

## Body – Identity – Society

### Guest Editor's Remarks on the Thematic Block

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Recently, at the XII International Congress of Finno-Ugric Studies (Oulu, Finland, 2015), within the framework of the 17<sup>th</sup> Symposium: *Body – Identity – Society: Concepts of the Socially Accepted Body*, there was an interdisciplinary dialogue initiated by Hungarian scholars. The main organizer of the panel was Katalin Juhász, senior research fellow at the Institute of Ethnology in the RCH of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.<sup>1</sup> Scholars from Finland, Hungary, Austria and Russia responded to the call for papers. Following the successful symposium, the participants wished to publish the proceedings. Katalin Juhász selected a handful of representative papers for *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*. In the present 2016/2 issue of the journal, the revised papers are presented with the guest editorial work of her.

The papers in this thematic block, *Body – Identity – Society: Concepts of the Socially Accepted Body*, introduce various aspects of the topic of cleanliness and purity from the perspectives of ethnography, anthropology, and linguistic and literary studies. The papers offer an overview of concepts, theoretical interpretations, methodological approaches, and field research summaries.

In anthropology, the attention paid to the issues of cleanliness and purity has increased since the theoretical trend established by the publication of Mary Douglas' seminal book *Purity and Danger* on purity and pollution (DOUGLAS 1966). It has been a generally accepted understanding in anthropology that purity and pollution are culturally defined categories. Several authors have searched for the meaning of 'dirt' and 'clean,' and have studied concepts, cultural responses and practices concerning cleanliness and hygiene through time and space in various societies. They compared and contrasted indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> The following topics were announced in the symposium's call for papers: The concept of cleanliness as a social and historical construct. (How the concept of well-groomed appearance standards – perceptions of neatness in women and men – are socially shaped.) Methods, techniques, tools and institutions of body care among people of different backgrounds (genders, generations, social and ethnical groups). Daily washing habits and rituals; Magical forms of washing/bathing; Body and beauty care. Attitudes towards the body within different social groups by looking at the representations of the (changing) ideal of the body. Interaction between appearance and identity, social networks and social status work.

notions with western interpretations, from abstract, ritual and moral dimensions to objectified and materialistic aspects, from public to private dimensions.

We hope that the present medley of papers will positively contribute to the scholarly discussion of this complex issue.

In the first paper of the thematic block, **Katalin Juhász** offers a brief clarification of the terms “cleanliness” and “hygiene,” as well as a useful review of international and Hungarian research on the topic. Using international comparisons, she briefly models the major socio-historical periods of the changing cleanliness habits among rural populations in Hungary in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Comparative Finno-Ugric studies are of special importance for the Hungarian scholarship. Most of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Europe (Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin; Finns, Estonians, Karelians, Vepsians, Livonians, Izhorians, and Votes in the Nordic-Baltic area) on the contrary of their regional and ethnic specialties, have followed the logic of modernization path in their culture of hygiene. The hygiene research of them is based on the works and theories (mentioned in Katalin Juhász’ next article), and it is also methodologically similar. They are in effect parts of European culture, with the exceptional speciality, that some populations at the peripheral areas (e.g. Sami) have maintained several aspects of their archaic pre-Christian culture for a longer time until relatively recently.

Compared to these, the socio-political historical situation is a bit different with the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Volga-Ural region (Mordvins, Maris, Komis, Udmurts) and Western Siberia (Voguls/Mansi, Ostyaks/Khanty, Samoyeds, and other nationalities with small populations). Although these peoples have been living under Russian rule for centuries, their unique cultures and religions had really started to be endangered during the Stalinist regime, when the assimilation or “Sovietization” of nationalities and the systematic destruction of national cultures took place. (On the other hand it also applies to peoples, such as the Vepsians, Livonians, Izhorians, and Votes with small population numbers in Northern Russian territories under Soviet Rule.) The demographic situation of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Siberia greatly deteriorated when in the 1930s–40s massive numbers of Russian, Ukrainian, German and Baltic families were relocated to the areas where these indigenous nationalities lived. From the 1960s onwards, the expansion of fossil fuel and other mineral extraction brought the dramatic consequences of labor migration upon the indigenous peoples of small populations, because it radically transformed their way of life and culture. The situation only worsened after the regime change (*perestroika*), when the restructuring of the mining industry and resource management was followed by a decline in the population’s standard of living.<sup>2</sup>

For a long time, ethnographic research of the Finno-Ugrians sought to document the culture prior to Russian influence, thus “saving” it from oblivion. We know that, especially among Siberian Finno-Ugric peoples such as the Khanty, the notions of purity essentially determine and are intertwined in all areas of social structure and encounter.

A look into the everyday lifestyles, daily habits and underlying cognitive mechanisms of the cultures that share Finno-Ugric origins but are greatly disparate could provide a

<sup>2</sup> C.f. e.g. FUNK 2016 on the role and actual problems of ‘ethnographic expertise’ in new industry projects and resource management in Siberia and one of the latest works of Zoltán Nagy describing this process through the case of the Khanty people (NAGY 2016).

lesson for researchers of other cultures. Through cleanliness research, by seeing “behind the scenes,” the hidden dimensions of the culture of individual peoples are revealed, on the one hand holding a mirror to the representatives of other cultures, and on the other hand creating opportunities for comparison.

Although others have turned their attention to the particular purity laws of Siberian Finno-Ugric peoples (e.g. ADAJEV 2000; LAPINA 1998; KOPTSEVA – LIBAKOVA 2015; TALIGINA 1999;), **Eszter Ruttkay-Miklián** is one of the few who explores the concept of purity in exceptional depth through the means of fieldwork in a small community—in her case, living for years as a family member among the Khanty, a partly fishing-hunting people dwelling along the Synya river (RUTTKAY 2014). She documents how “the set of rules stemming from the cleanliness concept of the Synya Khanty works in everyday life.” Specifically, what concepts can be used to describe their ideas of cleanliness; what categories, organizing principles they use to divide the world into clean and unclean sections; how they ensure their separation and maintain cleanliness; what is the extent and the motivation that makes it so important to them; how it is controlled, and what to do upon breach.<sup>3</sup>

**Ildikó Lehtinen** examines cleanliness as a part of Mari mentality. According to Mari ethnologist Nikandr Popov, the Mari ideal means “pure-hearted man,” which includes purity of thought, speech and action, as well as physical purity, health and strength (POPOV 2013:232–233). Lehtinen examines the cleanliness discourses and practices from two aspects: on the one hand, as a traditional moral concept, and on the other hand, as a hygiene concept adjusted to Soviet mass culture (cf. LEHTINEN 2009). We know that personal hygiene was markedly highlighted in the Soviet propaganda of civilized behavior (*kulturnost*) (GUROVA 2008:38–76; FILTZER 2010; STARKS 2008). Surveying how the health and hygiene propaganda affected everyday practice or if there is a connection between the traditional and the propagated concepts of cleanliness is definitely an enlightening enterprise.

Similarly to her colleagues, studying Finno-Ugrians in Russia, **Tatiana Minniyakhmetova**’s survey of the concept of purity among the Udmurts was rooted in the terminology. The dual concept of “clean/unclean” can be perceived as an elementary conceptual structure upon which a number of closely related semantic fields are based on the one hand, while on the other hand, “through symbolization and metaphorical terminology,” seemingly distant social phenomena can interconnect, thus the linguistic approach seems self-evident. The word “clean,” *chylkyt*, has a complex meaning in the Udmurt language as well. Besides “clean,” it can also mean the following: “healthy,” “beautiful” (attractive), “comforting/normal,” and “self-evident.” The concept of cleanliness is traditionally not only used in the everyday sense of devoid of physical dirt, but in the religious-ritual sense, too. The bath house (which, by the way, was traditionally used on Thursdays, diverging from the Orthodox Russians), is the residence of the spirits, connecting the living with the dead, and therefore played a key role at the turning points of human life.<sup>4</sup> Cleansing rites before major events are explicitly ritual in nature in the

<sup>3</sup> The true object of scientific investigation in this very complex subject matter is therefore the concept and value of purity (cf. VEREBÉLYI 2009).

<sup>4</sup> MINNIYAKHMETOVA 2015:78–87; cf. KANDRINA 2004; KOVÁCS-TÓKA 2009; NIKONOVA – KANDRINA 2003; PARÉJ 2009.

Udmurt tradition, demonstrated by the fact that practical activities are complemented by magical-ritual elements.

**Galina Nikitina** searches for late 19th-century Udmurt ideals of beauty in a variety of written sources and folklore texts. It is not a peculiarly Udmurt feature but quite common among people engaged in agricultural activities that exuberant health and industriousness are considered major virtues. However, it is a sure sign of foreign influence that it was not the physical features typical of their own anthropological traits that the Udmurts considered beautiful but rather those of the Russians or Tatars living around them, especially for women. At the same time, this points to the erosion of Udmurt identity as well.

The junctions of identity and body are nicely delineated in **Laura Bába's** and **Krisztina Kariz's** analysis of the young Estonian writer Sofi Oksanen's novels based on real historical events. These novels focus on the identity crisis that occurred among Estonians in the 1940s as a result of the traumas experienced after the Soviet invasion and forceful annexation to the Soviet Union (cf. GYŰRKY 2012; TURI 2011). To be Estonian in the Soviet regime was a subjugated, humiliated situation, yet Estonians in cahoots with the Communists were traitors even in the eyes of their own people, while the Russians also had their own reservations. In Finland there are further prejudicial presumptions: an Estonian is a "Russky," and if it's a woman, she is "easy prey" as well. The novels' heroines strive to compensate for the inter-generational shame and feelings of inferiority stemming from the violence they've suffered with meticulous cleansing rituals (be it bathing, or bulimia as compulsive "internal" cleansing), makeup, or clothing.

#### REFERENCES CITED

See the cited references to the editorial at the end of the author's next paper in this issue: *Body – Identity – Society: Concepts of the Socially Accepted Body in the 20th Century in Hungarian Rural Areas* (303–312)

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