltje, Fox & Olbrys 1999: 178). I was an insider in that I shared a cultural and national background and language with the people whom I interviewed. However, I was an outsider when it came to the practices and traditions that I was studying, more specifically the beliefs connected to these practices.

As a large part of contemporary ornament practices centres around the belief in ornament's benevolent qualities, a question that I have discussed in detail in article IV, this was something that I discussed with almost all of the people I interviewed. Even if I had not asked specifically, in the current practice this has such an important function, that either way it would come up without me asking. However, this aspect of ornament practice is also where my personal views were different from those I interviewed. In comparison to active ornament practitioners who shared with me their stories on the ornament benevolence that they or those close to or acquainted with them had witnessed, my experience and attitude towards this question aside from scholarly interest could be best described as suspended disbelief. The question of whether a scholar shares a worldview with those being researched should not represent itself as problematic; however, in line with the idea that the fieldworker's main task during the interviews is to listen and observe, I often felt that my suspended disbelief and the very fact that I brought these questions into the conversation, created a silent understanding that I was sharing the beliefs with practitioners of ornament. I was never directly confronted with the question, although I was asked what brought me to this topic, and I could give the honest answer that it was my fascination with contemporary uses of folk ornament. Still, at the end of the day, on several occasions I felt that I had lured people into thinking that my insider status was complete not only in terms of shared culture and language but also when it came to having a shared belief in the essentiality of the ornament and mythology nexus and the incorporated idea of an ornament's benevolence.

4.4. Tensions Between Lay and Academic Voices

The topic of belief is further tied to the larger frame of interpretation of ornament practice, which leads to questions of lay and academic voices in folklore studies. Folklore is a subject that has always drawn the attention of nonprofessional enthusiasts. Their contribution in many ways has been indispensable as I have already discussed when covering folklore collecting initiatives, with lay enthusiasts' contributions being crucial in establishing the collections of folklore archives (Reinsone 2018). Collecting folklore, nonetheless, is different from 'folk research': "the "research" conducted by individuals who claim the status of folklorist in public venues without formal training, engagement with learned societies, and other markers of expertise" (Gencarella 2024: 1). Tensions between professional and lay voices are possible in the first place because folklore as a vernacular expression by definition belongs to everyone, as stated by Andrea Kitta, Lynne McNeill, and Trevor J. Blank, and thus, feels familiar; although this is also where the problem lies:

> [A] competing array of ideas about what constitutes folklore has forged a gap between the bodies of knowledge that inform the formal, academic study of folklore and its informal "folk" or nonspecialized conceptualization. The folk

> notion of folklore often paints broad strokes about what the discipline entails … without acknowledging the profound depth of study that folklore scholars have endeavored to carve out over the years (2021: 202).

I would add to this, that in Latvia, folklore in popular understanding is often still trapped in the image of 19th-century romantic-nationalist-simplified perceptions that conceptualise the subject of folkloristics as vanishing vernacular knowledge of bygone generations. With this kind of framing, not only does critical assessment become complicated, but research topics that are uncomfortable and contested tend to receive less attention. At the same time, I have to admit that the romantic image is what draws many people to folklore and folkloristics in the first place, myself included.

As the disciplinary history of folklore studies shows, the topic has been dealt with with ambiguous attitudes. Richard Dorson's neologism 'fakelore' with which among other things he targeted fakelorists, "[a]mateurs, dilettantes, popularizers, charlatans" (Dorson 1976: 1) because of whom he believed folkloristics as a "study has been falsified, abused and exploited" (1950, 335) aligns with a recent article by Stephen Olbrys Gencarella who invites professional folklorists to take problems posed by what he calls 'folk researchers' seriously as "[t]hey are shaping public perception of what folklorists do, not for the better. Furthermore, they often spread falsehoods, misunderstandings, and prejudiced narratives" (Gencarella 2024: 30). Other scholars, who take a different stance, encourage deeper engagement with popular publications and the media and a broadening of interdisciplinary collaboration, and even casual interactions, encourage work with rather than against nonprofessionals: "We need to remember how powerful and entrenched a non-folklorist's understanding of folklore can be, and we need to think in terms of bridging our definitions with theirs or walking people from their existing expectations to a more nuanced understanding rather than simply plowing ahead with new information" (Kitta, McNeill, & Blank 2021: 212).

The tension between lay and academic voices as it plays out in my research is connected with opposing perceptions of the origins of the ornament and mythology nexus. In contrast to the popular understanding, which roots the origins of this nexus in the pre-Christian golden age, academic research shows the origin to be in the interwar period. Over the years, I have met people who are greatly inspired by this trope of the pagan golden age. Discussing this with people whom I interviewed, for whom it was part of their worldview, does not present any tension at all, on the contrary, it has been a fascinating experience to look into these beliefs. However, it is a different thing when claims of the authority of the romanticised version of the story are expressed. It puts me in a position of writing against the beliefs I recorded in the field. In this sense, I have always envied those scholars with strands of activism in their research, those working with marginalised communities or topics, or those with vanishing subjects and objects, whereas I was working with a flourishing practice with a lot of national sentiment attached to it. It felt almost like I had broken the canon of what counts as a legitimate research subject in folklore studies in terms of how it is positioned in

international scholarship. Instead of advocating for those I was working with, simply because no advocacy was needed I found myself battling with the romantic image of the golden age. At the same time, taking a purely critical outsider's stance was also not possible for me, thus this middle ground often felt uncomfortable because of how vague and pale it felt.

4.5. Hypervisible Positionality

In ethnography-based research, reflexivity includes a critical examination of the researcher's positionality, with the researcher's self having relevance in all dimensions of research, "encompassing the mundane as well as the sublime, the cultural as well as the personal" (Stoeltje, Fox & Olbrys 1999: 179). Considering the researcher's positionality in relation to the subject means acknowledging those personal positions, including life experiences, views, and interests that have the potential to influence the research (Cousin 2013). Without a doubt, writing article III on contemporary uses of the swastika was when my positionality towards the research subject both mattered the most and became hypervisible given the contested nature of the topic. Here advocacy played out differently. Unlike the other articles, this was the one where I felt the explicit need to explain my positionality. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, I have spent a great deal of time contemplating, often enough far from productively, whether this is even something that I should discuss, as well as how to position myself. When presenting on this topic at conferences I always included a few sentences on this. However, in article III, which I wrote for the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, explanations on my positionality even though part of the drafts, did not make it to the final version, and therefore I will share some of those reflections here.

Like me, other authors who have dealt with the topic of the swastika in their research have had their individual doubts and difficulties. Malcolm Quinn, the author of *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol,* states that "anyone who writes a book about the swastika finds themselves in disreputable company" ([1994] 2005: 5), referring to the pseudo-scientific research that has been done on this topic. The design historian Steven Heller, author of *The Swastika and Symbols of Hate: Extremist Iconography Today,* admits that his book (2019a) was originally turned down by a number of publishers, so he published it himself. However, his story is more complicated. Heller's fascination with the symbol began when he was only eight years old. He then started collecting artefacts with swastikas, without knowing anything about the Holocaust and the fact that his grandmother's family perished in Auschwitz. Heller admits: "As a designer, I have long been fascinated by the unmitigated power of the swastika. Yet as a Jew I am embarrassed by my fascination" (2019b). Heller tried to deal with this paradox by writing his book, but that did not resolve his conflict, he just became more obsessed with the symbol: "[M]ore drawn to yet repulsed by it" (2019b). His personal experience of fascination with the symbol led him to the conclusion that the swastika is a symbol beyond redemption and it "must forever be remembered

as a kind of portal to evil. Because if I can be seduced by the swastika as a form, and I know the legacy, then just think how younger generations will be engaged as memories of Nazis fade" (Heller 2019b).

I don't have the kind of fascination with the symbol that Heller does, nor can I complain about the company I have been keeping while doing this research as Quinn does, but I have had my share of struggles. My main concern has been with the fact that interest in this topic is often perceived as advocacy for the views of my informants, who insist on the rehabilitation of the symbol and deny any negative connotations. Even though I am not as strict on the impossibility of redeeming the swastika as Heller or the Finnish artist Minna Henriksson, who has stated that "it is absurd still in Europe of the 21st Century to claim the sign to be a symbol of happiness, fertility and sexuality, in the history of which the era of Nazi Germany was just some kind of error, and which can be ignored as lunacy and exception, and from which the symbol should be saved" (2014: 163), I share their concerns over the contemporary claims of using the swastika, especially when it comes to extreme right-wing groups and kindred ideologies. Therefore, finding the appropriate language to describe these cultural practices and vernacular voices so that both the critically analytical perspective and the ethical commitment to the people I interviewed, are maintained, has been challenging. What I realise now, is that my initial aim to approach the topic as something to be explained without becoming an advocate at least in some ways for these views is impossible. Ann Ferrel has done extensive research on tobacco farming in the United States, with a focus on farmers managing the stigma of their occupation and the problems that she as a researcher faced when trying to publicly talk about her topic. Ferrel believes that the possibility of neutrality on the researcher's behalf in both mundane and research contexts, is an illusion: "While debates continue within the field of folklore about whether we should be 'advocates' or engage in 'politics', my experience with tobacco production highlights the fact that we are already engaged in advocacy, even as we undertake something so seemingly non-political as describing our research to strangers at a baby shower" (2016: 35). Indeed, by picking up this contested topic of contemporary uses of the swastika, regardless of my attempts to convince myself of the opposite, I have become an advocate for those trying to reclaim the symbol for artistic or spiritual uses. This has come with the realisation that I was trying to explain the Latvian experience within the frame of broader contexts of which I am inevitably part.

In article III, I argue that the attitude toward the swastika, or *ugunskrusts*, the emic Latvian name of the symbol, correlates with the interpretation of World War II in the collective memory of Latvia. Furthermore, the presence of the *ugunskrusts* in contemporary Latvian culture shows (see Figures 14, 15, and 16) that the specific collective memory of the Baltics still dominates and forms Latvian identity. At the centre of this collective memory are the national victims of communist crimes, which is the larger framework that supports the use of the *ugunskrusts* in Latvia because, unlike the the swastika in Western Europe, it is not seen as the embodiment of ultimate evil and can be interpreted as conveying a benevolent message. In line with these arguments, the fact that I am a part of this

collective Baltic memory is what makes this research topic possible for me. Looking at researchers positionally implies that the social, historical, and political location of the researcher influences her or his orientations and that it is impossible to be separate from the social processes one studies: "There is no way we can escape the social world we live in to study it" (Holmes 2020: 3). Therefore, my positionality in this case is first and foremost determined by me being an insider to Baltic collective memory. This belonging is not only ensured because of my nationality, but also because of my family history. Collective memory formation and transmission as I recognise it in the voices of the people I interviewed, is also a part of my story. I grew up with the often repeated painful memories of my grandfather's experience of the years he spent in a forced labour camp in Siberia, in comparison to the absolute silence of my grandmother about her sixteen years of forced settlement in Tomsk after being deported at the age of eighteen. In contrast to these directly absorbed and internalised memories, the crimes committed by the Nazi regime were something I learned about in school only fragmentarily. It would be fair to say that only with this research have I come a bit closer to understanding the scope of the tragedy that the Holocaust also was in Latvia, not just in the rest of Europe. Therefore, it is also fair to admit that I am more biassed towards interpreting certain uses of the *ugunskrusts* as benign, or rather not seeing all of its uses as representations of neo-Nazi ideologies. At the same time, exactly the awareness of the negative association that this symbol has was what brought me to this topic in the first place. Particularly well crystalised in my memory is a moment of what I could call an ethnological sensation.[17] In line with the reasoning that mundane contexts matter in ethnography-based research and that research topics catch up with you everywhere, this happened outside pre-arranged research settings while 'in the field'. After I became interested in folk ornament, the *ugunskrusts* was not initially part of my research as I thought the controversies surrounding it would be too much for me to handle gracefully. Then once in a swimming pool, in the middle of my swimming routine, my attention was caught by a newcomer, visible to those already in the pool. He was an extremely well-built middle-aged white male with a hairdo inspired by at that time very popular TV series *The Vikings*. On the left side of his bare chest there was a large tattoo, in proportions and design unmistakably a replication of a Nazi swastika. I noticed others noticing him and him noticing the noticing. It felt for a split second like the water in the pool had been covered with a thin layer of crisp ice. A question of how he would dare to display so shamelessly what I identified as a sign of hate, was further entangled with the discrepancy between the symbol he had marked himself with, and his gentle

[17] As defined by SIEF these are moments that "describe that special insightful and often unintentional experience during the research of an ethnologist or folklorist (in spe), the one moment that gave him or her the insight that this is it: the work I must dedicate myself to, the discipline that makes me tick." Ethnological sensations described by scholars from various parts of the world are available on the SIEF homepage: https://www.siefhome.org/videos/ethno_sensations.

attitude towards the little boy, presumably his son, who was with him. The outgrowth of this initial question was what drove me to look into the question further. How was it possible for people to use this symbol and claim its benevolent nature despite how contested the history of it was? How could I draw a line between benign and hate-inspiring applications when the same visual element was used?

Figure 14. Uguskrusts (cross of fire) in Līgo park by Uldis Sterģis. Photo by Digne Ūdre, 2023.

Figure 15. Chairs of the deities with ugunskrusti (crosses of fire) at the Self-discovery and Harmonisation Park in Sigulda parish. Photo by Digne Ūdre, 2021.

Figure 16. Latvian Song and Dance Celebration, Rīga, 6 July 2018. Source: Latvian National Centre for Culture photo archive.

I will conclude this discussion on the researcher's positionality with another layer of confrontation which revealed itself when I received reviews for article III before it was accepted for publishing. The first one was inviting me to address my hidden biases, provide deeper analysis, and explain further the nuances that allow the reclamation of the symbol for artistic and spiritual reasons despite its negative connotation. The second saw my positionality as insufficiently advocating for the reclamation narrative. By offering a very different understanding of the researcher's positionality of what I had in mind, the second reviewer wrote that my approach, with its focus on collective memory, did not seem to allow me "to take a truly neutral position enabling to arrive at any new solutions", going against my understanding and belief that "a truly neutral position" in ethnography-based research is not possible. In the minds of many, the swastika automatically equals neo-Nazi and hate groups, which is understandable given the history of the symbol. Therefore, my initial fear when working with this topic had always been that my interest would be translated as advocacy of neo-Nazi ideas. Paradoxically, instead of being accused of having neo-Nazi sympathies, I was accused of spreading Russian propaganda narratives. In the article, I discuss various examples of how public uses of the *ugunskrusts* had made it to Russian media coverage, and how these cases were used to frame the Russian narrative of the rebirth of neo-Nazi ideas in Latvia. This was perceived by the second reviewer as the opposite of what I was trying to do, claiming that I was risking "spreading Russian and former Soviet propaganda that 'all Latvians are Nazis'". The intensity of opinions associated with the swastika provides potential for further research, a topic which I outline in the last section of this chapter on conclusions and directions for further research.

SUMMARIES OF THE PUBLISHED ARTICLES

Article I

Ūdre, Digne 2019. The Symbol of the Morning Star During the Third Awakening in Latvia (1986–1991): From Cultural Opposition to Non-Violent Resistance. *Letonica* 39: 149–176.

Based on the interrelation between cultural opposition and non-violent resistance, the article explores the role of visuality in social movements by taking an in-depth look at the uses of visual symbols during the Latvian Singing Revolution. As a non-violent resistance movement, the Singing Revolution involved many symbolic actions. In the visual realm, the most potent of them besides the revival of the crimson-white-crimson flag (the official flag of the state prior to Soviet occupation) was the regular eight-pointed star or octagram symbolising the Morning Star (*Auseklītis, Auseklis*). The article elaborates on two interconnected themes. First, by drawing on folklore materials and published sources on historical uses of the Morning Star, it analyses the connection between historical layers of visual symbols and their potency as a means of cultural opposition. Second, based on interview data with participants and opinion leaders of the Singing Revolution, and on media materials, the article explores how the Morning Star became the best-recognised symbol of the Singing Revolution in Latvia. With roots in folk ornament, this symbol in its graphic, geometric shape came to embody the hope of national awakening and a wish for political independence. Arguing that symbols must be deeply embedded in culture to resonate with the wider public (Tarrow 1998), this article explores the historical uses that fuelled the symbolic potency of the symbol during the Singing Revolution. I show how, initially, it was connected to folk ornament and folk crafts, as well as mythology, because in Latvian folk songs Auseklītis is one of the heavenly mythological entities. I then explore the newer historical layer of the interwar period, when the Morning Star was the official symbol of the authoritarian regime's favoured voluntary paramilitary the Latvian Guards Organisation (*Latvijas Aizsargu organizācija*). The article demonstrates how the role of the Morning Star as a unifying symbol seems to have strengthened with the authoritarian regime, after the coup led by Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942). These historical uses fuelled the symbolic potential that the symbol had during the Singing Revolution. As the Morning Star was connected to eco-nationalism (Dawson 2000) and became the official symbol of the first environmental protection NGO in Latvia, the *Environment Protection Club* (Vides aizsardzības klubs), the article delves into memories of the organisation's leader Arvīds Ulme (1947). Another important contribution comes from journalist and politician Dainis Īvāns (1955), who was one of the best-known and beloved activists and leader of the Latvian Popular Front. The iconic visual image of him with tousled, thick hair and a knitted sweater with Morning Stars on it became an icon of the Singing Revolution. Both

interviews with Ulme and Īvāns provided a valuable source of first-hand accounts of the events of the Singing Revolution. One of the symbolically loaded questions on the agenda since the beginning of the Singing Revolution was that of the national symbols of the state, therefore, the article discusses the nationwide poll titled On the Question of National Symbols (1988), which also included a question of national ornament. To no one's surprise, the Morning Star was at the top of the list, and the poll resulted in the LSSR Supreme Council's Decree on the Culturally Historical Symbolism of the Latvian Nation. With the idea that culture created in the context of action helps to define the tools available to activists, on a theoretical level, the article looks at culture as a 'tool kit', meaning the culture's ability to shape action (Swidler 1986). In turbulent conditions like the Singing Revolution, culture as a tool kit works as an ideology, with high coherence in competition with other cultural views, and strong control over action as cultural meanings are more highly articulated and explicit then. This, along with the idea that in general revolutions and social movements tend to create a unified visual identity to differentiate themselves from opponents and create a sense of unity (Tarrow 2014) accounts for the enormous popularity of the Morning Star during the Singing Revolution.

Article II

Ūdre, Digne 2023. Ideological Tuning of Latvian Folk Ornament. – Toms Ķencis, Simon J. Bronner, and Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (eds.). *Socialist in Form, National in Content: Folklore and Ethnography in the Soviet Western Borderlands*. Lanham: Lexington, 121–144.

The chapter, which is a part of the larger, international project aimed at exploring the disciplinary histories of Soviet-era folkloristics and ethnology, as well as the conditions and consequences of state-supported promotion of folk arts, addresses the restrictions on both the creation and consumption of culture imposed during the intense sovietisation of the late Stalinist period, with a focus on the ideological pressures placed on the form and content of Latvian folk ornament. Based on archival material, media sources, and published material, the research is rooted in the theory of Soviet postcolonial studies (Annus 2018) and discusses the concept of "ideological tuning", which refers to the re-conceptualisation and re-interpretation of cultural practices to fit certain ideological demands (Grill 2015). I cover the imposition of the Marxist-Leninist vision of folk ornaments, although ideological tuning also took place within the nationalist ideology of the interwar era. The chapter looks into the intellectual biography of Latvian artist Jēkabs Bīne (1895–1955), at the experience of the individual, and aims to explore what it meant for a publicly active artist with an established career under nationalist ideology to participate in cultural life under the terror and ideological pressure of late Stalinism, and again after the Soviet occupation. Bīne is known for his artworks inspired by mythology, folklore, and ethnography. He was also one of

Ernests Brastiņš the closest collaborators, who was the main proponent of the mythological interpretation of Latvian folk ornament. Bīne's career in the Soviet period, although a short one, can be considered successful, although it was not without its difficulties. To reveal the discursive confusion caused by the rapid changes in the Soviet regime – a traumatic rupture brought from the outside and typical of the establishment of colonial rule (Annus 2018: 4) –, I provide a detailed analysis of Bīne's failed attempt to participate publicly in Soviet cultural life. In 1952, Bīne's lecture "On Ornament" at the House of Artistic Workers prompted condemnatory reviews from influential figures on the Soviet art scene. Although Bīne's diaries attest that he had tried to learn Soviet parlance by copying fragments of the Soviet framework for folk art that were published in local newspapers, his interpretation of ornament did not fit the theory of Marxism-Leninism. Another in-depth look reveals how the interpretation of folk ornament changed with changes in ideology. Here I use the example of Bīne's interpretation of the same type of ornament in an analysis of the zigzag in two different time periods. The first example, from 1936, interprets the zigzag motif as the symbol of Māra, who is one of the main female deities in Latvian mythology and which is consistent with Bīne's ideas on the mythological interpretation. The second illustration was created around 1953, when by adjusting the zigzag to the methodology of Marxism-Leninism it was interpreted in line with historical materialism, with the highlight of this evolutionary depiction of history being the zigzag in the flag of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. Apart from the intellectual biography of Bīne, with this research I was initially interested in whether any folk ornaments were forbidden during Soviet rule. The answer leads to the matter of form and content in ornament research, as generally, with some exceptions, like the cross and the swastika, what was discouraged was cultural nationalism inspired content, meaning the mythological interpretation of ornament, not the aesthetic form of that ornament.

Article III

Ūdre, Digne 2023. Vernacular Voices and Contested Meanings: Contemporary Uses of the Swastika in Latvia, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 55(3), 545–566.

The third article focuses on what is probably the most notorious of contested symbols: the swastika and its local variation in Latvia, the *ugunskrusts* (Cross of Fire). The article explores the specific historical and local factors that enable the use of this symbol in Latvia, despite the fact that in large parts of the Western world it is despised and connected with unprecedented crimes in the history of humanity. The focus of the article is on situations in which there is a conscious choice to use the *ugunskrusts* with the intention of reclaiming and rehabilitating the symbol for artistic and spiritual reasons, based on a belief in the symbol's benign nature and with the help of narratives of cultural heritage. Drawing on interview material, I show how the contemporary vernacular narratives that

legitimise the use of the *ugunskrusts* and frame it as cultural heritage, reaching back to both the historical precedents of the interwar period and archeological discoveries dating back to the pre-Christian period, with the oldest artefact depicting the symbol dated to the third century BCE. By taking a look at how cultural and political contexts correlate with the uses of the *ugunskrusts*, I argue that the most controversial instances involving this cross concern public use that resonates internationally as these disputes represent the highest levels of dissonance between official and vernacular voices. Despite the fact that a certain feeling of forbiddance is missing when it comes to the uses of the *ugunskrusts* in Latvia in comparison to uses of the swastika in other parts of Europe, people are well aware of the negative associations and engage in certain activities using linguistic, visual, and narrative strategies to deal with them. Focus on the personal level, and giving voice to people I interviewed, I reveal how competing memory regimes (Kattago 2009; Oberländer 2011) have played out in personal experience narratives and formed people's attitudes both in defence of the symbol, and in experiences of those whose attitudes are more aimed at multidirectional memory (Rothberg 2009). My main argument in the article is that despite the claims of symbol's benign nature and narratives of cultural heritage, the cases are not just about symbols or cultural heritage but are also just as much about conflict in past and current political affairs. Thus, the article shows how different national experiences of crimes committed by totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century determine the interpretation of and attitude toward the use of symbols connected with these regimes. In Latvia, the history of the twentieth century plays an important role in contemporary collective memory, therefore vernacular interpretations and uses of the *ugunskrusts* directly correlate with the interpretation of World War II.

Article IV

Ūdre-Lielbārde, Digne 2025. The Nexus of Folk Ornament and Mythology in Latvia: Traditionalization, Commodification, and Spirituality. *Journal of American Folklore* 138 (548).

Based on the interviews with contemporary ornament practitioners, the fourth article looks at how creative rearrangements and recontextualisations of traditional practices become the subject of traditionalisation. The article offers a nuanced look at the poetic approach of combining folk ornament with elements of Latvian mythology. Grounded in the theoretical conceptualisations of traditionalisation (Hymes 1975; Bauman 2004; Mould 2005; Estiri 2018; Cocq 2014) as viewed through an ethnographic lens this article provides insights on the relationship between traditionalisation, commodification, and spirituality. I was interested in the interaction between traditional and creative, and the incorporation of novel elements to preexisting practices. Therefore the article looks at traditionalisation as a tool for establishing the authority of individual creativity

when tensions over tradition and innovation are present, and when, despite being an inherent part of each other, the traditional and the creative clash. The commodification of traditional culture and the flow of spiritual ideas attached to it is something that quite expressly characterises ornament practice in contemporary Latvia, while at the same time the contemporary creativity of ornament practice draws inspiration from global tendencies. Despite the many inventive ways of engaging with ornament which have no direct precedent in traditional practices in terms of material, technique, or concept, for ornament practitioners there is a pronounced need to root their creativity in the realm of the traditional. One of the most pronounced strategic moves when creating links with the past is attribution or referencing previous events, performances, or people. I argue in the article that the element of the past in contemporary ornament practice is implemented in two ways: people either situate their experience within their personal memory by referring to their family members, or they invoke ancestors in a symbolic sense, attributing ornament and its mythological interpretations to pre-Christian Baltic ancestors. This grows out of the conceptualisation of Latvian folklore as having preserved many pre-Christian and pagan elements. To contextualise contemporary data, I discuss the nexus between ornament and mythology in the diachronic perspective, thus revealing the historical origins and evolution of this approach. This allows recognition of the roots of this interpretation in the cultural-nationalism-fuelled artistic endeavours of the 1920s and 1930s, and of how this has changed, has been adapted to, or been influenced by historical, social, and cultural factors. As a part of the new cultural productivity, artists and intellectuals of the interwar period created mythological interpretations of Latvian folk ornament. The most concise publication was authored by artist Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942) with his book *Latviešu ornamentika* (*Latvian Ornamentation,* 1923). Since this ornament practice in contemporary society has gained the status of having existed 'from time immemorial', it reveals the power of consolidation of cultural practices inherent in traditionalisation. As an ethnographic study of one of the most pronounced visual expressions of cultural and ethnic belonging, the article draws attention to what is currently a very lively folk practice in Latvia. Apart from the ethnographic knowledge created, this allows me to draw broader conclusions on the emic understanding of traditional and tradition in contemporary society and illuminates the current fascination with visual symbols and ethnic visuality.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Through arguments presented in this dissertation, I have demonstrated how the contemporary uses of folk ornament in Latvia reach beyond the realm of traditional culture. The folk ornament and mythology nexus is a cultural phenomenon wherein national and ethnic sentiments, belief, contemporary spirituality, commercialisation, and layers of historical meaning and contestation are intertwined in a mutually constitutive way. With its roots in the interwar era, which was the first period of the national self-determination in Latvia, the ornament and mythology nexus was created alongside the establishment of the national ideology. It consequently holds a high potential to express national sentiment and is an often-used visual tool to display one's ethnic identity and national belonging. In contemporary culture, manifestations of the folk ornament and mythology nexus range from practicing it as a visual trend in design to paths that lead ornament practitioners to self-development and contemporary spirituality. In addition to exploring ornament's visual transformations and manifestations in contemporary culture, I have examined the origins of the folk ornament and mythology nexus as a folk revival characterised by a renewed, politically motivated interest in and appreciation of traditional cultural expressions, involving their rediscovery, reinterpretation, and traditionalisation. Apart from the initial revival phase, I have covered other historical periods when the relationship between folk ornament as a visual cultural phenomenon and mythology as a content for this visual form have been relevant and connected to particular ideologies of those times.

One of the conclusions that I have drawn from analysing the origins of the ornament and mythology nexus in Latvia, from looking at how it has played out through different historical periods, and how it manifests in contemporary settings, is that this uncovers the dynamics between vernacular and academic voices. Despite the academic criticism received both shortly after it was created and also in contemporary publications, the idea has been picked up with enthusiasm by the general public and traditionalised, i.e. made into a tradition perceived as coming from time immemorial. In my assessment based on the conclusions drawn from my research, this interpretation is well established in contemporary culture beyond specific interest groups. Its presence is ensured not only by the various creative ways in which it is part of contemporary culture, but also because it is becoming institutionalised. Among other things, it is included in education curricula, starting from the earliest levels of education. The contagiousness and persistence of these ideas and considerably rapid traditionalisation are also visible in the spin-off of the folk ornament and mythology nexus, the contemporary myth of the Lielvārde belt, discussed in section I. This kind of resilience of vernacular knowledge has also been present on other occasions of creative re-interpretation of folk art, which I have discussed in section II.

The folk ornament and mythology nexus has been attractive for different reasons depending on the historical setting. During the interwar period, it fit well

with the zeitgeist and general attitudes, meanings, and values attached to folk art. In the era of regaining political, social, and cultural self-determination, folk ornament was one of the links with the first independence period and was able to convey emotional messages crucial for grassroots mobilisation. In contemporary settings, one of the distinct driving forces of the ornament and mythology nexus is the possibility to commodify it. Increased interest in ethnically and culturally specific practices and the ever-growing presence of the intangible cultural heritage framework amidst the global flows of information have further contributed to the popularity of the folk ornament and mythology nexus.

Despite the well-established position of this nexus in contemporary culture, changes in general attitudes raise the question of the dynamics of the popularity of this interpretation. If something is valued as traditional, then inevitably it tends to be perceived as something that overlooks the passage of time. However, as this dissertation demonstrates, even practices that are interpreted as traditional, are subject to the dynamics of popularity, in a similar way to how fashion trends work with waves of popularity that turn into fatigue and resentment. This was the case with the extensive use of the eight-pointed star during the Singing Revolution, which led to its rejection during the first years of renewed independence. This is something that to some extent is taking place now with both the commodified and beyond-consumption uses of folk ornament becoming so oversaturated that it has led to exhaustion and annoyance in some parts of the society.

Looking beyond the borders of the geopolitical space of this dissertation, the overall rise in popularity of ethnic visuality in different parts of the world is one of the possible avenues for future research and a chance to continue the topics discussed here. In the preliminary outlines, I see contemporary ethnic visuality as creatively rearranged expressive visual forms based on the distinctive features of ethnic cultures, with roots in vernacular forms of traditional and indigenous cultures. As with the Latvian folk ornament, the commodification aspect plays a crucial role, extracting the most marketable and visually appealing parts from cultures. Framed as a re-appreciation of ancient practices and traditions, ethnic visuality becomes an easily employed resource for expressing ethnic identity and belonging. Based on my observations beyond Latvia, ethnic visuality covers various expressions ranging from exclusive niche design products and high fashion to tourist souvenirs, vernacular creativity included. Inevitably ethnic visuality includes contested issues, both for the general public and scholars alike, cultural appropriation being one of these.

Considering both the potential and ambiguity of the topic, another of the possible future research directions would be to expand the topic of the contemporary uses of the swastika by introducing a comparative perspective and looking into how this contested symbol is used elsewhere, for example in Lithuania and Finland. Apart from the chance to see how the conclusions I have drawn in article III work in different geopolitical spaces, the rationale for choosing to do this kind of comparative study would be the idea that both Lithuania and Finland share the historical legacy of the presence of the swastika in their cultures before and beyond Nazi uses. However, their historical paths in

the 20th century have been different. Lithuania shares with Latvia both the Baltic heritage and Soviet occupation, while Finland carries Finno-Ugric heritage and a history of Soviet aggression. This would also mean a continuation theory-wise as I believe that a framework comprising folkloristics, Soviet postcolonial theory, and memory studies has been a fruitful one. I believe that attention to contested topics of this kind could further contribute to folkloristics as an invitation to analytically access those aspects of cultures and traditions that are subject to debate, disagreement, and reinterpretation due to changing societal values, political ideologies, and cultural shifts.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Läti rahvapärase ornamendi ja mütoloogia neksus kui taastulemine: vaidlustatud ajaloolised kihid, visualiseeritud ideoloogiad ja kaubastatud loovus

Doktoritöö uurib etnograafiliste meetodite ja folkloristliku teooria toel rahvapärase ornamendi ja mütoloogia seoseid Lätis. Ornamendi ja mütoloogia neksusele sel moel lähenedes avaneb tänases Lätis kirev vaatepilt, kus talupoeglikust kultuurist pärinevaid elemente tõlgendatakse, taaskasutatakse ja kaubastatakse neoliberaalse majanduse tingimustes loovalt inspireerituna nii romantiseeritud rahvuslikest minevikukäsitlustest kui ka globaalse levikuga ideedest. Kaasaegsest loovusest sügavamale puurivale kriitilisele pilgule paljastuvad selle neksuse ajaloolised kihistused, mis aitavad mõista vaidlustatud mineviku vastuolulisi versioone ning märgata aja jooksul moodustunud ideoloogilise paatina kihte. Käesolevas väitekirjas tähistabki rahvapärase ornamendi ja mütoloogia neksus lähenemist, mis kombineerib Läti rahvakunstile omaseid geomeetrilise ornamendi kujundeid mütoloogiliste olemitega. Mütoloogia geomeetrilised visualiseeringud kannavad mütoloogilisi nimesid ning jutustavad folkloorsest ainesest kantud lugusid kujunditele omistatud tähendustest, milles väljendub usk ornamendi head tegevasse jõusse. Selle laialt levinud arusaama järgi pärinevad ornamendid ja nende mütoloogilised tähendused „vanadelt lätlastelt", kes asustasid tänase Läti alasid eelkirstlikul perioodil ning sellele järgnenud sajanditel.

Doktoritöö sai alguse küsimusest, kuidas käsitleda ornamendi ja mütoloogia sidet teaduslikult, laskmata end eksitada rahvuslikest sentimentidest ja minevikku ümbritsevast romantilisest aurast, mis annavad Lätis tooni pea kõiges folklooriga seonduvas. Akadeemilise distsipliinina põhineb tänane folkloristika rahvapärase teadmise ja loovuse tunnistamisel selle kõige erinevamates avaldumisvormides ja -kontekstides igapäevasest piduliku ja häbimärgistatuni, kollektiivsest individuaalseni. Folkloriste huvitavad need kui ühiskondade ja kogukondade sotsiaalse koe uurimise allikad nii tänapäeval kui ka minevikus. Sellest lähtuvalt seab käesolev väitekiri eesmärgiks uurida rahvapärase ornamendi ja mütoloogia neksust just individuaalsete kogemuste perspektiivist. Mind huvitab, kuidas inimesed ornamentide ja mütoloogia seoste ja seostamise läbi oma loovust mõtestavad ja milliseid tähendusi sellele omistavad; kuidas nad seeläbi rahvuslikke tundmusi väljendades oma kuulumist kujundavad ning kuidas ornamendi ja mütoloogia seostajad samal ajal nii vormivad vaidlustatud mineviku vastuoluliste versioonide kihte kui ka saavad nende poolt vormitud. Kuivõrd väitekiri on kantud ka vajadusest ornamendi ja mütoloogia neksuse teadusliku käsitluse järele, on selle eesmärgiks ka leida sobiv keel, sõnad ja teoreetilised kontseptsioonid kirjeldamaks kultuuripraktikaid nii olevikus kui minevikus viisil, mis oleks analüütiliselt kriitiline, kuid jääks inimeste arusaamade ja eluilmade suhtes austavaks ilma, et sellega kaasneks romantiseeriv suhtumine. Kokkuvõtvalt uurib doktoritöö rahvapärase ornamendi ja mütoloogia neksuse algupära, kuidas see seos erinevatel ajaloolistel perioodidel erinevate ideoloogiate mõjuväljas on avaldunud ning millisena see ilmneb ja kuidas toimib tänastes tingimustes.

Form, National in Content: Folklore and Ethnography in the Soviet Western Borderlands (2023), mis uurib etnoloogia ja folkloristika distsiplinaarset ajalugu Nõukogude Liidu läänepoolsetes vabariikides ja sotsialistlikes riikides. Valdavalt arhiiviallikatel ja meediatekstidel põhinev peatükk lähtub sotskolonialismi uuringutest (Annus 2018) ning „ideoloogilise tuunimise" (Grill 2015) mõistest, millega viidatakse kultuuripraktikate uuesti kontseptualiseerimisele ja ümber tõlgendamisele, viimaks need (uute) ideoloogiliste nõudmistega vastavusse. Analüüsin Läti kunstniku Jēkabs Bīne (1895–1955) intellektuaalse biograafia näitel, kuidas, millistel tingimustel võis rahvusriigi ja rahvusliku ideoloogia kontekstis juba tunnustuse pälvinud küpses eas kunstnik naasta kultuuriellu nõukogude Lätis, kus valitsesid hilisstalinistlik terror ja ideoloogiline surve. Mütoloogia, folkloori ja rahvakultuuri aineliste teoste poolest tuntud Bīne oli Ernests Brastiņš'i (1892–1942) lähemVäitekiri koosneb neljast publikatsioonist. Neist järjekorras esimene ja ajaliselt varaseim (2019) on artikkel Läti laulvas revolutsioonis olulist rolli mänginud kaheksakanna motiivist ning laiemalt visuaalsusest ühiskondlikes liikumistes. Läti punase ja valge rahvuslipu kõrval tõusis laulva revolutsiooni kui vägivallatu vabadusliikumise visuaalseks sümboliks just koidutähega (läti keeles *auseklītis, auseklis*) seostatud kaheksakand. Artiklis on kaks põimunud teemaliini, mis lähtuvad teesist, et kaasaja ühiskonnaga laiemalt resoneerumaks peavad sümbolid olema kultuuris sügavalt juurdunud. Esiteks analüüsingi kaheksakanna ajaloolisi kasutusi kajastavaid folkloorseid ja trükis avaldatud allikaid, et selgitada visuaalsete sümbolite varasemate kasutuskihtide mõju nende võimele toimida kultuurilise vastupanu vahendeina. Samal ajal huvitab mind, ja tuginen sealjuures oma intervjuudele Läti laulva revolutsiooni osalejate ja arvamusliidritega ning meediatekstidele, kuidas sai just kaheksakannast Läti laulva revolutsiooni tuntuim sümbol, mis kehastas rahvusliku ärkamisajaga kaasnenud lootust ja poliitilise iseseisvuse igatsust. Kui kaheksakand on levinud motiiv rahvakunstis ning koidutäht esineb Läti rahvalauludes taevase mütoloogilise tegelasena, siis maailmasõdade vahelisel iseseisvuse perioodil sai sellest võimude soosingut nautinud vabatahtliku paramilitaarse organisatsiooni Aizsargi ametlik sümbol. Näitan, kuidas selle roll rahvast ühendava sümbolina kasvas veelgi pärast Kārlis Ulmanise (1877–1942) autoritaarset riigipööret ning kuidas need erinevad ajaloolised kasutuskihid tugevdasid kaheksakanna sümboolset potentsiaali laulva revolutsiooni aastatel, mil koidutäht seoti ökorahvuslusega (Dawson 2000) ning sellest sai Läti esimese kodanikualgatusel põhineva keskkonnakaitseorganisatsiooni (*Vides aizsardzības klubs*) ametlik sümbol.

Doktoritöö II publikatsioon ilmus kogumikus *Socialist in* aid kaastöölisi ning just Brastiņš propageeris sõdadevahelisel perioodil väga jõuliselt Läti rahvapärase ornamendi mütoloogilisi tõlgendusi. Lisaks Bīne püüdlustele uue režiimi ja ideoloogiaga kohaneda ajendas mind tema biograafiaga tegelema ka küsimus sellest, kas nõukogude võim püüdis mõnda rahvapärast ornamenti keelustada. See omakorda juhatas mind vormi ja sisu suhte probleemistikuni ornamentide uurimises ning järelduseni, et mõne erandiga, nagu rist või haakrist, taunis nõukogude võim mitte rahvapäraste ornamentide esteetilist vormi, vaid neile omistatud mütoloogilist sisu, mis seostus kultuurilise rahvuslusega.

Järjekorras III publikatsioon (2023) on pühendatud kõige kurikuulsamale vaidlustatud sümbolile, haakristile ja selle Läti versioonile nimega *ugunskrusts* ehk tulerist. Käsitlen artiklis ajaloolisi ja kultuurilisi põhjuseid, mis teevad selle sümboli kasutamise tänases Lätis võimalikuks vaatamata tõigale, et mitmel pool mujal maailmas seostatakse haakristi ennenägematult räigete kuritegudega inimkonna ajaloos. Keskendun juhtumitele, kus *ugunskrusts*'i on kasutatud teadlikult sooviga seda kunstilistel ja spirituaalsetel alustel rehabiliteerida, lähtudes uskumusest, et tegemist on healoomulise sümboliga, ning luues narratiivseid seoseid kultuuripärandiga. Uurimuse aluseks on intervjuud, milles *ugunskrusts*'i kasutajad legitimeerivad sümboli kasutamist, käsitledes seda kultuuripärandina ning luues seoseid varasemate ajalooliste perioodidega. Analüüsist ilmneb, kuidas oma kogemustest jutustades viidatakse võistlevatele mälurežiimidele (Kattago 2009; Oberländer 2011) ning kuidas need on mõjutanud nii sümboli kaitsjate kui ka nende inimeste hoiakuid, kes eelistavad kõneleda mitmesuunalisest mälust (Rothberg 2009). Väidangi, et kuigi intervjuudes kirjeldati svastikat healoomulise sümbolina ning seostati seda kultuuripärandiga, ei käsitletud seeläbi pelgalt sümboleid ja kultuurivara, vaid ka minevikus aset leidnud konflikte ning tänaseid poliitikaid. Näitan, kuidas rahvuslikud kogemused 20. sajandi totalitaarsete režiimidega mõjutavad nende režiimidega seotud sümbolite tõlgendusi, sümbolite kasutust ja suhtumist neisse. Lätis, kus 20. sajandi ajalugu mängib tänases kollektiivses mälus olulist rolli, on *ugunskrusts*'i rahvapärased tõlgendused ja kasutused otseses korrelatsioonis II maailmasõja tõlgendusega.

Doktoritöö IV publikatsiooni (ilmumas) aluseks on intervjuud ornamente kasutavate praktikutega tänases Lätis ning traditsionaliseerimise teoreetilised käsitlused (Hymes 1975, Bauman 2004, Mould 2005, Estiri 2018, Cocq 2014), täpsemalt traditsionaliseerimise, kaubastamise ja spirituaalsuse suhted. Analüüsin traditsionaliseerimist võttena, mida individuaalsed loojad kasutavad oma autoriteedi kehtestamiseks traditsiooni ja innovatsiooni pingeväljas, kus traditsioon ja loovus vaatamata olemuslikule seotusele põrkuvad. Ornamentidega seotud praktikaid tänases Lätis iseloomustab traditsioonilise kultuuri kaubastamine ja üleilmsetest trendidest inspireeritud spirituaalsete ideede juurdevool. Kuigi kohtasin välitööde käigus ornamentidega seotud leidlikke tooteid ja teenuseid, millel puudus otsene side traditsiooniliste materjalide, tehnikate või mõistetega, oli praktikutel selgelt vajadus seostada oma loovuse lätteid traditsioonilisega. Artikkel toob fookusesse ühe kõige elujõulisema kaasaegse rahvapärase fenomeni, mille kaudu väljendatakse kultuurilist ja etnilist kuulumist. Selle etnograafiline ja folkloristlik uurimine võimaldab teha üldisemaid järeldusi traditsioonilise ja traditsiooni eemilise mõtestamise kohta ning selgitada visuaalsete sümbolite ja etnilise visuaalsuse atraktiivsust.

Doktoritöö demonstreerib, et kuigi pealtnäha marginaalne nähtus, võimaldab rahvapärase ornamendi ja mütoloogia neksus Lätis uurida ideoloogilisi nihkeid läbi mitme sajandi, alates 19. sajandi teise poole rahvuslikust ärkamisest kuni tänapäevani, ning analüüsida rahvapäraseid ajaloosündmuste käsitlusi, rahvuslikke tundmusi ja sotsiaalseid kujutelmi.

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