

## **Bear culture**

A new approach to bear-human relations in Scandinavian folklore

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VT 2021  
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## **Abstract**

The present work serves to bring to the fore bear-human relations as they appear in Scandinavian folklore. This has been done through mythic discourse analysis of Norwegian and Swedish folkloric material, which was organized by constructing a motif-index and then analysing the material through a theoretical framework based on recent developments in anthropology. The thesis develops a working theory of what I call *bear culture*. This concept is an amalgamation of new animist theories, perspectivism and the implications derived from them. If bears are approached as persons with agency, and are endowed through perspectivism with a body that is inherently malleable and fundamentally an expression cultural instruments, then bears and their interaction with humans can be understood as reflecting *bear culture*. The study shows that the theme of transformation, which permeates the material at hand, can be tied in various ways to cultural interactions and dynamics.

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## **1. Introduction**

The following thesis serves to give attention to the role of the bear in Scandinavian folklore. While the bear ceremonialism of the Sámi and Finno-Karelian traditions have been given continuous attention in the research history, the Swedish and Norwegian bear lore, by comparison, has mostly been mentioned in passing or in shorter works, and often merely as a point of comparison to the Sámi and Finno-Karelian traditions, rather than being given full attention in their own rights. The ambition of this thesis is to highlight the way in which humans and bears have related to each other. The personhood and agency of the bear and its interactions with human society will be the focus of the study. In order to capture this, anthropological approaches to human-animal relations have been adapted and applied to the task at hand.

This thesis is a continuation of the work that resulted in a BA-thesis degree in 2019, which was a comparative study of bear- myth and practices in the Circum-Baltic area. In the present work, the cultural history of the bear has here been analysed through the lens of new animist theories and mythic discourse analysis. The novelty of the theoretical approaches, in terms of applying them to Scandinavian folkloric material, as well as the lack of research generally on the subject at hand prompted me to work develop the concept of *bear culture*, exploring bear-human relations as cultural interaction.

### **1.1 Purpose and research questions**

The purpose of the thesis is to shed light on bear-human relations in non-modernized traditions of Scandinavia as they appear in folkloric and ethnographic source materials, mainly from the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In order to do this, anthropological theories dealing with personhood, corporeality and kinship have been applied to the material. Theories of *animism*, dealing with the personhood and agency of other-than-humans, makes up a foundation for understanding the material. Animism then leads into *perspectivism*, which acknowledges the veracity of other-than-humans' perspectives on themselves and others. Perspectivism also deals with corporeality and the performative aspect of bodies, which feeds into *totemism*, where humans and other-than-humans perceive fundamental sameness between them. These perspectives build up to introducing a new, theoretical approach to bear-human relations through what I call *bear-culture*. This approach treats bear-human relations as cultural interaction. Bear persons are thought of as representatives of bear-culture in the same way that

human persons are representatives of different human cultures.<sup>1</sup> This theory should be understood as a heuristic approach, exploring largely uncharted terrain. The underlying analytical categories; animism, perspectivism and totemism should be viewed as distinct but related components used for testing and developing the theory rather than rigid regimes into which the material is shoehorned.

I propose that approaching bear-human relations in non-modern Scandinavia through the concept of *bear-culture* and thereby through cultural encounters will further current understandings and that this approach can also be transferred and adapted to traditions outside of Scandinavia.

## **1.2 Disposition**

After the introducing the purpose, material, method, theories and earlier research in sections 1-1.5, section 2 gives a short background to the subject. The survey is presented in section 3; 3.1 is focused on the mind/body divide (or lack thereof), magical bear-human transformation and Bear's son tales. 3.2 Is focused on the threat the bear poses to human women and the morals of bears. 3.3 deals with vernacular bear-taxonomies, bear-naming, bear-human codes of conduct and totemic bear ancestry. 3.4 is the last part of the survey is focused on the bears role in vernacular Christian mythology and in courtship, engagement and weddings.

Section 4 recapitulates the survey briefly and continues with a discussion of what is found to be the conclusions of the thesis. Section 5 summarizes the thesis and section 6 contains the list of sources and literature.

## **1.3 Material and method**

### **1.3.1 Material**

The *Norsk folkeminnelags skrifter*, henceforth abbreviated as NFLS, constitutes the main body of source material for the survey at hand. The NFLS is a journal published by the Norwegian Folklore Society (*Norsk folkeminnelag*) and has been published annually or bi-annually since 1921. Each issue is either centered on a specific theme or deals broadly with folklore and ethnography in a certain geographic area of Norway.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> What a human person says or does at any given moment can be interpreted in relation to that human person's cultural context.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of the former: NFL nr.28 - Storaker, Joh[an] Th[eodor], *Sygdom og forgjørelse i den norske folket: (Storakers samlinger V) ved Nils Lid*, Oslo, 1932 – "Sickness and bewitchment in the Norwegian

The formation of a centralized organization for collecting Norwegian folklore was initiated by Moltke Moe and Alexander Bugge who had in their possession the large private collections of 19th century pioneers of Norwegian folkloristics Magnus Brostrup Landstad, Jörgen Moe, Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, Sophus Bugge and Moltke Moe. These collections were donated to the central archive organization, the NFS (*Norsk folkeminnesamling*), established by Knut Liestøl in 1914. The NFS enlisted laymen collectors and granted them stipends, ensuring that the collections grew. Voices were raised for making the collected materials accessible to the broader public and thus the NFLS saw the light of day.<sup>3</sup>

Organized collection of folklore and the subsumption of the collected materials into a useable archival structure entails a certain degree of distortion. The practice of employing laymen to interview informants required that the scholars responsible for organizing the collected materials were able to control what was collected.<sup>4</sup> One such instrument was the explicit instructions to the collectors, *Veiledning ved innsamling av folkeminder* ("Guide to collecting folk memories"), written by Reidar Th. Christiansen in 1917.<sup>5</sup> This short book contains a system of categories and subcategories that constitute what the collector is supposed to look for.

This was a process of institutionalizing and expropriating folk culture in which certain things may have been omitted or at the very least distorted. The academics at the top of the organisation had a predetermined set of ideas defining what folklore was supposed to be – "the terrain is shaped by the map", as Norwegian folklorist and former head of NFL Kyrre Kverndokk puts it.<sup>6</sup> In his 2011 article *Han ligner litt på nissen i grunn* Kverndokk addresses these methodological and source critical issues in the Norwegian folkloristics of the early 20th century. Kverndokk points out the risk of silencing out variation and presenting an idealized picture whatever was the specific subject at hand, given the self-perpetuating nature of the method.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Kverndokk also notes that the collectors sometimes stepped outside the given "curriculum" and had relative freedom in terms of who to interview and how to record

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folklore", or, of the latter: NFL nr.9 - Moe, Moltke, *Folkeminne frå Bøherad*, Oslo, 1925 – "Folk memories from Bøherad".

<sup>3</sup> Kyrre Kverndokk, Line Esborg and Leiv Sem, "Innleiing" in Esborg, Line. (red.), *Or gamalt: nye perspektiver på folkeminner ; festskrift til Anna-Wiersholm, som takk for 40 års arbeid for og med folkeminnene*, Norsk folkeminnelag, Oslo, 2011, p.5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Kyrre Kverndokk – "Han ligner litt på nissen i grunn" in Esborg (ed.) 2011, p.82.

<sup>5</sup> See Christiansen, Reidar Thoralf, *Veiledning ved innsamling av folkeminder*, Kristiania, 1917 and the expanded version Christiansen, Reidar Thoralf, *Norske folkeminne.: En veiledning for samlere og interesserte.*, Oslo, 1925.

<sup>6</sup> "...terrenget er formet etter kartet", Kverndokk in Esborg 2011, s.82.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.90-94.

what was said.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Kverndokk recognizes that the presuppositions defining what to look for during field work was indeed based on a solid knowledge about existing traditions.<sup>9</sup>

With regards to the present work it should be noted that some of the general themes appearing in the chosen source material are indeed mentioned in the 1925 version of Christiansen's "handbook"; the danger of bears to pregnant women and the larger theme of stories and practices tied to bear-human transformation.<sup>10</sup> Both of these subjects make up key elements of the thesis. In the same manner as the collectors of the material were given expectations and biases concerning what to record and therefore implicitly what to omit, my own role as "extractor" rather than collector is challenged by what I expect to find. This will be elaborated on in the methods-subsection.

The NFLS material was chosen on the grounds of personal interest, since my earlier forays into the Circum-Baltic bear traditions had mainly been focused on Sámi, Finno-Karelian and Swedish traditions. In the literature dealing with said traditions the corresponding Norwegian traditions are only mentioned scarcely and in passing. In searching for a suitable corpus to work from, it soon became apparent that the NFLS fills the requirements with regards to the actual content as well as to volume and availability. The number of issues of the NFLS reviewed was determined by access to indices. Issues 1-118 are indexed systematically and alphabetically in four volumes; NFLS nr.50, NFLS nr.100a+b and NFLS nr.118b.<sup>11</sup> The reviewed issues were published between 1921 and 1976.

Apart from the NFLS additional sources were deemed relevant as well. Since the essay deals with totemic ancestry/totemic thinking, sources pertaining to north-Swedish marriage practices involving the bear was included. These sources consist of a handful of early 20th century articles, a dictionary of a North-Swedish dialect and entries from the folklore archives in Uppsala, Sweden.<sup>12</sup> The Swedish traditions are also included methodologically. The use of

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<sup>8</sup> Kyrre Kverndokk, "Norsk Folkeminnesamling" in Rogan, Bjarne & Eriksen, Anne (red.), *Etnologi og folkloristikk: en fagkritisk biografi om norsk kulturhistorie*, Novus forl., Oslo, 2013, p.560.

<sup>9</sup> Kverndokk in Esborg 2011, p.71.

<sup>10</sup> Christiansen 1925, p.38-39, p.99.

<sup>11</sup> See Solheim, Svale, *Norsk folkeminnelag Register til nr. 1-49*, Kristiania/Oslo, 1943, Skjelbred, Ann Helene Bolstad, *Register til NFL bind 51-99 D. 1 Alfabetisk*, Oslo, 1983, Skjelbred, Ann Helene Bolstad, *Register til NFL bind 51-99. Del 2, Systematisk*, Oslo, 1989 and Bonnevie, Tiril & Lindblad, Sven, *Register til Norsk folkeminnelags skrifter: 101-118*, Norsk folkeminnelag, Oslo, 1989.

<sup>12</sup> ULMA 20024 T.Tannerhagen 1949 Lit Jtl., ULMA 20595 Nordenson, W. 1950. Ragunda. JÄMTLAND, "Björnkallas", ULMA 33403 Olof Svård, f.1918. 1984. JTL JÄRPEN, Granberg, Einar "År björnen vår gamle fruktbarhetsgud? I Festin, Eric (red.), *Festskrift till Carl J. E. Hasselberg på hans 75-årsdag 16/5 1931*, Östersund, 1931, Granberg, Einar, *Friarsaker och giftermålsbestyr i det gamla Härjedalen* i Festin, Eric (red.), *Jämten*:



Af Klintberg's *The types of the Swedish folk legend*<sup>13</sup> as a model for organizing the surveyed Norwegian material showed similarities between the Swedish and Norwegian traditions, which will become evident to the reader below. The two categories of materials belong to different corpora, stemming from different cultural and geographical contexts but are here considered as related and viable components of an analytical whole.

### 1.3.2 A Bear discourse

The basic method applied for engaging the source material is an adaptation of mythic discourse analysis. This approach has its roots in developments that swept through multiple fields of research following the postmodern turn.<sup>14</sup> Early folklore research was centrally interested in mapping out the diffusion of different tale types for the purpose of (re)constructing an imagined ideal form – an original version of any given tale, myth or other story. This approach, known as the Historic-Geographic Method, and its attached theories certainly influenced the formation and early publications of NFLS.<sup>15</sup>

Instead of focusing on idealized forms of certain types of texts or stories and their diffusion, mythic discourse analysis looks at the *use*, combination and transmission of units of knowledge in social tradition and what they mean to those belonging to that tradition. Turning away from analyzing whole narrative plots, mythic discourse is instead focused on smaller units such as images and motifs. Use of these images and motifs is not limited to texts or stories but may appear in any aspect of reality; they may be recognizable in material objects, in rituals, in nursery rhymes or any of the different genres represented in the source material used in the present work.<sup>16</sup>

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*Länsmuseets och Heimbygdas årsbok. Årg. 20(1926)*, Heimbygdas förlag, Östersund, 1926 Levander, Lars & Björklund, Stig, *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna Bd I A-F*, Dialekt- och folkminnesarkivet, Uppsala, 1961-1970, part 2, p.117-121.

<sup>13</sup> Klintberg, Bengt af, *The types of the Swedish folk legend*, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Frog, *Myth In The Challenge of Folklore to the Humanities* i Ben-Amos, Dan (red.), a Special Issue of *Humanities* 7(4), 14, s.1-39, 2018, s.22.

<sup>15</sup> On the academic mileu in which the NFL germinated and its ties to Folklore Fellows and Karle Krohn, the pioneer of the historic-geographic method, see Kristoffersen, Eirik, *Kampen om folkeminnesamlingen: da folkeminnene ble et forskningsfelt og folket krevde dem tilbake*, Scandinavian Academic Press, Oslo, 2017, p.57-65. For further comments on some of the formative figures in the conception of NFL and their use of said methods, see Kverndokk in Esborg 2011, p.77-78.

<sup>16</sup> Frog (forthcoming). "Mythic Discourse Analysis". In *Folklore and Old Norse Mythology*. Ed. Joonas Ahola & Frog. Helsinki: Kalevala Society, p.1-3.

In the past, myth has usually been understood as some type of story. In later developments, tied to semiotic approaches, myth has instead been understood in terms of models through which people think and know the world. Myth as a system of signs moves understanding of myth from the noun to the adjective – *mythic*. This opens up to interpreting myth as a quality – anything with a symbolic value for knowing and that people engage with emotionally, producing convictions about the world, can be understood as belonging to the mythic.<sup>17</sup> All such instances taken together are understood as a *symbolic matrix* – the sum total of mythic signs available in any given cultural context, with which people engage from sometimes competing perspectives or interpretations.<sup>18</sup>

For the present work this means that BEAR (small capitals to denote a mythic sign) is identified as a mythic image that is reflected in the sources at hand. BEAR can then be combined with other components such as another image or an action to constitute a *motif*, such as BEAR HAS SUPERNATURAL GUARDIAN.<sup>19</sup> This motif can then be identified in various forms such as stories of the bear and the *Skogsrå* (forest spirit), stories about the bear and the Virgin Mary, stories where someone spends the winter with the bear in its den where they are fed through the winter by a supernatural being or the bear and its connection to Leibolmai (The Alder man) in Sámi myth. Approaching these signs within the symbolic matrix of the mythology alleviates the problem of “beliefs” held by individuals. For example, sources that contest the motif BEAR HAS SUPERNATURAL GUARDIAN also participate in the mythic discourse by asserting that it is not true nevertheless reproduce the motif with the implication that there are or were people in society who held convictions to the contrary. Also, the identification of the supernatural guardian with an image of SKOGSRÅ, VIRGIN MARY or LEIBOLMAI reflect alternative or

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<sup>17</sup> Frog, “Mythology in Cultural Practice: A Methodological Framework for Historical Analysis”, In *Between Text and Practice: Mythology, Religion and Research*, Ed. Frog & Karina Lukin, RMN Newsletter 10, special issue. Helsinki: Folklore Studies, University of Helsinki, Pp. 33-57, 2015, pp.33-57, p.35-38.

<sup>18</sup> Frog 2015, p.33-34.

<sup>19</sup> Frog, “Mythologies in Transformation: Symbolic Transfer, Hybridization and Creolization in the Circum-Baltic Arena (illustrated through the Changing Roles of *\*Tīwaz*, *\*Ilma*, and *Ódinn*, the Fishing Adventure of the Thunder-God, and a Finno-Karelian Creolization of North Germanic Religion)”, In *Contacts and Networks in the Circum-Baltic Region: Austmarr as a Northern Mare nostrum, ca. 500–1500 AD*, Ed. Maths Bertell, Frog & Kendra Willson, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, Pp. 263–288, 2019, p.263-265.

sometimes competing perspectives that link the motif to different mythic agents with different cultural backgrounds. This approach provides a framework for inductively identifying different elements that are used and circulated in the social tradition. Reading the material as expressing mythic discourse means including all elements relating to the bear discourse that were deemed relevant for understanding bear-human relations. What this means in practice is that the extracted items may indeed consist of “stories” as well as descriptions of bear-hunting, magical practices involving body parts of the bear, ways of naming the bear, bear-dancing and so on.

### **1.3.3 Reading and Organizing the NFLS Material**

In order to organize and analyze the NFLS-material, I constructed a basic index. As previously mentioned, the items deemed relevant to the study was located with the help of four separate indexes, each covering a given number of issues of the NFLS. I mainly used the alphabetical index to locate entries with “bear-” in them. Each entry was marked with the issue and page numbers. The entry was then located in the respective issue and read closely. Entries containing useful material were then fed in to a table accordingly.

In this process, of close reading, I inductively identified recurring elements in the sources potentially linked to mythic thinking about the bear. The identification of these elements was guided by my previous research and reading of research literature, but my attention was not limited to these and remained broadly inclusive. The number and diversity of recurrent elements rapidly increased and I began tagging them with codes. This work began as a heuristic tool for tagging data rather than a comprehensive survey. Initially, it was a practical tool to be able to find things that might contain a common traditional element in order to sort and compare them. An example of an entry in the table is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Example entry of the data table

Nr	Bib.	Geo.	Text/Description.	Translation.	Type	Section	Classification
1	Storaker, Joh[an] Th[eodor], Tiden i den norske folketro (Storakers samlinger 1): Ved Nils Lid, Kristiania, 1921, s.72 (Norsk folkeminnelags skrifter 2)	(Wille, Sillej. Beskr.. 241). Telemark	“(Traffer Juledagen ind paa Nyet, betyder det et godt Aar; men indfalder den paa en Søndag, da bliver der et gyldent Aar, og alle Bjørne skulle da ligge døde (og altsaa ikke paa skade Buskapen) (Wille, Sillej. Beskr.. 241).”	“If Christmas day falls on a new moon, it means that it will be a good year; but if it falls on a Sunday, it will be a golden year, and all the bears shall lay dead (and thus wont be able to hurt the livestock)”	*OM1	?	-

All items in the data were consecutively numbered in the first column on the left. Column 2 gives bibliographical information. Column 3 contains geographical information, which was noted whenever it was available. Column 4 is the text-item itself in the original language, followed by its translation into English in Column 5. All translations in the present work are my own, unless otherwise stated. Column 6 contains the items type-code for the index. An asterisk is added to for searching the table: it allows a character string search of the document to find only codes marked with an asterisk for code searches. Increased searchability meant easy access to all items of a certain type during the work. Column 7 gives a tentative suggestion (when there was one) on which sub-section of the thesis the item at hand might appear in. The last (8<sup>th</sup>) column contains information on what type-codes the item might be classified as in Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* and/or in af Klintberg’s *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*.<sup>20</sup>

I developed the coding system in dialectic with the empirical material in line with conventional folkloric methods and the two works mentioned above. The product is a system for classifying each item in a motif index. Each motif was given the initial “OM” and then a number.<sup>21</sup> The index follows below:

<sup>20</sup> See Thompson, Stith, *Motif-index of folk-literature: a classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends Vol. 6, Index*, Rev. and enl. ed., Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008 and Klintberg, Bengt af, *The types of the Swedish folk legend*, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> The letters are the initials of the author of present work and is not of significance but is merely another way of adhering to folkloric convention – the most comprehensive folklore index to date, the Aarni-Thompson-Uther index also names its types with letters that make up the initials of the authors. See Uther, Hans-Jörg & Dinslage, Sabine, *The types of international folktales: a classification and bibliography : based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson. Parts I to III*, Tiedeakatemia, Helsinki, 2004.

OM1 = Time reckoning, portents and “bear days”

OM2 = Body parts of the bear

OM2.1 – placed in church

OM2.2 – used for medicinal and/or magical purposes

OM3 = Various displays of human traits (feelings, motor skills, speech, intentionality in actions etc.)

OM3.1 = Bears understand human speech

OM3.2 = Bears can speak

OM3.3 = The bear measures its body length

OM3.4 = The bear is skilled at dressing out its prey

OM4 = Bears fear certain humans (men, but not women, people born on certain days etc.)

OM5 = Bears are connected to evil powers (trolls, the devil etc.)

OM6 = Bear shapeshifting/transformation (“werebears”/“hamnbjörnar”, hybrids, partial transformation etc.)

OM6.1 = Self transformation

OM6.2 = Transformation cast on other

OM6.2.1 = A bear is a prince subjected to transformation.

OM6.3 = Half-bears, foster child of bear is hairy, human son/foster-son of bear acquires bear characteristics. Cf. AT301, AT650A and Stith-Thompson B.635/B.635.1

OM6.4 Can only be killed by silver bullet.

OM.6.4.1 Other bullet (barley).

OM6.5 Belt with knife and/or other objects found under a transformed bears skin.

OM6.6 Bear shapeshifting/transformation/conjuring is tied to Sámi/Finnish people.

OM6.7 Conjured bear

OM7 = Bear taxonomies and naming (different feeding habits, sizes, mental dispositions, harmless/ravenous, kinship names, nicknames, noa names etc.) Cf.

OM5

OM7.1 Taxonomy/different kinds of bears.

OM7.2 Noa names and/or kinship names, names implying human nature, taboos concerning naming/addressing the bear

OM7.3 Human named after the Bear.

OM8 = Bears and women/pregnant women. Bear attacks pregnant woman.

Cf.OM6

OM8.1 = The bear (a bewitched human/prince) wants to tear the foetus out of the pregnant woman and rear the child (if its a boy) as its own (to break the spell).

OM8.2 = The bear's magical power helps make childbirth easier.

OM8.3 = Bears are scared off by exposed vulva.

OM8.4 A bear attacks and/or carries off a (pregnant) woman. The bear then digs a hole ("grave") in the ground. (While the bear is busy digging, the woman takes off a piece of clothing and places it on an object to fool the bear and then sneaks away (Cf. Af Klintberg R24-R25).

OM8.5 = The (lingering) scent of a pregnant woman causes the bear to behave in an unusual manner.

OM8.6 = The bear will not attack a pregnant woman who is unmarried.

OM9 = Rituals and/or offerings directed at the bear or its supernatural guardian.

OM10 = Magical control over bear.

OM11 = "Klumsing". To be spellbound/dumbstruck by the bear or have the bear be spellbound/dumbstruck.

OM12 = Vor, Vorde, Vardaule, Fylgja – Fetches.

OM13 = Bear-portents and bear-dreams.

OM14 = Explicit reference to mythical time. Often connected to OM3.2

OM15 = Twelve men's strength and the wit of ten, or variations thereof.

OM16 = The bears nourishment during the winter sleep

OM16.1 Is fed by supernatural being

OM16.2 Nourishes itself by sucking on its paw

OM17 = Bears receives punishment for unwanted behaviour (killing/attacking people or livestock).

OM18 = The bear has a supernatural guardian (huldrufolk, Skogsrå etc.).

OM19 = Pious/impious bears.

OM20 = Bears and castration.

OM21 = Metal objects (knives, scythes etc.) frightens the bear.

OM22 = The bear helps Mary (and Jesus) and is rewarded (with ability to hibernate/not eat in winter).

OMR29 = Bears in grain fields/hay fields.

OM30 = Hunting motifs.

OM30.1 = The bear hunt as a communal endeavour.

OM30.2 = Ritual consumption of the bear in connection to the hunt.

OM31 = Person suddenly overcome by fatigue when a bear is nearby.

OM32 = Woman (is abducted by, and) lives with a bear in his lair and bears his child. (The couple gets nourishment from milk given by female supernatural ruler of the bear. One day they are instead given blood as an omen of the bear's impending death. Girl returns to human society after the bear is killed and the offspring has bear characteristics). Cf. Stith-Thompson B.631, B.635.1

OM32.1 The woman in question is called Bjønn-Beret, Bjønn-Marit or variations thereof.

OM425 = AT425 (Beauty and the beast) "East of the Sun and West of the moon" and variations thereof. Kvitebjørn.

The index was modeled on Stith Thompson's motif index. Sub-motifs are distinguished by a number following a decimal (e.g. "OM32.1"). When needed, a third sub-level was used. Brackets in the descriptions denote extant variations.

Although there were certain expectations about what I hoped to find in the material, given my previous forays into bear traditions in the Circum-Baltic, the index came about in a pragmatic manner – when a recurrent element was identified, it was slotted for the index. Although images and motifs may be formally distinguished in analysis, the development of the index was not concerned with making such a distinction. Instead, it follows the general and inclusive approach of Stith Thompson, which was developed as

an indexing tool rather than an analytical category. The index should not be considered as an exhaustive source for mapping the totality of bear lore in the NFLS, nor should the tagging of motifs be considered as defining items of data rather than simply making it possible to find them for comparison and analysis.

## 1.4 Theories

The theoretical framework for the present work is intimately bound up with the purpose of the thesis and its inquiries, which involves reading the material as expressing an animist mode of thinking and how that thinking shapes bear-human relations. Animism has a long history within the fields of anthropology and religious studies. The term's problematic baggage is hard to ignore – animism in its original Tylorian meaning is tied up with racist attitudes towards the 'primitive' other – usually indigenous peoples inhabiting colonies or former colonies of Europe. What is more, in later academic discourse, the older animist theories are often used as examples of obsolete and antiquated ideas within the different fields of research that have made use of the term.<sup>22</sup> This section serves to briefly introduce animism in its revived iteration known as 'new animism' and to make clear how this is distinct from earlier usage of the concept. New animist theories make up the foundation upon which *bear culture* is theorized, a foundation augmented by Viveiro de Castro's concept of *perspectivism*.

### 1.4.1 The Old Animism

*To the savage the world in general is animate, and trees and plants are no exception to the rule. He thinks that they have souls like his own, and he treats them accordingly.*<sup>23</sup>

Although the history of the use and etymology of the word 'animism' could be elaborated extensively, the meaning and use of the word that is immediately relevant to the present work starts mainly with its adoption by Edward Tylor in the 19th century. The influential anthropologist Tylor understood animism as the proverbial ground zero of all religion. As a consequence, his evolutionist views interpreted subsequent developments of religion as survivals of the same original, faulty assumption about the nature of the world – animism. According to Tylor, the 'belief in spiritual beings' constitutes not only the basis of animism but that of religion as a whole. According to Tylor, the animation of material objects and projection

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<sup>22</sup> Harvey 2017, p.3.

<sup>23</sup> Frazer, James G, *The Golden Bough* (abridged single volume edition), Macmillan, London, 1983 (1860), p.146 quoted in Harvey 2017, p.5.



of human-likeness to non-humans comes from a basic tendency in the minds of humans, a tendency that is visible in, for example, a child talking to his toys or to a tree, as well as in the belief in souls or spirit beings to which are attributed the mysteries of death and dreaming. Tylor emphasizes that these ways of understanding the world are in fact rational but considers them as based on insufficient evidence.<sup>24</sup> All the while Tylor takes this somewhat reconciliatory stance regarding animist ontology he also clearly states that such a worldview is no more than superstition and that it is the ethnographer's job to 'mark these out for destruction'.<sup>25</sup>

Tylor serves as a good example of what many of his contemporary and later scholars thought about non-western, non-Christian peoples and their worldviews. These views have been firmly imbedded in the word 'animism' itself, which has been cause for much debate on the relevance of its use.<sup>26</sup> Fiona Bowie comments succinctly and in passing: 'The term is still used with different nuances as a general descriptive term for "primitive", "indigenous" or "tribal" religions.'<sup>27</sup> As we shall see, there are however more recent developments in the use and re-invention of animist theories that aims to get rid of the unflattering connotations illustrated above.

### 1.4.2 The New Animism

*Animists are people who recognise that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others.*<sup>28</sup>

Tylor and others had identified an anthropocentric extension of *humanity* to non-humans, that is, regarding any entity or object that shows human-likeness as a person, as having a soul and so on. The focus on whether or not someone or something is more or less human as the main criterion for personhood has proved to be a faulty assumption regarding non-Western, non-Cartesian ontologies. Irving Hallowell, making a lasting impression on subsequent research on indigenous worldviews<sup>29</sup>, instead spoke of *other-than-human persons*, a term that does not

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<sup>24</sup> Harvey 2017, p.6-8.

<sup>25</sup> Tylor, Edward, *Primitive Culture*, 2 vols, London, 1913 (1871), p.453 quoted in Harvey 2017, p.6.

<sup>26</sup> Harvey 2017, p.27-28.

<sup>27</sup> Bowie, Fiona, *The anthropology of religion: an introduction*, 2. ed., Blackwell, Oxford, 2006, p.13.

<sup>28</sup> Harvey, Graham, *Animism – Respecting the living world*, Hurst & Company, London, 2nd edition, 2017, xvii.

<sup>29</sup> See for example Strong, Pauline A. *Irving Hallowell and the Ontological Turn* in HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory 7, 2017, pp.374-393. Strong argues for Hallowell as an important precursor for later developments in the field. See also Harvey's introduction to the reprint of Hallowells 1960 article *Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View* in Harvey, Graham (red.), *Readings in indigenous religions*, Continuum, New York, 2002, p.17.

presuppose humanity as the definitive factor for what constitutes a person. Hallowell's work among the Ojibwe of Canada in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century showed that they perceived the world as being inhabited by a great host of persons of various categories. What made them persons was not the extent to which they were similar to human (persons) but their relations; personhood is created through interaction with others.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, anthropologist Nurit Bird-David stresses that an animist worldview is not, however, something that 'just happens' out of some universal propensity in humans, as Tylor would argue, but that it is internalized with culture and thus something that must be *learned*. This also implies that relationality is the basis for animation and personhood, not an ubiquitous property of the human mind, projecting outward:

We do not personify other entities and then socialize with them but personify them *as, when, and because* we socialize with them. Recognizing a 'conversation' with a counter-being – which amounts to accepting it into fellowship rather than recognizing a common essence – makes that being a self in relation with ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

### 1.4.3 Perspectivism

A consequence of recognizing personhood in other-than-humans, and recognizing that personhood is not built on degree of sameness with humans, is to also recognize the veracity and significance of other-than-human perspectives on the world. This phenomenon is described as *perspectivism*, introduced by Viveiros de Castro in his formative article 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism'. Viveiros de Castro notes that, in the ethnographies of Amerindian cultures, there is present a constant reference to these differing perspectives. The gods, the dead, animals, humans etc. do not perceive themselves or each other in the same way. That is, not only do human persons recognize the personhood of other-than-humans, but other-than-humans see themselves as persons too.<sup>32</sup>

The phenomenon entails that, for example, animals see themselves as humans. As such, animals also engage in social and cultural activities; marriage, war, dancing, magic and so on. At first glance, this suggests that perspectivism is anthropocentric and that the continuity of interiorities between humans and other-than-humans (the condition of humanity), as well as their bodily discontinuities (perceived by animals as 'clothing') rests on the human species as the baseline of subjectivity, personhood and culture. This is however not the case; Viveiros de Castro highlights that it is instead characterized by

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<sup>30</sup> Harvey 2017, p.17-18.

<sup>31</sup> Bird-David, Nurit, "Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology, *Current Anthropology* 40, S67-S91, p.77 quoted in Harvey 2017, p.21.

<sup>32</sup> Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, *Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism* in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute N.S.* Vol. 4, 1998, p.469-488, p.470.

the deictic nature of all the varying points of view, much as the personal pronoun “I” is used and understood by everyone speaking a language as referring to different *perspectives* without conflating or confusing them. De Castro exemplifies:

This is to say Culture is the Subject's nature; it is the form in which every subject experiences its own nature. Animism is not a projection of substantive human qualities cast onto animals, but rather expresses the logical equivalence of the reflexive relations that humans and animals each have to themselves: salmon are to (see) salmon as humans are to (see) humans, namely, (as) human. If, as we have observed, the common condition of humans and animals is humanity not animality, this is because ‘humanity’ is the name for the general form taken by the Subject.<sup>33</sup>

Viveiros de Castro also delves into what corporeality means in the Amerindian traditions. Here, too, a modern Western worldview, with its Cartesian divide, fails to capture the functions of bodies and their relation to the agent's interiority. Viveiros de Castro points out that there is a continuity of interiorities between humans and other-than-humans: they all possess what could be dubbed ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ and it is this that makes them potential subjects. What differs between categories are bodies. Different bodies give different perspectives. Furthermore, the differences between bodies are not mainly physiological but rather something that is *performed* through dietary habits, choice of habitat, and other behaviors. The body is the sum total of what, for example, a bear *does*. A bear has a bear body because it lives as a bear, not the other way around. The body is what gives the bear its specific perspective. In sum:

Between the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms there is an intermediate plane which is occupied by the body as a bundle of affects and capacities and which is the origin of perspective.<sup>34</sup>

The body as an ‘envelope’ or ‘clothing’ plays into the unstable nature of bodies in the Amerindian tradition. If a body is in fact ‘an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a habitus’<sup>35</sup> then this also opens up to a large degree of malleability and metamorphosis. Perspectivism then, dovetails neatly with new animist theories stressing the importance of relations. Relationality is the interface in which personhood ‘happens’ and is inherently tied up with shifting perspectives. These shifts are in turn synonymous with metamorphosis, as Viveiros de Castro points out.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> De Castro 1998, p.477.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.478.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.478.

<sup>36</sup> Castro, Eduardo B. V, and Roy Wagner. *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere: Four Lectures Given in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, February-March 1998.*, 2015. Internet resource, p.145-147.

#### **1.4.4 Bear culture**

The task at hand is to elucidate the character of the relationships between two groups, bears and humans, in the given set of data. The chosen theoretical frameworks posits that a modern naturalist division of nature/culture, animal/human, object/subject, body/soul is not sufficient for understanding the complexities of bear-human relations nor its implied ontological underpinnings. This study builds from a working hypothesis that bears were indeed endowed with personhood and agency and, as a consequence, the interaction between members of the two groups is approached as social. This social interaction is extended by acknowledging that membership in the respective group forms a categorical identity to which individual identity generally appears as secondary. Consequently, interaction commonly appears not to reflect an interaction between persons as individuals but as persons representative of different groups, the identification with which characterized the persons by a respective ‘bundle of affects and capacities’ that also encompass dietary habits, choice of habitat and other behaviors, which is here described as ‘culture’.

The thesis will not delve into the potentially enormous subject of defining culture itself and thereby having to address hundreds of years of academic discourse on the matter. Instead, culture will be used as a heuristic term that lines up with the theoretical framework established above. The aim is not to paint an ideal and monolithic picture of what bear culture is and is not, but rather to find a useful way to approach interactions and relations in the data. There is no doubt that the human persons appearing in the chosen source material are cultural persons. I therefore hypothesize, given the relational emphasis of the theoretical framework used here, that bear-human relations in non-modern Scandinavia may be understood as cultural interaction rather than inter-species encounters, in the modern sense of the word. The interaction between bear persons and human persons in the chosen material is to a large degree of a social character. These instances of bear-human relating often show signs of social reciprocity and a code of conduct according to cultural norms performed by both parties.

The importance of relationality in new animist theories, coupled with the deictic multiplicity of viewpoints acknowledged through perspectivism, highlights a field of intersubjectivity in which bear-human relations take place. This approach will be used in an attempt to situate bear culture through its features of contrast and sameness relative to human culture. Since, unfortunately, none of the sources were written by bears, the endeavour of approaching bear-human relations

as cultural interaction entails a certain degree of boldness in terms of writing style and analysis. In an attempt to lure the reader out of a reality where bears are animal and humans are human and never shall the twain meet, I will refrain from constantly referring to the “perceived” or “imagined”, as opposed to our modern “empirical truth”, and rather let the worldview reflected in the sources speak on its own terms.

In pre-modern ontologies, as Mr Frog has shown with regards to the Scandinavian cultural context, different categories of beings (trolls, bears and sami people in his example) would have existed on a sliding scale of sameness or difference. This means that while in our modern worldview a Sámi person is always a human, and always *more* human than a bear (that is an animal) or a troll (that is imaginal), this was not the case in the pre-modern discourse on these categories. Although the Norsemen intermarried and traded with Sámi people, that is, had cultural contact with them, they could simultaneously imagine the Sámi as supernatural others, endowed with powerful and dangerous magical abilities generated by a body/soul-constitution different from the Norsemen. Conversely, bears are presented as being able to produce offspring with humans and trolls clearly live in societies similar to that of the norsemen.<sup>37</sup> All of these three categories are in different ways being *othered* – certain markers in what they are and do are pointed out and juxtaposed to things that define the in-group as an “us”. The process of othering requires a potential for sameness. In our modern worldview a bear is always different from humans, but is hardly ever othered. In pre-modern worldviews bears are othered because they, as social and cultural beings existing on the sliding scale mentioned above, always have the potential for belongingness.<sup>38</sup>

#### 1.4.5 Totemism?

The theoretical framework for the present work is focused on ways of understanding bear-human relations. Animism recognizes personhood in other-than-humans while perspectivism puts further emphasis on culture as the basic mode of existing and relating in the world. This warrants the attempt to acknowledge *bear culture*. As a final addition to this, some aspects of this cultural interaction may be understood as totemic.

Much like animism, totemism has been subject to constant debate. In some cases, the question has been raised whether the term is at all useful as an analytical category. The word *totem*

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<sup>37</sup> Frog, Mr, *Are Trolls, Bears and Sámis People too? – Considering the Mythic Ethnography of Old Norse Culture*, RMN Newsletter 9, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 2014/2015, p.122-124.

<sup>38</sup> Frog, Mr, *Otherworlding: Othering Places and Spaces through Mythologization* in Signs and Society, Volume 8, Nr.3, 2020, p.455-456.

(“totam”) first appears in 1791 when a trader by the name of James Long tells a story about an Ojibwe man expressing his devastation over having accidentally killed a bear:

Beaver, my faith is lost, my *totam* is angry, I shall never be able to hunt any more.<sup>39</sup>

The original meaning in the Ojibwe language is simply “uterine kin”, apparently used in the compound *indoodem*, meaning “my clan”.<sup>40</sup> Evidently, for the Ojibwe, clan relations were not limited to human persons. In order to avoid the insurmountable task of reviewing the entirety of research history on totemism, I will paint it in broad strokes. Sharon Mertz, in her 2018 doctoral thesis “Crocodiles Are the Souls of the Community”, identifies three arguably distinct steps in the academic discourse on totemism; evolutionism, structuralism and the ontological turn.<sup>41</sup> The first step is tied to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship that sometimes placed totemism at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder, similarly to what we saw above concerning animism. To scholars like Durkheim, Frazer and Freud, totemism was the first religion known to man, and thus implicitly the most primitive. The general definition of what totemism was to these early scholars included kinship with other-than-humans, taboos about eating said other-than-humans and rules concerning matrimony.<sup>42</sup> Already at an early stage, the debate surrounding totemism ran along the lines of defining what precisely it was, its common traits, or indeed whether it had any unifying traits. It became evident that the definitions of totemism applied to the Pacific Northwest did not apply, for example, to traditions in Australia.<sup>43</sup> This critique reached its apex with Levi-Strauss’s *Totemisme* (1962), which essentially “debunked” totemism, claiming that it did not have any ontological or religious dimensions but was simply a classificatory system that modelled social groups after patterns in nature. However, the “homology of differential gaps”<sup>44</sup> – i.e. “bears relate to ravens as the Bear Clan relates to the Raven Clan” – failed to capture the fact that totemic clans in some cases did not define themselves in contrast to “the other” but by the distinctness of their totemic entity in its own right, regardless of its relation to other categories.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Knight, Chris, *Totemism* in Barnard, Alan; Spencer, Barnard, Alan J. & Spencer, Jonathan, *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology [E-book]*, Routledge, London, 2002, p.826.

<sup>40</sup> Harvey 2017, p.164.

<sup>41</sup> See Mertz, Sharon “*Crocodiles are the Souls of the Community*”: *An Analysis of Human-Animal Relations in Northwestern Benin and its Ontological Implications*, doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2018, p.30-72 for an exhaustive research history.

<sup>42</sup> Knight 2002, p.826.

<sup>43</sup> Mertz 2018, p.42-44.

<sup>44</sup> Descola, Philippe, *Beyond nature and culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013, p.144-145.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

This critique of Levi-Strauss is tied to the broader ontological turn in anthropology, pioneered by Viveiros de Castro among others.<sup>46</sup> Totemism has often been understood as in opposition to animism. Phillipe Descola's schematic understanding of the two boils down animist relations as recognizing "similar interiorities, dissimilar physicalities", while totemic relations recognize "similar interiorities, similar physicalities".<sup>47</sup> Others still steer clear of definitive schematics and recognize that, rather than animism being in opposition to totemism, the two are often dependent on each other.<sup>48</sup> Marshall Sahlins, in an article published as a response to Descola, sees totemism as an off-shoot of a basic animist ontology:

Totemism is segmentary animism, in the sense that different nonhuman persons, as species-beings, are substantively identified with different human collectives, such as lineages and clans.<sup>49</sup>

Harvey simply stresses the relationality and how some animist persons are closer to each other than others:

The new totemism adds to new animism by clarifying a way in which some relationships are closer than others while, conversely, not all relationships are equally valued by all persons and groups.<sup>50</sup>

Harvey's open-ended way of defining totemism shall be applied here. And in an attempt to stay clear of, or at least not fully commit to, the notoriously hard-to-define concept, its noun-form will be replaced by adjectives; I hypothesize that the source material may reflect totemic aspects of bear-human relations. In this context I define *totemic* as instances where the relationship to specific categories of other-than-humans is highlighted as especially close and where there is a perceived basic sameness which also includes kinship.

## 1.5 Earlier research

The present thesis is working from a hypothesis that is developed from a theoretical framework that has not been applied for analysis of bear-human relations in this category of source material to any significant extent. As a consequence, there is not a lot of earlier research that deals with the issues at hand for me to be in dialogue with. However, the theoretical approaches used here

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<sup>46</sup> Mertz, p.64.

<sup>47</sup> Descola 2013, p.122.

<sup>48</sup> Mertz, p.70.

<sup>49</sup> Sahlins, Marshall, "On the ontological scheme of Beyond nature and culture" in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, p.281 - 290. 2014, p.282.

<sup>50</sup> Harvey 2017, p.167.

were inspired to a significant extent by historian of religion Rune Hjarnö Rasmussen and his popular scientific and academic work. Rasmussen applies the concept of “Nordic Animism” to the history of religions and folklore in the Nordic area. Rasmussen’s approach identifies, throughout Scandinavian history, an animist worldview that waned with the onset of major changes such as institutionalized Christianity and later the coming of modernity. These “survivals” of an earlier ontological paradigm are understood as “rejected animist knowledge forms”. Rune applies new animist theories (see §1.4 above) to the Scandinavian history of religions and folklore and is working in dialogue with neo-pagan practitioners, environmentalist, artists etc. while at the same time continuing his academic work.<sup>51</sup>

Although the specific perspective on bear-human relations in Scandinavian folklore used in the present work is uncharted territory, the bear has attracted attention throughout the research history of Circum-Baltic folkloristics and religious studies. I have not been able to locate any works specifically addressing the bear lore of Norway, apart from the attention it is given within larger works or thematic issues of the NFLS.<sup>52</sup> The Swedish folklorist Nils Edward Hammarstedt published three articles on bear lore and related practices in Scandinavian folklore; the first in 1913, the second in 1916 and the last one in 1929.<sup>53</sup> These three articles highlight relevant sources and have been inspirational, despite their old age. Ella Odsteds 1943 dissertation on the werewolf traditions of Sweden<sup>54</sup> also deals with traditions pertaining to the bear and provides directions for further reading of relevant sources. Carl-Martin Edsman’s *Jägaren och makterna* is a compilation of Edsman’s work on Sámi and Finno-Karelian bear ceremonialism but also makes reference to non-Finno-Ugric traditions in Scandinavia.<sup>55</sup>

Of works that specifically deal with the personhood of the bear, but that are further removed from the specific dataset analysed in the present work, a few warrant mention. Vesa Matteo

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<sup>51</sup> See <https://nordicanimism.com/home1>. In an academic setting Runes work on Nordic Animism has resulted in presentations at various conferences (for example <https://ykes.org/elaintutkimuspaivat/>) and he is currently working on financing his research project on raven- and mermaid/seal-totemism in the North European context. Additionally, personal communication and consultation with Rasmussen has influenced the theoretical approaches of the present work.

<sup>52</sup> See Hermundstad, Knut, *Truer om villdyr, fangst og fiske*, Norsk Folkminnelag, Oslo, 1967 and the posthumously released Hermundstad, Knut, *Truer om dyr*, Norsk Folkeminnelag i kommisjon hjå H. Aschehoug & Co (W. Nygaard), Oslo, 1985, both of which deals with folklore pertaining to animals, hunting and fishing. See also Reichborn-Kjennerud, I., *Vår gamle trolldomsmedisin*. 5., i kommisjon hos Jacob Dybwad, Oslo, 1947, p.117-132 which presents folkloric material related to the bear and links it back to medieval icelandic litteratur and pre-Christian traditions.

<sup>53</sup> See Hammarstedt, Nils Edvard, 'Bröllops- och fastlagsbjörn', *Fataburen.*, 1913, s. 1-9, 1913, Hammarstedt, Nils Edvard, *När vänder björnen sig i idet?*., Stockholm, 1916, and Hammarstedt, Nils Edvard, *Vår- och bröllopsbjörn*, 1929.

<sup>54</sup> Odstedt, Ella, *Varulven i svensk folktradition*, A.-B. Lundequistska bokhandeln, Uppsala, 1943.

<sup>55</sup> Edsman, Carl-Martin, *Jägaren och makterna: samiska och finska björnceremonier = The hunter and the powers : Sami and Finnish bear ceremonies*, Dialekt- och folkminnesarkivet, Uppsala, 1994.



Piludu's doctoral thesis *The Forestland's Guests: Mythical Landscapes, Personhood, and Gender in the Finno-Karelian Bear Ceremonialism* provides an up-to-date perspective on bear-human relations and the personhood of the bear.<sup>56</sup> Clive Tolleys *Shamanism in Norse myth and magic, vol. 1* has an excellent section on bear-human relations but is focused on the Old Norse corpus. Frog's short article "Are Trolls, Bears and Sámis People too? – Considering the Mythic Ethnography of Old Norse Culture", which was mentioned above and is of significance for approaches implemented in the present work, is also focused on Old Norse material. His article "From Mythology to Identity and Imaginal Experience: An Exploratory Approach to the Symbolic Matrix in Viking Age Åland"<sup>57</sup> includes a more detailed overview of Germanic bear-related traditions in a Circum-Baltic context, but still focuses on the medieval evidence with little consideration of the rich nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scandinavian traditions, which seem to be largely unknown except through the publications of Edsman.

## 2. Background

The present work should be understood against the backdrop of the broader Circum-Baltic context and its rich traditions concerning the bear. Some general characteristics of bear lore in this area will be presented here as a means to point out the importance of the bear in the cultural history, generally of the Circum-Polar area<sup>58</sup>, but specifically of the Circum-Baltic.

Firstly, must be mentioned the great similarities between bears and humans; they, like us, are omnivores that walk on their hind legs, cry, who nurse their babies sitting up, masturbate and so on. The similarities have often been emphasized in the literature as a reason for the bear's strong impression on humans and as an explanation for the respect and reverence the bear has been given in many (if not all) cultures across the Circum-polar area.<sup>59</sup> Not only has the bear been seen and treated as a *person* with human-like qualities but it has also been connected to

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<sup>56</sup> Piludu, Vesa Matteo, *The Forestland's Guests: Mythical Landscapes, Personhood, and Gender in the Finno-Karelian Bear Ceremonialism*, doktorsavhandling, Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2019

<sup>57</sup> Frog, "From Mythology to Identity and Imaginal Experience: An Exploratory Approach to the Symbolic Matrix in Viking Age Åland", In *The Viking Age in Åland: Insights into Identity and Remnants of Culture*, Joonas Ahola, Frog & Jenni Lucenius (eds.), Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2014, Pp. 349–414. This study was further elaborated with additional comments on bear traditions in Frog, "The Ålandic Clay Paw Rite, the Question of Seals and Conventions of Interpretation", *Fennoscandia Archaeologica*, 37, 2020, pp. 109–130.

<sup>58</sup> i.e where bears live, see Pentikäinen, Juha, *Golden king of the forest: the lore of the northern bear*, Etnika, Helsinki, 2007, p.7.

<sup>59</sup> Mebius, Hans, *Bissie: studier i samisk religionshistoria*, Jengel, Östersund, 2003, p.96f, Edsman 1994, p.19, Brunner, Bernd, *Bears: a brief history*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 2007, p.1.

supernatural powers, transformation and the ability to move back and forth between different cosmological planes.<sup>60</sup>

In the Circum-Baltic the bear ceremonialism of the (south/central) Sámi and that of Finno-Karelians deserves some brief consideration here. Bear ceremonialism is a long series of ritualized behaviours pertaining to the tracking, hunting, killing, cooking and eating of the bear, and finally disposing of its remains.<sup>61</sup> There is not space here to elaborate on the intricacies of the Sámi and Finno-Karelian traditions but they both serve as examples of instances where the relationship to the bear seems to take on religious proportions. In the Finno-Karelian tradition, bear ceremonialism is has attached to it a large corpus of folk poetry, some of it performed during the different phases of the ceremonies, and in one famous account from 1755, a Swedish priest records an etiological myth corresponding to the ceremonies performed by South/Central Sámi people in Sweden.<sup>62</sup>

Some fundamental and reoccurring motifs in Norwegian and Swedish bear lore include:

- The mystery of the bear's winter sleep. This is often connected to conceptions of a female ruler being of the bear, usually the forest spirit. The forest spirit is often the one feeding the bear during its stay in its den, explaining how this extraordinary creature could survive the winter at all.<sup>63</sup>
- The strength and intelligence of the bear. Expressions like "the strength of 12 men and the wits of 10" or variations thereof, are common in both Norwegian and Swedish folklore. This motif points to the respect and awe that was given to the bear.<sup>64</sup>
- The conception that a skinned bear looks like a human being is common in Norwegian and Swedish further emphasizes sameness between the two categories.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Black, Lydia T. *Bear in Human Imagination and in Ritual* i *Ursus* 10, 343-347, Print, 1998, p.344f.

<sup>61</sup> This division into ritual phases like the one recounted here was first introduced by *Hallowell in his Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern hemisphere* in 1926 and seems to still remain as the basic approach to breaking up the complex series of events and rituals by scholars. See Hallowell, A. Irving, *Bear ceremonialism in the northern hemisphere* ..., Thesis (Ph. D.)--University of Pennsylvania, 1926., Philadelphia, 1926, Pentikäinen 2007, Edsman 1994 and Piludu 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Piludu accounts for a total of 288 bear-songs in the Finnish archival corpus, See Piludu 2018, p.24. For the Sámi etiological myth, which we shall return to at a later point, see Fjellström, Pehr, *Kort berättelse om lapparnas björna-fänge, samt deras der wid brukade widskeppelser*, Facs.-utg., Två förläggare, Umeå, 1981[1755].

<sup>63</sup> This conception can be considered as common in the Circum-Baltic area. For Swedish, Finno-Karelian and Sámi examples see Edsman 1994, p.154-156. As we shall see below, the same conception is extant in Norwegian folklore as well.

<sup>64</sup> Zetterberg, Hilmer, *Björnen i sägen och verklighet*, Lindblad, Uppsala, 1951, p.36-37.

<sup>65</sup> Zetterberg 1951, s.20

It is beyond the scope of the thesis to engage in a discussion on the possible influences the Finno-Ugric and the Germanic traditions may have had on each other throughout history<sup>66</sup> and its possible implications for the present work. Mentioning the Sámi and Finno-Karelian traditions here simply serves to point out that they were present in the same greater geographical and cultural context as the Norwegian and Swedish traditions and that they carried deep meaning in their respective cultures.

### **3. The surveyed material**

The disposition of the following has already been presented above in section 1.2. The ordering of the following subsections is motivated by the ambition to untangle the surveyed material for the reader in an accessible way.

#### **3.1 Bodies, transformation and hybridity.**

The following subsection serves to shed light on how the boundaries between the categories of bear and human seem to be porous in several ways. A significant aspect of bear-human relations, coming to the fore in the chosen material, is that humans and bears appear as fluid categories or hybrid entities – either can transform into the other and they sometimes produce offspring. Furthermore, prolonged contact with a bear or being attacked by one seems to have been enough to become “bearlike” socially and/or physically, which suggests that the property of “bearness” was transferable, perhaps not unlike an infection.

##### **3.1.1 The Mind and Its Form**

In the Scandinavian folklore, a body/mind division does not appear as a clear and systematic distinction. Furthermore, understandings seem not to have been uniform understanding, which would account for variation in the material that seems to reflect contradictory ideas. Due to limitations in terms of scope, a full overview of concepts of the soul and its relation to the body in Scandinavian folklore will not be presented here. The frequency of stories in the material dealing with bear-human transformation and hybridization does however raise questions about the conceptions of interiority/exteriority that lie behind the accounts. One fundamental circumstance may be noted; that there is a multiplicity of soul-concepts and that they do not display a clear or unambiguous way of thinking either when it comes to the materiality of the

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<sup>66</sup> For example, Tolley 2009, ch. 20, argues that stories of bear-human transformations in Old Norse sources reflect relatively recent influences from Sámi traditions; Frog 2014 argues for long-term continuities in the Scandinavian traditions that were impacted through historical changes within the culture while also in ongoing interaction with neighbouring cultures across the centuries.

body or the etheriality of the spirit.<sup>67</sup> Two related concepts that are important for understanding bear-human relations and transformation are *hug* and *ham*. *Hug* is cognate to Old Norse *hugr*, a word that has a basic meaning of “thought, mind, intention”, but was used to describe several related but different things.<sup>68</sup> Norwegian *hug* (Swedish *håg/hug*, Danish *hu*) means “mind” but also has connotations of “desire”, “disposition” and “memory”.<sup>69</sup> In the folkloric sources, the *hug* appears as an aspect of the mind that projects outside of the body and can affect other people. Depending on how “strong” one’s *hug* is, it might even take on a physical form:

Hugen kunde vera so sterk, at han tok Ham paa. Dei saag han. Eg vilde ikkje segja det, hadde eg inkje set han.<sup>70</sup>  
The *hug* could be so strong, that it took on a *ham*, they saw it. I wouldn’t tell it to you if I hadn’t seen it myself.

This excerpt underscores the potential corporeality of concepts linked to the interior and also leads us on to the concept of *ham*, which evidently is closely linked to *hug*. In Old Norse, *hamr* can refer to the skin or hide of an animal as well as the physical shape, the outward form, of an animal or human. When the word appears in Old Norse, supernatural transformation is in most cases explicit or implied. A *hamr* is never just a pelt – it also contains the essence of the animal to which it belonged. Consequently, changing one’s outward form also affects one’s mental disposition. Individuals that were able to change their form were called *hamrammr*<sup>71</sup> – “shape-strong” or *eigi einhamr* – “not of only one shape”.<sup>72</sup> The Old Norse word for the activity of shapeshifting – *skipta hǫmum* survives in Norwegian as *hamskifte* and Swedish *hamnskifte*, words most commonly used in connection with shapeshifting into the forms of bears or wolves. These stories of transformation are closely related to the werewolf-complex<sup>73</sup> but in the Norwegian folklore, shapeshifting is more commonly connected to bears than to wolves.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of what animal a human person is transformed into, the stories may say something

<sup>67</sup> Brøndum-Nielsen, Johannes & Lid, Nils (red.), *Nordisk kultur: samlingsverk. 19 Folketru*, Bonnier, Stockholm, 1935, p.100-101.

<sup>68</sup> On the concept of *hugr*, see Tolley, Clive, *Shamanism in Norse myth and magic. Vol. 1*, Suomalainen tiedeakatemia/Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 2009, p.187-193.

<sup>69</sup> Brøndum-Nielsen, Johannes & Lid, Nils (red.), *Nordisk kultur: samlingsverk. 19 Folketru*, Bonnier, Stockholm, 1935, p.3.

<sup>70</sup> Skar, Johannes, *Gamalt or Sætesdal. 4, Bygdeliv*, Kristiania, 1909, p.35.

<sup>71</sup> Being *hamrammr*, does however not necessarily imply a physical transformation or that a pelt is involved. In the *Landnámabók*, a character named Oddr Arngeirsson becomes *hamrammr* from killing and eating a bear in an act of revenge on the animal that had killed his father and brother. Nowhere in this story is it said that Oddr has taken on the physical shape of the bear. See Madsen, Carsten Lyngdrup *Landnamabogen 3* 2012-2015, vers 223: *Arngeir*, Link: [https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Landnamabogen\\_3](https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Landnamabogen_3) (accessed 2021-08-19).

<sup>72</sup> Tolley 2009, s.195-196.

<sup>73</sup> See Odstedt 1943.

<sup>74</sup> Reichborn-Kjennerud, I., *Vår gamle trolldomsmedisin. 5.*, i kommisjon hos Jacob Dybwad, Oslo, 1947, p.118. Stories of *hamskifte* appears to be older than those linked specifically to werewolves, see Odstedt, Ella, *Varulven i svensk folktradition*, A.-B. Lundequistska bokhandeln, Uppsala, 1943, p.1-2.

about how body and mind were understood in non-modern Scandinavia. The following story is about a Sámi man who in confidence shows his Norwegian friend his wolf-*ham*, which he uses to turn himself into a wolf. When asked to show his friend how the transformation is done, the Sámi man is reluctant:

For tek eg hamen over hovudet, så er eg varg, ikkje berre i skinn,- men -og i hug, sa finnen.<sup>75</sup>

Because if I pull the *ham* over the head, I will become wolf not only in skin but also in *hug*, said the Sámi.

Transformation and its significance for bear-human relations and bear culture shall be expounded upon in the following segment. This introduction merely serves to illustrate how, in the source material at hand, the exterior and interior reciprocally influence each other.

### 3.1.2 Transformation

Transformation into bear appears to be of three kinds; having a spell or curse cast upon you by someone else, self-transformation and transformation due to circumstances related to childbirth.<sup>76</sup> Examples of all three types are presented below. Stories of bear transformation often overlap with another common conception in Scandinavian folklore concerning bears, such as that the bear is especially dangerous to pregnant women:

Af Sporet, hvor hun har gaaet, skjønner han strax hvordan det er fat med hende, og om hendes Foster er Dreng eller Pige. Er det Pige, endser han hende ikke, men gaar hun med Drengebarn, vil han rive det ud af hendes Liv og opfostre sig en Søn. Han skal nemlig — saa berette de gamle Sagn — vare en forgjort (forhexet) Kongesøn, som løber i Bjørneham, og kan ikke komme til Mands igjen, uden at han faar opfostret sig en Søn. Da skal Trolddommen forsvinde'. Det er de allerstorste og varste Bjørne, som ere af dette Slags. Der er engang bleven skudt saadan En paa Skornetten i Nissedal. Han var saa stor at det var stygt at see, og saa slem at han slog ned for Fode baade Folk og Fæ og gjorde stor Skade. Der var Mange som lagde sig om at skyde ham, og der blev gjort Manngard, men der beed ingen Kugle paa ham. Men saa fandt de paa at tage Arvesølv<sup>77</sup> og støbe Kugler af, og mod dem kunde han ikke bestaa sig. Men det forunderligste var, at da de flaadde Skindet af, fandt de at han havde et Slirebelte saaledes som Konger og Kæmper brugte i

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<sup>75</sup> Strompdal, Knut, *Gamalt frå Helgeland*, Oslo, 1939, s.63.

<sup>76</sup> These three different ways of transformation is also noted by Ella Odstedt in her 1943 dissertation on the werewolf in the Swedish tradition. See Odstedt, Ella, *Varulven i svensk folktradition*, A.-B. Lundequistska bokhandeln, Uppsala, 1943.

<sup>77</sup> Specifically inherited silver, passed along in the family – "family silver" See: <https://naob.no/ordbok/arves%C3%B8lv> (accessed 2012-05-19).

gamle Dage imellem Skindet og Kjodet. Da fik de Syn for Sagn at det var et Menneske, som løb i Bjørneham. De bleve herover bange og frygtede for at de havde gjort en stor Synd. Men saa var der en viis Kone, som sagde, at de kunde frelse den Forgjortes Sjæl, naar de toge Skindet, deelte det i 7 Parter, og gav det til 7 Kirker, en Part til hver. Dette blev gjort, og i Nissedals Kirke ligger endnu den ene Syvende-part af Bjørnehuden.<sup>78</sup>

From the tracks where she has walked he will soon know her condition and whether she is carrying a boy or a girl. If it's a girl, he won't take note of her but if it's a boy she's carrying he will want to rip it out of her womb and raise a son for himself. He is, as the old tales tell, a Prince put under a spell who runs in bear-form and who cannot come back to his man-form unless he raises a son. Then the spell shall be broken. They are the largest and worst bears, this kind. Such a bear was once shot on Skornetten in Nissedal. He was so large that it was awful to behold and so cruel that he struck both people and livestock to the ground and caused great damage. There were many who tried to shoot him and a hunting party was formed, but bullets wouldn't hurt him. But then they got the idea to use silver for bullets, and those he could not withstand. But the most remarkable thing was that, when they flayed it's skin off, they found between the hide and his flesh that he had a belt and sheath of the kind that kings and heroes of old had. Then they realized that it was a human in bear-form. This scared them and they feared that they had committed a great sin. But then a wise lady told them that they could save the soul of the spellbound if they took the hide and split it in seven parts and gave the pieces to seven churches. This was done and in Nissedal's church there is still a seventh-part of that hide.

The element of the bear as a transformed prince appears again in this short excerpt:

Vistnok siger man paa Helgeland, at Bjørnen er en Kongssøn, som er bleven omskabt.<sup>79</sup>

Sure enough, it is said in Helgeland that the bear is a prince who has been transformed.

As we shall see below in section 3.2, bear-human transformation is often tied to bears behaving in an unacceptable manner. Typically, the bear attacks a person or some livestock, after which a hunt of the bear follows. Then, when the animal is killed and skinned, they find out that it was actually a human being underneath the outer form of a bear. In the two examples above, however, there is doubt whether this transformation pertains only to bears who cause harm to humans and their livestock or if it is a reflection of a general mythic past concerning *all* bears. In the first example the assertion that the bear is a human prince is preceded by establishing that it is prone to follow pregnant women, linking this specific bear to unacceptable behaviour. In the second example however, nothing points to either conception.

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<sup>78</sup> Landstad, Magnus Brostrup, *Fra Telemarken: Skik og Sagn : efterladte Optegnelser*, Oslo, 1927, p.70.

<sup>79</sup> Storaker, Johan Theodor, *Naturriggerne i den norske folketro*, Oslo, 1928, p.121f.

The transformed prince also appears in the Norwegian wonder tale “Østenfor Sol og vestenfor Maane”, in which a prince is a white bear by day and returns to his human form at night.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in the Icelandic saga *Hrolfs saga kraka*, King Hrolfr’s most renowned warrior Bǫðvarr *bjarki* (“Bǫðvarr Little-Bear”) is said to be of ursine descent. His father *Björn* (“Bear”) was cursed by his Sámi stepmother for rejecting her advances, and, like the prince of the Norwegian tale, is a bear by day and a human by night.<sup>81</sup> A stepmother who transforms her stepson also appears in the Norwegian folk ballad “Liten Lavrands unge”:

Sá lengi skal de bjönnir vera	As long shall they be bears
og heran pá skogin gange	and here in the forest walk
Til de teke bánið or mó’rsmaga	Til’ they take a child from the mother’s womb
og föðer deð up til manne. <sup>82</sup>	and rear it up to manhood.

Shapeshifting is often linked to the Sámi, as is hinted at in the story of Bǫðvarr *bjarki*, where the sorceress and antagonist is of Sámi origin. This conception appears numerous times in the later Norwegian material as well, here in the form of self-transformation:

Men de fleste sige, at det er en gammel, onskabsfuld Fin, som har taget Bjørneham paa, og som da drager ned i Bygderne og anretter stor Skade. Undertiden har man skudt saadanne Bjørne og fundet Tollekniven under Hammen paa den ene Side tæt ved Boven. Det er Mærke godt nok paa, hvorledes det har havt sig med den Bjørn. Men almindelige Kugler af Bly bide ikke paa saadanne, som løbe Bjørn, eller som er omskabte til Bjørne; man maa have Kugler af Sølv f. Ex. en Halsknap, eller om man bruger en Kugle af Bly, maa man have et Bygkorn i den.<sup>83</sup>

Most people say that is an old, wicked Sámi who has taken on the bear-*ham*, and who goes down into the villages and causes great harm. When such a bear is shot, they have found a knife under the *ham*, on one side tightly against the shoulder. That is a tell-tale sign about the nature of this bear, but normal bullets won’t hurt those who shapeshift or are enchanted into bears; one has to use bullets of silver, for example a button, or if a lead bullet is used there should be a grain of barley in it.

Other times, shapeshifting is linked to evil sorcery in a general sense:

<sup>80</sup> Asbjørnsen, Peter Christen, *Norske folke- og huldre-eventyr*, 2. opl., Gyldendal, København, 1896, p.259-275.

<sup>81</sup> Bugge, Alexander, *Fortællingen om Rolv Krake og hans kjæmper : norrøne heltesagn og eventyr*, Gyldendalske boghandel, Nordisk forlag, Kristiania ; København, 1911. Link: [http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Fort%C3%A6llingen\\_om\\_Rolv\\_Krake\\_og\\_hans\\_kj%C3%A6mper](http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Fort%C3%A6llingen_om_Rolv_Krake_og_hans_kj%C3%A6mper) (Accessed 2021-08-19).

<sup>82</sup> Landstad, Magnus Brostrup (red.), *Norske folkeviser*, Tönsberg, Christiania, 1853, p.337.

<sup>83</sup> Storaker, Johan Theodor, *Naturriggerne i den norske folketro*, Oslo, 1928, p.122.

Men Bjørn og Ulv staa i de onde Magters Tjeneste, ja Troldmænd kunne endog kaste Bjørne- og Ulve-Ham paa sig og gjore Skade.<sup>84</sup>

But bears and wolves are in the service of the evil powers, yes sorcerers could transform themselves into bears or wolves [literally: “cast bear- and wolf-*hams* upon theselves”] and cause harm.

Regardless of whether the bear is a prince or a Sámi, both kinds of stories may contain the element of finding various objects under the skin of the bear, which is a sign that the bear in question is a transformed human person rather than a bear person.<sup>85</sup> This implies that, without finding such objects, there is no way of telling the difference between a bear and a human, once its *ham* is removed. That a skinned bear looks eerily similar to a human is a well-known trope among bear hunters:

Och den flådda björnen var rätt som en naken människa, det var rent elakt att se — den hade bröst och axlar, skulderblad, lår och skinkor som en människa, men huvudet var som en hunds.<sup>86</sup>

And the skinned bear was like a human, it was downright awful to see – it had a chest and shoulders, scapula, thighs and buttocks like a human, but the head was like that of a dog.

There are various methods for self-transformation and they do not necessarily include an actual bear skin. Sometimes it is just a smaller piece of a bear skin that is used. This piece of skin is said to be elastic, or made elastic by spitting on it, and is simply stretched over oneself in order to transform. Other times, the shapeshifter uses a belt, crawling through it in order to shapeshift.<sup>87</sup> An additional method of transformation is interesting in relation to foetus-stealing bears, a motif which we have seen above and that we shall return to later:

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<sup>84</sup> Storaker, Joh[an] Th[eodor], *Tiden i den norske folketro* (Storakers samlinger 1): Ved Nils Lid, Kristiania, 1921, p.233.

<sup>85</sup> The motif is known in Swedish folklore as well, see Klintberg, Bengt af, *The types of the Swedish folk legend*, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 2010, p.310, Q61 - *Tiinder-box inside fur*.

<sup>86</sup> Paulaharju, Samuli, *Ödebygdsfolk: från nordsveriges finskbygder*, Natur och kultur, Stockholm, 1966 quoted in: Kuusela, Tommy, *Skogens ludne drott* i Knutson, Charina (red.), *Jämten 2019*, 112 uppl., Jamtli Förlag, 2018, p.101. The same fact is emphasized by Hilmer Zetterlund, who adds that especially the “feet” and “hands” of the bear are similar to those of humans. See Zetterberg, Hilmer, *Björnen i sägen och verklighet*, Lindblad, Uppsala, 1951, p.19-20. In a wider perspective, the same was highlighted by Hollowell, pertaining to bear-ceremonialism in a wide variety of cultural contexts across the Circum-Polar areas; Hollowell, A. Irving, *Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere ...*, Thesis (PH. D.)--University of Pennsylvania, 1926., Philadelphia, 1926, p.149.

<sup>87</sup> Reichborn-Kjennerud, I., *Vår gamle trolldomsmedisin*. 5., i kommisjon hos Jacob Dybwad, Oslo, 1947, p.121-122. Also identified by af Klintberg as Q62 – *Man crawls throug belt*, see af Klintberg 2010, p.310.



Dei som kunde løp varg eller bjørn, hadde henta noko or hiet etterat binna hade bore (det var av greidone). Dette sette dei på nasen og såg på eit dyr, då skifte dei ham litt etter kvart.<sup>88</sup>

Those who could shapeshift into wolf or bear had fetched something from the den after the she-bear had given birth (it was the afterbirth). This they put on their nose and looked at an animal, then they changed *ham* little by little.

Thoralf Reidar Christiansen, in his handbook used by folk memory collectors mentioned above in the methods-section, also makes reference to a similar practice:

Der er ogsaa undertiden fortalt hvordan en fik hammen. Om en plyndret et bjørnehi, og tok ungen ut av binnen, og smøg hinden omkring den om sig, saa skulde en fåa evnen til at løpe bjørn.<sup>89</sup>

It is also told how the *ham* was acquired. If one looted a bear's den and took the cub out of the she-bear and wrapped oneself in the membrane it had around itself you would gain the ability to shapeshift into a bear.

In the first account, it is the afterbirth that is used while the second makes reference to the caul. In both Swedish and Norwegian folklore, there are stories of women using the caul of a foal as a means to alleviate the pains of childbirth. This use of what is considered black magic then causes the child to become a werewolf.<sup>90</sup> As we shall see below body parts of the bear were also used to help with the difficulties of giving birth.

### 3.1.3 The Bear's Son

Stories of a hero/protagonist with ursine descent appears in numerous folktales, legends and myths from a large geographic area and over a vast period of time.<sup>91</sup> In folkloristics, the bear's son motif is identified with a number of well-known narratives or tale types of which it is only one component. These include: ATU 301: The Three Stolen Princesses, ATU 650A: Strong John and AT 425A: The animal as bridegroom.<sup>92</sup> Stith Thompson describes the motif as "Human son of woman who marries a bear acquires bear characteristics."<sup>93</sup> Klintberg breaks this motif up into two components that appear independently of each other but may also be conjoined – R21: The Girl in the Bear's Den and R22: The Bear's Last Meal.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Reichborn-Kjennerud, 1947, p.121.

<sup>89</sup> Christiansen, 1925, p.101.

<sup>90</sup> Odstedt 1943, p.115. Cf af Klintberg 2010, p.303: Q19 – *Rite with foal fetus stopped*.

<sup>91</sup> See Panzer, Friedrich, *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte. 1, Beowulf*, München, 1910 for an exhaustive survey of the bear's son tales in the Germanic context.

<sup>92</sup> Uther 2004, pp.177, 355

<sup>93</sup> Ref till stith thompson

<sup>94</sup> Af Klintberg 2010, p.316.

In the Scandinavian context the earliest known example of this motif appears in Saxo Grammaticus's genealogical account of the royal families of Denmark, where one branch of the Estrid-line is given an ursine ancestor:

In a district of Sweden lived the father of a family who had a daughter of engaging beauty; once, when she had gone out to amuse herself with her young maidservants, there came an enormous bear, which drove away her companions and then snatched her up; nevertheless, as it carried her off to its familiar lair in the forest, it clasped her gently and held her to its chest with its paws. But now it approached her lovely limbs with a novel kind of greed, a longing to clasp rather than kill her, so that, though it had originally aimed to tear her apart, she afterwards became the prey of its abominable lust. At once it turned from robber to suitor, relieved its appetite in intercourse, and exchanged its ravening hunger for the satisfaction of its desires. In order to nourish her more tenderly, it made frequent raids on nearby herds of cattle and attacked them fiercely; the girl, who in the past had normally eaten more delicate repasts, now became used to them sprinkled with blood. The captive's beauty tamed the wild savagery of her kidnapper to such a degree that, whereas she had been terrified that it wished to take her life, she now found it eager for love-making, and received food from a creature who she had initially feared would swiftly make her its meal. Is there anywhere that love does not penetrate or anything it does not undermine? At its prompting the urge of the belly yields to the dictates of passion even in the unrestrained ferocity of wild animals.

15. 3. Finally the owner of the herd, exasperated by the dwindling of his impoverished stock, set watch for the beast; after he had encircled it with dogs, he continued to drive it furiously, running and shouting, till he pursued it, as it happened, to the spot where the girl was being kept. Its den, enclosed by trackless marshes, was screened with an intertwined succession of boughs providing a continuous leafy canopy. Here the animal was quickly surrounded by men with nets, who assailed it with hunting spears until they had stabbed it to death.

15.4. But Nature, a craftswoman sympathetic to the two different materials, wanted to disguise the unnaturalness of the union by adapting the seed, and granted a normal birth to this monstrous engendering, with the result that wild blood was invested with the features of a human body. When a son was born, his relatives gave him a name taken from his begetter. Eventually, when he had been told the truth about his descent, he wreaked deadly revenge on his father's murderers. Thrugils, his son, surnamed Spragelæg, imitated his sire's courage in such a way that he showed not the slightest trace of deviation from its excellence. He produced Ulf, who made the lineage evident through his character, and by his spirit exhibited the ancestral strain.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, 1st ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, x.15.2-x.15.4, p.735-737.

In Pehr Fjellströms 1755 account of South Sámi bear ceremonialism, a story is related that the informant explicitly states as being accounting for the origin of the ceremonies. The bear's son motif is clearly present, here in translation by Carl Martin Edsman:

“Three brothers had an only sister who was so hated by her brothers that she had to take refuge in the wilds. When exhausted, she finally comes across a bear's den, she enters it to have some rest; a bear comes to the same lair and, on closer acquaintance, he weds her and begets a son by her. After a while when the bear has become old and his son is grown up, the bear is said to have informed his wife that, on account of his great age, he can no longer live, but wishes to go out on the first snow in the autumn, so as to enable her three brothers to see his tracks and then ‘ring him in’ and kill him. Although his wife tries in every way to prevent him from doing this, the bear does not let himself be persuaded, but does as he has said, so that the three brothers can ‘ring him in’ when seeing his footprints. Then the bear asks to have a piece of brass attached to his forehead, for this sign would distinguish him from other bears and also prevent his own son who had now left him from killing him. After a deep fall of snow, the three brothers go out together to fell the bear, whom before that they have been ‘ringing in’. Then the bear asks his wife if all the three brothers had been equally spiteful to her, and she answers that her two eldest brothers had been more spiteful than the younger who had been somewhat more clement. When the brothers come to the lair, the bear runs out and attacks the eldest brother, bites him and injures him rather severely, and he himself returns uninjured to his lair. When the second brother comes, the bear runs against him in the same manner and injures him in the very same way and then he returns to his lair. Then he orders his wife to get hold of him round his waist. When she has done so, he walks out of his lair on his hind-legs carrying her; then she orders her youngest brother to shoot him, which he does. The wife then sits down some distance away, covers her face, as if she has not the heart to see the bear being shot and flayed, but still she watches with one eye. This is the origin of the old custom that no woman may see the bear or the men dealing with the bear, unless she has her face covered and is looking through a brass ring. More will be said about this below.

When the three brothers have felled the bear and all the meat has been put in the cauldron to be boiled, the son arrives and the brothers tell him that they have shot a strange animal with a piece of brass attached to his forehead. He says that it was his father, who had been marked with such a piece of brass and he says that he has therefore a right to an equal share in the bear with them. When they keep on refusing to give him this, the son threatens to wake up his father, and then he takes a rod and saying the words, ‘My father, arise! My father, arise!’ he beats the skin with it. Then the meat in the cauldron begins to boil so violently that it looks as though it wants to rise up out of the cauldron and so they are forced to give him an equal share. This is said to be the origin of the following custom (if what Schefferus says really happens): when the bear has been felled, the hunters immediately drag him out of his lair and beat him with twigs or soft rods. From this come the proverb: “beat a bear with twigs”. The fact that the bear hunters as well as all the implements used in the capture of the bear must be adorned with brass chains and rings has its origin in the piece of brass attached to the bear's forehead.

As for the ceremonial used, the woman is said to have been instructed by the bear, and then she passed on the instructions to her brothers and told them that the ceremonial was necessary if they wished to overpower such a fierce animal as the bear: thus everything has been handed down to the Lapps by tradition, and therefore they have been all the more anxious to preserve and practise such customs as were prescribed by the bear himself, as they believed that far from being able to overpower him, they would be overpowered and injured by him, if they failed to keep the rules of the old custom.<sup>96</sup>

As seen above, bear's son-tales have been circulated in the Scandinavian area for many centuries, albeit within very different genres; Saxo's is motivated by a wish to endow the royal family of the recently consolidated Danish kingdom with an honorable genealogy<sup>97</sup> while the Sámi etiology lifts the motif into the sphere of religious beliefs, touching on totemic ancestry. Both stories are centered on hybridity between human and bear and how this is something desirable, or at the very least connected to great power. In the later Scandinavian folklore the same motif is found, this example being from Verdal:

Det var ei jente frå Vuku som var teke av bjørnen og levde ei tid med han i hiet. Ho hadde ogso barn med bjørnen, og enno skal det vera ætt att etter deim.<sup>98</sup>

There was a girl from Vuku who was taken by the bear and lived for some time with him in his lair. She also had a child with the bear and there is supposed to family descended from them still.

Another version also contains the element of the bear being fed by a supernatural agent while in the den:

Det var ei veikje som heitte «Bjønner-Beret». Ho hadde vorte teke av bjørnen ein gong. Han tok ho inn i hiet åt seg, og der levde ho ei tid saman med bjørnen. Ho fekk barn og med bjørnen, og han stelte vel med henne. Kvar dag vart det innsett ei skål melk til henne. Men ein dag var skåla full av blod. Då var bjørnen skoten, og so kom ho att til bygda atter.<sup>99</sup>

There was a lass called Bear-Beret (*Bjønner-Beret*). She had been taken by the bear one time. He took her into the den and there she lived with the bear for some time. She had a child with the

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<sup>96</sup>Fjellström Pehr, *Kort berättelse om lapparnas Björna-fänge, samt deras der wid brukade widskeppelser*, Stockholm 1755, p.13-15 translated by Edsman and quoted in Edsman, Carl-Martin, *The story of the bear wife in the Nordic tradition*, Ethnos 21, s.36-56, 1956.

<sup>97</sup> Johannesson, Kurt, *Saxo Grammaticus: komposition och världsbild i Gesta Danorum*, [Lärdomshistoriska samf.], Uppsala, 1978, s.310ff.

<sup>98</sup> Røstad, Anton, *Frå gamal tid: folkeminne frå Verdal*, Oslo, 1931, p.73.

<sup>99</sup> Røstad, Anton, *Frå gamal tid: folkeminne frå Verdal*, Oslo, 1931, p.73.

bear, and he took good care of her. Every day a bowl of milk was put forth for her. But one day the bowl was full of blood. Then the bear was shot, and after that she came back to the village.

The same story is also found in Jämtland, in northern Sweden:

Det var en tös, som gick i skogen, ock så kom hon över ett björnide om hösten. Då vart björnen vis det där, ock så tog björnen tösen där ini björnidet ock hade hänner där en stund utpå vintern. Mjölck fick hon för var morgon, ock björnen lika ens. Så var det några folk, som värvade björnen om vintern eller om hösten; så var de tänkt att ta honom en dag om vintern. Dagen förrn de tog honom, så fick björnen en blodskål i stället för en mjölkskål. När de kom ock tog björnen då, så fann de nu tösen ock, ock tog hänner tog de vara på. Men då var tösen på sytten, ock det barnet tösen hade, det vart ludet som en björn, men med folkskapnad; ock utav det släktet lever folket ännu idag borti Gubbhögen, men lite mindre och mindre ludet, dess mer det släktas ut. Han Erik i Gubbhögen har nu varit mycket omtalad; han skulle nu vara halv luden, nedan midjan.<sup>100</sup>

There was a lass who wandered in the forest and she came across a bears den in the autumn. The bear became aware that the girl was there and so he took the lass into the den and kept her there through the winter. She was given milk every morning, and the bear too. Then there were some folks who encircled the bear in the winter or the autumn; they were gonna take him one day in the winter. The day before they took him the bear received a bowl of blood instead of a bowl of milk. When they came and took the bear they found the lass and took care of her. But the lass was with child, and that child the lass had was furry like a bear but with the shape of people and from that kin there are still descendants over there in Gubbhögen, but they are a little less furry in every generation. That man Erik in Gubbhögen is widely known, he is supposed to be furry from the waist down.

Judging from the content of the bear's son tales presented above, bears and humans may produce offspring. The scenario seems to be specifically connected with a bear-human conflict following the abduction of a human woman or girl, although the conflict does not necessarily seem to stem from the abduction itself. Saxo emphasizes that such a union is "monstrous" but at the same time presents the qualities inherited from it as something favourable. None of the other accounts exhibit any mention at all of the inter-species procreation as problematic in a "biological" or ontological sense, although this might be implicit.

### 3.1.4 Concluding discussion

In the non-modern setting reflected in the source material, it would seem that the mind can take on a form and that a form can take over the mind. Donning a bear hide in order to become a bear tells us that the body changes the person's interiority. If a person *performs* the bear body

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<sup>100</sup> Zetterholm, Delmar Olof & Waltman, Karl Hybert (red.), *Lidmål: sagor, sägner och historier, seder och bruk*, Stockholm, 1939, p.39f.

– putting on the bear-*ham*, the *hug* will change accordingly, as the example above told. This harmonizes well with the Amerindian traditions where bodies are inherently malleable and where the body itself is what creates a certain point of view. In the Amazon, the feather plume of a bird is seen as “clothing”, a cultural instrument for performing *birdness*.<sup>101</sup> This would suggest that the difference between humans and bears is a cultural one. The fact that removing the hide of a bear person renders it indistinguishable from a human person is also relevant to reflect upon. What gives the shapeshifter away are the cultural instruments (tinder box, knife, belt etc.) found after the bear has been killed and skinned. This could be seen as reflecting a train of thought where removing the *ham* – the form, which may be considered a cultural “clothing” – reveals an interiority that is similar across the cultural borders separating human and bear society. This would fit the animist schema as presented by Descola (see above in theories section). On the other hand, a body is still a body, even if one removes the “clothing”. This, then, leads me to suggest that there is an aspect of totemic thinking present in the material. Totemism as continuity of physicalities between human and other-than-human can perhaps explain to some extent why human bodies and bear bodies are only distinguishable through their cultural clothing, while said clothing is part of demarcating cultural differences between humans and bears, generating different points of view.

While stories of shapeshifting and those about ursine descent might seem like two very different genres, they overlap. The next section will deal more in depth with stories of foetus stealing bears and section 3.3 deals with foster-children of the bear. The following example from Hardanger may serve as a bridge from here to there:

For ikring femti år sidan fortalde Gamle-Helge Ase: Det drog ein stor, loden mann ikring i bygdene her i gamal tid. Dei kalla honom Bjørnefanten; for han sku ha vore uppalen tå bjørn. Han munde og ha ervt noko tå naturi åt fosterfaren; for ender og då gjorde han ferder uppi lidi og leika med små-logi, og då lykta det gjerne so at eit beist vart liggjande. På Kvitno manna dei seg upp, tolv karar, og tok på honom. Det vart ei lang og hard Öta, men dei fekk då slita tå honom hamen. Med dei tolv heldt fanten, sette ei kvinna eld på hamen. Han var åt og sku ha rive seg laus då, og nåde dei um det hade lukkast! Men etter kvart som hamen brann, minka styrken, og då han var utbrunnen, åtte han ikkje større krefter enn eit vanleg menneske.<sup>102</sup>

About fifty years ago, Gamle-Helge Ase told me: There was a large, furry man prowling around these parts in the old days. They called him the Bear-tramp (*Bjørnefantan*), because he was supposed to have been raised by a bear. He perhaps inherited some of the nature of his foster

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<sup>101</sup> De Castro, 1998, p.470.

<sup>102</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger. 2, Norsk folkeminnelag, Oslo, 1934, p.67.

father; from time to time he would travel up to the hills and mess around with the livestock and that would often end with a beast being killed. In Kvitno, they stiffened themselves up, twelve men, and went after him. There was a long and hard struggle but the managed to rip his *ham* off. While the twelve men held him down, a woman set fire to his *ham*. He tried to cut himself loose, and God help them if he had succeeded! But as the *ham* burned, his strength diminished and when it was burnt out, he had no greater powers than that of an ordinary human.

This account exhibits elements of bear-decent, albeit as an adoptee, on the one hand, and elements of shapeshifting on the other. The person is said to be raised by a bear and this has apparently changed him physically to such a degree that his *ham* must be burned, a motif otherwise present in stories of shapeshifters. Another amalgamation of shapeshifting and ursine ancestry can be identified in this comment on “Humans in beast-*hamn*” (*Människor i odjurshamn*) from Jämtland, Sweden:

But once received this change of *hamn* were under certain circumstances inherited and did in some cases appear again in the family line...

### 3.2 A Threat to Women and Children

One of the most prevalent groups of motifs in the Norwegian material pertains to pregnant women and the danger the bear poses to them. The material reflects a lively discourse that represents bears as specifically out to get pregnant women, whose condition they can recognize by their scent. Whereas bears’ sexuality can be threatening to other members of human society, pregnant women are threatened by physical violence. As a rule, the bear is explicitly said to tear the foetus out of the mother’s womb.<sup>103</sup> Accounts concerning attacks on pregnant women take numerous forms. The information can simply be presented without elaborating why there bear does this, as in the following representative example:

Frugtsommelige Kvinder forfølges meget af Bjørnen, som, dersom den faar en fat, sønderriver hende, men tager Fosteret og opammer det, især hvis det er en Gut; thi da er den glad, er det derimod et Pigebarn, græder den.<sup>104</sup>

Pregnant women are sought after by the bear. which if it catches one it will tear the foetus out of her body and rear it, especially if it’s a boy, then it will be happy, whereas if it’s a girl, it will cry.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. af Klintberg 2010, p.453, Z14: *Strong man has suckled she-bear*, p.306, Q31: *Werewolf tears foetus out of pregnant woman* and p.318, R32: *Wolves tear foetus out of pregnant woman*.

<sup>104</sup> Storaker, 1928, p.120.

The motivations for this behaviour are customarily explained in one of two ways: either the bear simply wants to eat the foetus, especially if it is a boy, or the bear wants to adopt the baby, sometimes specifically a boy, and raise it as its own. In many cases, though not all, a bear that “steals” a child to rear as its own is in fact a transformed human being. In such cases, raising the child is the condition required to break the spell and return the bear to its human form. As mentioned in section 3.1 there is considerable overlap between motifs concerning the bear’s complex relation to female humans and the group of motifs pertaining to bear transformation.<sup>105</sup>

### 3.2.1 Enchanted Humans

The connection between the desire to kidnap a foetus and raise it is often explicitly connected to bear-human transformation. In the following example, this is presented as general knowledge about bears’ behaviour rather than narrating a specific event in which it occurred as a legend or telling it as a fantastic folktale. The knowledge is nevertheless qualified by the expression *fortel dei* (“they say”), identifying it with a popular view rather than necessarily being the writer’s own:

Bjørnen var hard etter kvinnfolk som var “på veg”. Det var barnet han vilde ha tak i. Dei segjer at bjørnen skal vera ein prins i dyreham og at trolldomen fyrst vert løyst når han har greidt å taka eit barn levande or mors liv og sidan el det upp. — Han kunde kjenna lukten tå fosteret lang veg, fortel dei.<sup>106</sup>

The bear had an urge for women who were “on the way”. It was the child he wanted to get a hold of. They say that the bear is supposed to be a prince in animal-form and that the sorcery could only be broken once he managed to take a living child out of the mother and then raise it. – He could pick up the scent of the foetus from a great distance, they say.

Although a connection to human transformation is not uniform in the tradition, it links this type of violation of social norms in bear-human relations specifically to evil supernatural powers rather than to normal bears.

### 3.2.2 Preparing a Place for the Pregnant Woman

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<sup>105</sup> The only legend type in which the bear raises the child indexed by af Klintberg is Z14: *Strong man has suckled she-bear* (2010, p.453). This suggests that foetus-stealing bears were not as common in the Swedish material. af Klintberg’s index suggests that the tearing of a foetus from the mother’s womb was linked in Swedish traditions to wolves rather than bears and breaking the curse of a werewolf, but breaking the curse was linked to drinking the foetus’s blood rather than raising the child (af Klintberg 2010, p.306, Q31, p.307, Q36 [cf. p.319, R43], p.318, R32, p.319, R44).

<sup>106</sup> Opedal, 1930, p.38



Another related element present in these stories, is that a bear who has caught a pregnant women often digs a grave or makes a “bed” for her. While the bear is busy digging, the woman tries to fool the bear and escape: *Men kona klødde tå seg, med bjørnen grov, og hengde klæda sine på stuven...* (“But the woman took her clothes off while the bear was digging and hung her clothes over the tree stump”)<sup>107</sup>. This is done in order to make the bear mistake the tree stump for the actual woman, allowing her to slip off unnoticed. In the following version, the woman manages to escape, but the transformational power of the bear has already affected the unborn child:

Guten ho bar — han var første barnet og heitte Lars — var ikkje lik anna folk. Han lutte med hauet, og såg vill ut når'n gløste opp på folk. — Men gamalt folk minnest endå ei djup hole i marka oppi Hagen, der som bjørnen hadde tenkt seg grave ned kona.<sup>108</sup>

The boy she bore – he was the first born and his name was Lars – wasn’t like other folk. His head was tilted and he had a look of wildness as he glared at people. – But the old folks still remember a deep hole in the ground up in Hagen, where the bear had planned on burying the woman.

The motif for tricking a bear is also widely established in the Swedish tradition, indexed by af Klintberg as type R24: *Jacket slipped over tree stump*.<sup>109</sup> Although the Swedish tradition links the motif to attacks generally, stories with the complex situation involving a woman are also found. In one Swedish version, where the woman manages to escape using the *Jacket slipped over tree stump* trick, the child that is then born is said to be furry and “as strong as a bear”.<sup>110</sup> Bears exhibit a great deal of agency and personhood in these stories. Digging graves and making beds are no doubt cultural activities and are in this example tied to violent behaviour of bears. The example also suggests that there is an inherent connection between this socially unacceptable behaviour of bears and transformation.

### 3.2.3 Foetus-Stealing in Mythic Time

Sometimes the story of the stolen baby is placed in the remote past. In the following example, the motif is linked to a feature of a stone in the landscape and projected *i eldgamal tid* (“in the

<sup>107</sup> Rekdal, Olav, *Eventyr og segner: Folkeminne frå Romsdal*, Oslo, 1933, p.151.

<sup>108</sup> Rekdal, Olav, *Eventyr og segner: Folkeminne frå Romsdal*, Oslo, 1933, p.151.

<sup>109</sup> Klintberg, Bengt af, *The types of the Swedish folk legend*, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 2010, p.316 – R24 *Jacket slipped over tree stump*. This scenario is also found more widely. It is indexed as ATU 160\*: A woman betrays a bear. See Uther, Hans-Jörg & Dinslage, Sabine, *The types of international folktales: a classification and bibliography : based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson. Part I Animal tales, tales of magic, religious tales, and realistic tales, with an introduction*, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Helsinki, 2004, p.114

<sup>110</sup> Kuusela, Tommy, *Skogens ludne drott i Knutson*, Charina (red.), *Jämten 2019*, 112 uppl., Jamtli Förlag, 2018, p.103.

time as old as fire”), which seems to equate to the mythic time when the world was being created:

Me hadde krøteri våre på Skjenangen i Aurdal i Nord-Aurdal i mange somrar. Når ein der kjem åt ein bekk, er det på ei helle tydelege avmark etter ein liten barnefot. Her skulle ein bjørn i eldgamal tid rive i hel ei kjerring. som gjekk med småe. Då bjørnen tok ut ungen, hadde eine ungefoten kome ned på ei helle og sett blodmerke etter fotsolen, så det ikkje gjekk bort att.<sup>111</sup>

We had our livestock on Skjenangen in Aurdal in Northern Aurdal for many summers. When you come up to a creek there, there is a boulder with a clear footprint of a small child. Here, in the time old as fire, a bear is supposed to have killed a lady who was with child. When the bear took out the kid, one of its feet touched the rock surface and left its imprint there so that it couldn't be removed afterwards.

Another example of this legend, identified with marks on the same stone or at least one in the same area, is not as explicit about the ancientness of the event:

Ein gong tok bjørnen på ei fremeleg kjerring mellom stølane Foroset og Skjenangen på Aurdalsåsen i Nord-Aurdal. Bjørnen reiv or henne ungen, eit foster som var 8 månad gamalt. Det var endå på ei flat helle like ved vegen at dethende. På denne hella syner det så vel ferde etter barnefoten.<sup>112</sup>

One time the bear took a pregnant woman between the shielings Foroset and Skjenangen on Aurdalsåsen in Northern Aurdal. The bear tore the kid out of her, an eight-month-old foetus. There was a flat rock by the side of the road where it happened. On this rock one could clearly see the track of the child's foot.

Rather than being just a scary story about a horrible event or the danger of bears generally, the placement of this event in mythical time gives the story some weight as an important element of bear-human relations. Another type of reference to mythical times is present in a version where the bear can speak:

Det var endå den tid bjørnen kunne tala. Då han hadde teke ho, sa han til henne: “Sit te e kjem att”. Så stelte han seg til å grava opp ein svær kjellar, og der nedi hadde han vilja hatt ho.<sup>113</sup>

That was still at the time when the bear could talk. When he had taken her [i.e. the pregnant woman], he said to her: “Sit here til' I get back”. Then he set about digging a huge cellar, and he had wanted to have her down there.

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<sup>111</sup> Hermundstad, Knut, *Truer om villdyr, fangst og fiske*, Norsk Folkminnelag, Oslo, 1967, p.79.

<sup>112</sup> Hermundstad, 1967, p.89.

<sup>113</sup> Hermundstad, 1967, s.80.

Placing events in a mythic time setting may point to these modes of bear-human relations as deeply engrained in the social tradition. “In the time as old as fire” coupled with traces in stone hints at the foetus stealing-motif as a fundamental element in bear-human relations.

### 3.2.4 The Bear and Childbirth

In one example of the same foetus-stealing narrative, the bear is described as being relatively gentle with the woman and almost acts as a midwife. The woman is out walking and suddenly goes into labour. As she sits down to rest, she hears the cracking of branches close to her and soon enough a bear’s head sticks out between the trees. In the same moment, she goes into another bout of contractions which renders her senseless. When she regains consciousness, she can see that the bear has approached her and she can feel its claws and teeth on her body. This causes her to faint again. When she has recovered her senses “the bear sits by her and holds her steadfastly across her back, and he treats her so gently and seems so caring of her”. She falls unconscious once more and when she wakes up, she has given birth but both the baby and the bear are gone. The baby is later found wrapped in a sheepskin and hung in a tree. The bear also put a piece of fat from the sheep in the baby’s mouth.<sup>114</sup>

This example of “the bear as midwife” is also interesting in the light of some childbirth-related customs from Jämtland and Härjedalen in Sweden. In one account from Jämtland, it was said that a woman in labour should embrace the body of a skinned bear, as this will make childbirth easier.<sup>115</sup> Another account, from Härjedalen, says that a man who has been mauled by a bear is especially suited as a midwife since his presence will loosen up her pelvis.<sup>116</sup> In the Norwegian material, contact with bears also helps with childbirth:

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<sup>114</sup> Opedal, 1934, p.65: “— Ho besta (slokna i 1860) fortalde: Ei kona drog ein dag frå Vestrheim te Uppheim. På vegen fekk ho barnerider og laut setja seg på ei tuva. Då knest og brest det i kvister attmed henne, nokre greiner bøygjer seg tesides, og eit bjørnehovud sting fram millom trei. I same rykken fær ho ei hard barnerid, so ho er åt og uvitar. I ørska vert ho vis med at bjørnen kjem hegåt henne. Ho tykkjer alt ho kjenner klør og tenner kor dei riv i holdet, og dermed svimar ho burt. Då ho rår or, sit bjørnen og held henne trufast um ryggen, og han fer so fint og tykkjest vera so vyrk for henne. Um eit bel fær ho endå ei rid, og då ho vaknar, har ho født. Men burte er både barn og bjørn. Seint um sidan kjem det folk. Kona er so nedfor-komi at ho greider ikkje mæla ordet, berre peikar med handi i den leidi ho trur bjørnen har drege. Dei finn faret og fylgjer det. So 'gjeng dei seg på ein nydrepren ver. Skrotten er mest heil, men skinnnet er burte. Dei skynar at bjørnen kann ikkje vera langt undan heller, og dreg ein mole lenger inn i skogen. Attmed ei fura fin dei verskinnet. Ein tå karane luter seg og vil taka det uppi handi, men støkk attende; for sveipt inni skinnnet ligg det eit nyfødt gutbarn og syg på eit talgknybbe. Bjørnen sjølv såg ingen meir te (Ulv.).”

<sup>115</sup> Granberg, Einar ”År bjørnen vår gamle fruktbarhetsgud? I Festin, Eric (red.), *Festskrift till Carl J. E. Hasselberg på hans 75-årsdag 16/5 1931*, Östersund, 1931., p.47

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Dersom Moderen haver store Smerter ved Fødselen, stryge de hende med den høire Forfod af en Bjørn, hvilket ganske vist pleier hjælpe.<sup>117</sup>

When the mother is in great pain while in labour, they stroke her with the right forepaw of a bear, which usually helps.

These childbirth-related examples seem to indicate that there is an inherent connection between bears and female reproductive capacities that goes beyond the bear as a murderous kidnapper. This may not be directly linked to the personhood of the bear but is relevant for understanding the complex ways of thinking about the bear, which shape bear-human relations. Some accounts claim that bears will not attack *any* pregnant woman, but only those that carry a legitimate child:

Gamle folk fortel at bjørnen var før te skilja millom gjentor og konor. Gjentor som hadde lege seg burt, stod lite i vyrdni, og han freista aldri te draga av med borni deira, nøgde seg med te gje dei tå labben på baket, sa Jødna-Lars.<sup>118</sup>

Old folks say that the bear could tell the difference between married and unmarried women. Girls who had pre-marital sex were looked down upon and he [the bear] never tried to take off with their children but was content with giving them a spanking on the rear, said Jødna-Lars.

Another similar account deals with the harsh reality of “fallen women”: it tells of a girl carrying an illegitimate child who is overcome with shame and wants to commit suicide. She goes out into the forest to a large boulder called *Bjødnaustain* (“Bear Stone”) where it is said that the bear usually comes to lay down and rest. The bear eventually comes along and the girl prepares to meet her destiny. The bear, however, only gives her a slap in the face and then goes away again. The girl ends up keeping the baby and is later thankful to the bear for having been spared.<sup>119</sup>

Accounts dealing with the bear being selective raises questions about bear morals. It would seem that, on the one hand, bears are capable of heinous acts of violence, while on the other, bears adhere to social norms similar to those of human culture in choosing not to steal illegitimate children. The bear even punishes women who carry illegitimate children, implying

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<sup>117</sup> Storaker 1928, p.117.

<sup>118</sup> Opedal, 1934, p.64.

<sup>119</sup> Opedal 1930, p.47: “Ho Olina fortalde: Det var ei ung gjenta som hadde lege seg burt og var mest ifrå seg tå skam og trege. So kom det for henne at ho vilde skilja både seg og det ho bar under hjart med livet. — No ligg det ein stor stein dei kallar Bjødnaustain uppi Sandvæ-lii. I gamal tid kvilde bjørnen jamleg under den steinen, sa dei. Fin haustkveld drog ho stad og la seg der. Um eit bel tok det té knesta og bresta i buskor og kjørr, greinen sveidde seg tilsides og ein stor bjørne-rugg stend undren og gløser på 'ne. Gjenta ligg og skjelv som eit lauvblekkje og er so redd. Men ho er glad òg, at det no skal verta slutt på al liding. Der kjem han hega! Lyfter labben! Gjenta ligg so still, so still. Ho torer ikkje ha augo feste imot velgjerds mannen sin, men har snutt andletet burt. So fell slaget: ein dask yver øyra som tå ei flat mannshand! Ho ventar på meir, men det kjem ikkje. Bjørnen ruslar inn i skogen att, og gjenta tek vegen til bygdar. Sidan fødte ho barnet og l det upp. Og té lenger det leid, té klårare såg ho at skogekongen hadde gjort vét imot henne (Odda).”

some sort of position of license. This raises the question whether only a legitimate child can fulfil needs that prompts the bear to attack pregnant women and steal their foetus.

Another indication that the bear has a set moral values is the fact that women can scare off a bear by showing the bear their private parts<sup>120</sup>:

That's an old custom, that the herding girls should lift their skirts. Then he became ashamed and went on his way.

Det er no gamal vis og det at budeione skal lyfta upp stakkane sine. Då vert han skamfull og dreg sin veg.<sup>121</sup>

The attribution of shame or embarrassment to the bear when seeing a woman's sexual organs ascribes the response expected in polite human society to the bear, rather than inciting lust. Although the ideas behind human-bear interaction cannot be assumed to be uniform or systematic, this tradition, which could be enacted by women encountering bears rather than only being narrated, suggests that bears were generally expected to be modest and that bears that kidnap women and steal foetuses are exceptional.

### 3.2.5 Overview of the threat to women and children

This subsection has elucidated bears complex relationship to human women. In the previous section we saw that humans and bears sometimes produce offspring while this subsection has dealt with stories of violent acts towards women, including the theft of unborn children. Both types of stories suggest that bears and humans have potential for sameness. In the first case, this potential is in the form of categorical compatibility which results in hybridization. The second case suggests that humans may become bears, either through magic transformation or social transformation – a foster child of the bear acquires bear characteristics. Similarly, a bear can become human if it raises a human child as its own. Such a bear is a transformed human, but cannot be told apart from a normal bear unless one removes its *ham*. This aspect of bear-human

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<sup>120</sup> This motif is known from Finno-Karelian and Swedish folklore as well. See Piludu, Vesa Matteo, *The Forestland's Guests: Mythical Landscapes, Personhood, and Gender in the Finno-Karelian Bear Ceremonialism*, doctoral thesis, Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2019, p.229 and Jauhiainen 1998, p. 321 for Finno-Karelian examples and Kuusela 2018, p.102 for examples from Sweden. It was earlier indexed as tale-type AT 169A\*: On the road the wolf does not touch the man, subcategory (7) The bear will not allow the housewife to cross the road. She lifts her dress. The bear clears off. (Thompson, Stith, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography: Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* (FFC No. 3) Translated and Enlarged, Second Revision, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1961, p.62); Uther (2004, p.118) simplifies AT types 169a\*–169F\* to be included under ATU 169\*, where this narrative becomes invisible. Jauhiainen (1998, p.321) indexes a distinct legend type that makes this motif rather than placing clothing on a stump the pregnant woman's means of escape from the bear: R401: Bear is angry at human woman who is pregnant with a boy child – becomes ashamed and flees, when woman lifts her skirts.

<sup>121</sup> Opedal 1930, p.25.

relations is fraught with conflict and violence while at the same time bears seem to have moral values that correspond to those of humans. Again, bear culture has a degree of sameness with human culture while at the same time being other to human culture, in which kidnapping and violence towards women is not acceptable. Conversely, bears do not accept illegitimate children and are ashamed at the sight of women's private parts. Furthermore, bears are inherently connected to childbirth and may act as a gentle midwife, albeit with the motivation of kidnapping when doing so.

### 3.3 Bear-Taxonomies and Naming.

The purpose of this section is to elucidate the vernacular taxonomy of bears in Scandinavia and the different names that have been used for bears, as well as to shed light on the phenomena of naming humans after the bear.<sup>122</sup> Vernacular taxonomy refers to the categories into which bears are classed. Some of these categories are similar to a biological classification of different species, while others distinguish different segments or facets of bear culture. Different names and terms used for bears exhibit a rich vocabulary that allowed a speaker to avoid naming the bear directly, in addition to terms linked directly to a bear taxonomy. Avoidance terms will be considered in relation to noa words, as words to be used when a direct naming of the bear would be equivalent to a taboo violation. This vocabulary includes words that are simply descriptive but also terms that indicate intimacy, imply kinship, honorification or a connection to supernatural powers. These topics interconnect but are understood here as different levels of distinguishing and relating to bears. Together, these phenomena point to perceptions of bears as a heterogeneous group of cultural persons who relate to human beings and human culture in different ways, depending on their individual disposition and/or their kinship ties to humans.

#### 3.3.1 Taxonomies

The phenomenon of distinguishing between different kinds of bears depending on their size, feeding habits and moral disposition (i.e. good bears and bad bears) is found already in Peder Claussön Friis' *Norriges og omliggende Øers sandfærdige Beskrivelse, indholdendis huis vært er at vide, baade om landets og indbyggerns leylighed og vilkor*, written in the late 16th century. Friis describes three kinds of bears. The largest kind is the *gres-diur* ("grass-animal"). According to Friis, this type of bear stays far away in the forest and rarely eats meat and therefore seldom comes close to people and their livestock. The second kind is called *schade-*

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<sup>122</sup> Onomastics on the Scandinavian male personal name *Björn* ("Bear") will be omitted as the name itself does not generally link the individuals named Björn to the animal.

*diur* (“damage[-causing] animal”); it is smaller and not as fat as the first kind and kills a lot of livestock. The third kind of bear is something between these; it eats livestock, but not as often as the *schade-diur*, and it also feeds on ants, which is why it is called a *myre-bjørn* (“ant-bear”).<sup>123</sup>

The same kind of taxonomic distinction is made by Erik Pontoppidan (1698-1764) in his *Det første forsøg paa Norges naturlige historie*, published in 1752-1753. However, Pontoppidan distinguishes only two kinds of bears: the *heste-bjørn* (“horse-bear”) and the *myre-bjørn* (“ant-bear”). He does not explicitly state that the two kinds have different feeding habits, but he notes that the former is larger than the latter.<sup>124</sup>

In his 1749 zoological dissertation on hunting and trapping in Jämtland, Sweden, Æschill Nordholm mentions two kinds of bears: the *slagbjörn* (“striking-bear”) and the *myrtufs* (“mire-tuft”). The former, as implied by its name, is carnivorous and will attack livestock. The latter gets its name from the environment in which it mainly dwells.<sup>125</sup>

Among the early sources, Friis is the only author to distinguish *three* different types of bears and a three-fold distinction has not appeared in the corpus of *Norsk folkeminnelags skrifter* (NFLS). The more common way of differentiating bears seems to be between only two types. This distinction appears multiple times in the NFLS, as in the following excerpt from Telemark:

Af dem er der flere Slags, der fornemmelig adskille sig i Storrelse og Levemaade. Grastass eller Maurebjønn kaldes de smaa, som ingen Fortrad gjore hverken Folk eller Fa, men alene æde Gras og grave i Myretuerne. Han kaldes ogsaa Berja-Bjønn fordi han æder Bær i Skoven. Illjas-Bjønn kaldes den store og slemme Bjørn, som lever af Rov, dræber Hester og Kreature, og har voldt Mang en Mand Meen, naar de have vovet sig i Kast med ham.<sup>126</sup>

Of them there are several kinds, who differ in size and habits. Grass-paw or ant-bear are the names of the smaller ones, who trouble neither people nor livestock, but eat only grass and dig in anthills. He is also called berry-bear because he eats berries in the forest. Ill-deed-bear is the name of the large and nasty bear that lives off of prey, kills horses and cattle and has caused many a man harm when they have come to grips with him.

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<sup>123</sup> Friis, Peder Claussön, *Samlede Skrifter.: Udgivne for den norske historiske Forening af Gustav Storm.*, Kristiania, 1877-1881, s.2f.

<sup>124</sup> Pontoppidan, Erik, *Det første forsøg paa Norges naturlige historie ...*, København, 1752-1753, Vol II, s.21.

<sup>125</sup> Berch, Anders, *Jämtlands djur-fänge, under ... Anders Berchs inseende, förestält i ett snille-prof af Æschill Nordholm, jämtlänninge. I större Carolinska lärosalen den 26. junii år 1749*, Diss. Uppsala : Uppsala universitet, 1749, Tryckt i Upsala, 1749, s.23.

<sup>126</sup> Landstad, Magnus Brostrup, *Fra Telemarken: Skik og Sagn : efterladte Optegnelser*, Oslo, 1927, s.69.

What is apparent in these accounts is that there are different kinds of bears; they differ in size, color and feeding habits. What is more, they seem to be endowed with different *inner* qualities.

### *Græs-bjørn*

Pontioppidan says regarding a good-natured bear:

Fra Bordne i Røgsund har man berettet mig, at en gammel Græs-Bjørn i mange Aar sædvanlig fulgte Hjorden ligesom dens Vægter, og stod ofte tam derhos, naar Pigerne malkede, joeg altid Ulven bort, og allene om Høsten, naar han snart vilde søge sin Hie, tog han sig en Geed eller et Faar, ligesom sin, *per contractum tacitum*, accorderede SommerLøn.<sup>127</sup>

From Bordne in Røgsund, they have told me that an old grass-bear regularly followed the herd like a shepherd for many years, and often stood with them when the maidens milked, always chased off the wolves, and only in the autumn, when he was about to find his den, he took a goat or a sheep as his *per contractum tacitum*, accorded wage for the summer.

This account illustrates that bears could be seen as in peaceful coexistence with the human society. The bear is described as aligned with the human household by protecting its livestock. More significantly, this protection is viewed as “work” in a *contractus tacitus* (“implicit contract”) for which the bear becomes entitled to payment in a manner comparable to a human labourer. Rather than simply being viewed as a wild animal, the bear is situated in reciprocity systems like members of human society, in which his monitoring of livestock “like a shepherd” becomes interpreted as a commodity that predicts an exchange for another commodity in kind, in an arrangement said to be ongoing for years.

A similar relationship of peaceful coexistence is described in an account from Hardanger, where a herder girl spends the summer on a shieling where a bear peacefully grazes side by side with her livestock. The girl feels that, rather than treating the livestock as its prey, the bear seems to guard them. One day, she hears a rapping at her cottage door. The girl walks out and finds the bear standing there. The bear holds out one of its paws, placing it in her lap. She finds that the bear has a stone splinter stuck in its paw and she pulls it out.<sup>128</sup> Here too, the bear performs what could be understood as labor or a chore and ask for something in return when needed. The bear expects to receive help, placing his paw in the girl's lap. In the Swedish legend tradition, af Klintberg identifies this motif with legend type R27: *Splinter removed from bear's paw*, which

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<sup>127</sup> Pontoppidan, Norg. Nat. Hist. II, s.25 quoted in Storaker, Johan Theodor, *Naturriggerne i den norske folketro*, Oslo, 1928, s.88.

<sup>128</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger*. 5, Norks folkeminnelag, Oslo, 1943, p.149.



is characterized by the bear performing a service for the person who removes the splinter.<sup>129</sup> It is interesting that the Norwegian account also situates the bear in a role and reciprocity system of human society although the service as a shepherd precedes rather than follows the removal of the splinter.

The motif of the bear as a shepherd seems to have circulated socially, but beliefs and ideas associated with it were clearly not uniform. In another account, a bear, referred to as a grass-bear, is also said to graze with the livestock all summer. Come autumn, the farmer still decides to shoot the bear, but is said to regret his decision later.<sup>130</sup> In this case, the farmer's regret seems to suggest a reassessment of the act of killing the bear as inappropriate reciprocity, whether connected directly with beliefs about the bear as shepherd or a more general idea that a bear that is not threatening has a life that should be respected rather than ended immediately or on a whim.

These stories stand in stark contrast to those of for example foetus theft. Stories of symbiotic bear-human relations adds complexity and depth to bears as a group.

### *Slag-bjørn*

In contrast to these examples of symbiotic relationships with the *græsbjørn*, a *slagbjørn* may be portrayed as a supernaturally empowered enemy that requires a joint effort of the whole community, along with ritual specialists and the support of divine powers, to neutralize:

Folket i Ullensvang var so ille plaga tå ein gamal slagbiørn. Han drap sauer og geiter og kyr og hestar um kvartanna, so dei visste lite kva dei skulde ty til. Mang ein veidemann hade vore i kast med karen; men det var likt til at han stod både for kula og kniv. På seinsten vart bygdefolki samde um at dei skulde reka honom ei preikehelg og at presten ifrå kordøri skulde beda um heppa med fyrehavet. Dei tok til å reka på Espe. Det gjekk som smurt, og alt på Hovland måtte ruggen til. — Folk tottest skyna at Vaherra hadde hjelpt dei av med udyret, og til takk gav dei bjørnefelden til Ullensvangskyrkja. Han låg lenge på ein tå dei attare benkene. «Eg hasjøl'å hatt han i hændåna, so da æ ingjæ usætande såga,» såå han beste (Ullensv.).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> af Klintberg's describes this legend type as follows: "A person (sheperd girl) removes a thorn from a bear's (wolfs) paw. The animal performs a service in return (tears away moss from an ore deposit)" (parentheses indicate attested variations; see af Klintberg 2010, p.317). This appears to be a variation of what Stith Thompson identifies as motif type B381: *Thorn removed from lion's paw (Androcles and the Lion). In gratitude the lion later rewards the man*, with the variations of B381.1, in which the animal is a wolf, and B381.2, in which the animal is a monkey. The form with the animal as a bear currently appears distinct to Scandinavia.

<sup>130</sup> Eriksen, Erling Vegusdal, *Atterklang fra gammeltida.: Folkeminne fra Beiarn. 1.*, Oslo, 1953 p.130.

<sup>131</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger. 1*, Oslo, 1930, p.34.

The people of Ullensvang were badly plagued by an old striking-bear. He killed sheep and goats and cows and horses alternately, so they were bewildered as to what they were going to do. Many a huntsmen had come to grips with the man [*sic*]; but it was as if neither bullet nor blade could hurt him. At last the community agreed that they would collectively hunt him on a weekend of sermon and that the priest, from the chancel door, should pray for help in this endeavour. They went to drive the bear on Espe. It went off without a hitch and already at Hovland the beast was brought down. It seemed to the people that the Lord had helped them getting rid of the beast and as thanks for this they gave the hide to the church in Ullensvang. It lay for a long time on one of the back rows of pews. "I have held it in my hands myself, so this is not a tall tale," said Granpa.

In this example, supernatural empowerment is implicit in the bear's imperviousness to blades and bullets, which prevents people from hurting it by normal means. This empowerment is linked to the bear's destructive behaviour, which is set in opposition to the power of Christianity. The hunt is organized according to the Christian religious calendar and the priest should support the hunt through synchronized prayer.

### Overview of Taxonomoies

As a large and powerful predator that poses a potential threat to the lives and livelihood of people, it is not surprising to find that the bear was sometimes seen as connected to evil supernatural powers. Some examples seem to consider all bears (and wolves) as bewitched or agents of evil supernatural power, as in the statement *Men Bjørn og Ulv staa i de onde Magters Tjeneste* ("But bears and wolves are in the service of the evil powers")<sup>132</sup>, or *...Bjørn og Skrub endnu kaldes Troldskab...* ("...bear and wolf are still called witchcraft...")<sup>133</sup>. However, a two-category distinction seems generally to dominate in the discourse. This tells us, then, that bear-human relations can be peaceful and even symbiotic and that, when friction or conflict arises, the marauding bear may be ritually-magically engaged when hunted because its "misbehaviour" is seen as an effect of supernatural influence of some sort or simply as anti-social behaviour diverging from the normal state of human-bear relations, which is ideally one of mutual respect.

#### 3.3.2 Naming

There are many different names for the bear attested in the NFLS-material, which can be divided roughly into three different categories:

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<sup>132</sup> Storaker, Joh[an] Th[eodor], *Tiden i den norske folketro* (Storakers samlinger 1): Ved Nils Lid, Kristiania, 1921, s.233.

<sup>133</sup> Storaker, Johan Theodor, *Naturriggerne i den norske folketro*, Oslo, 1928, s.88.

a) Noa-names, that is avoidance-names that are used in place of the generic word “bear”.

The use of such names have the purpose of avoiding to draw the attention of the bear, which may be dangerous. This practice was commonplace across Eurasia.<sup>134</sup> Noa-names overlap with names denoting kinship insofar as names based on kinship names may also have been used as noa terms.

b) Names denoting kinship.

c) Names implying the bears close connection to evil powers.

Apart from these three categories there is also the practice of giving a human person a bear-related by-name. These names are given for different reasons but it is commonly owing to one of the following: being an especially skilled bear-hunter; being able to shapeshift into a bear; being directly descended from a bear; or having been temporarily adopted by a bear.

### 3.3.3 Noa-names

Kinship terms (category b) may or may not be noa-names and all such terms will be addressed in the following section. Other noa-names identified in the NFLS are: *Breiðfot* (“Broad-foot”)<sup>135</sup>, and *Gulfot*, *Gullfot* (“Yellow-Foot” or “Golden-Foot”)<sup>136</sup>, and other sources use the expression *Gamle i pelsen* (“Old man in the fur”). Noa-names were used in Sweden as well and, in addition to many of the same kinship-names found in the Norwegian material, include: *Gullfot* (“Yellow-Foot” or “Golden-Foot”), *Nalle* (“Teddy”) and *Stolle* (“Goof”).<sup>137</sup> Noa-names and general avoidance of the common word for bear is not only tied to the obvious physical threat a bear poses but also to being *klumset*, meaning to be supernaturally dumbstruck or spellbound. People who become *klumset* cannot move or speak:

Naar man møder Bjørnen, maa man ikke nevne den ved Navn, thi da bliver man klumset (N.fj.).  
Kommer Bjørnen og faar hore en af de Tilstedevaerendes Navn navne, bliver denne klumset, saa  
lange Bjernen er i Narheden (Søndm.).<sup>138</sup>

When one encounters the bear, its name must not be spoken, for you will be spellbound (N.fj.). If  
the bear comes and hears the name of anyone present, they will be spellbound as long as the bear  
is nearby (Søndm.).

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<sup>134</sup> Hallowell, A. Irving, *Bear ceremonialism in the northern hemisphere ...*, Thesis (PH. D.)--University of Pennsylvania, 1926., Philadelphia, 1926, p.43-51.

<sup>135</sup> Landstad, Magnus Brostrup, *Fra Telemarken: Skik og Sagn : efterladte Optegnelser*, Oslo, 1927, p.70.

<sup>136</sup> Nergaard, Sigurd, *Skikk og bruk: Folkeminne fraa Østerdalen V*, Oslo, 1927, p.108.

<sup>137</sup> Edsman, Carl-Martin, *Jägaren och makterna: samiska och finska björnceremonier = The hunter and the powers : Sami and Finnish bear ceremonies*, Dialekt- och folkminnesarkivet, Uppsala, 1994, p.93.

<sup>138</sup> Nergaard, Sigurd, *Skikk og bruk: Folkeminne fraa Østerdalen V*, Oslo, 1927, p.108.

Conversely, the bear could also become *klumset*:

For bjørnen var det slik at vart du var han først, fjatra du han, elles klumsa han deg.<sup>139</sup>

Concerning the bear it was so that if you became aware of him first, you would fetter him, otherwise he would *klumsa* you.

Certain activities seem more high-risk than others in terms of attracting the bear:

Navner man under Slagtingen Bjornen eller noget andet Rovdyr ved Navn, ville de drebe samme Aar (Nf.).<sup>140</sup>

If the bear's or some other predators name is mentioned during the slaughter [of livestock], they will kill during that year.

One aspect of avoidance-language is the belief that the bear could understand human speech, a conception that appears in the Norwegian material.<sup>141</sup> In Sámi and Finno-Karelian bear ceremonies, the bear was addressed as though it could hear and understand human language throughout the rituals, even post mortem. The great respect for the bear, and the fear of its revenge, prompted Sámi hunters to use a specific set of bear-related terminology while processing the bear's carcass, possibly in hopes that the bear would not understand that the Sámi had shot it and were about to eat it.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, the Finno-Karelian hunters would deny blame for having killed the bear, trying to convince the bear that they cannot possibly have done so and it had instead fallen from a tree.<sup>143</sup> Such explicit and complex elaborations on avoidance-language cannot be identified in the Norwegian material, but the root cause – the bear's personhood and agency – is certainly there. What is also interesting to note is that the bear can also become spellbound when unexpectedly encountering a human, suggesting that the bears' perspective on humans is similar to the humans' perspective on bears, at least in this specific instance.

### 3.3.4 Bears are People too

Names given to the bear that imply kinship suggest totemic thinking about human-animal relations. The source material suggests that people viewed bears as having direct blood ties to certain human beings and that male bears were able to produce offspring with human women. Not only do humans call the bear “grandfather”, “brother”, and so on, but, from the perspective

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<sup>139</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger*. 1, Oslo, 1930, p.77.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p.108.

<sup>141</sup> Nergaard, Sigurd, *Skikk og bruk: Folkeminne fraa Østerdalen V*, Oslo, 1927, p.9.

<sup>142</sup> Edsman 1994, p.93-98.

<sup>143</sup> Piludu 2018, p.200.

of the bear, this is the preferred nomenclature. A person threatened by a bear can calm it down and de-escalate a potentially deadly conflict by affirming the close ties between humans and bears. Reasserting the totemic bond, in which the bear in fact holds the senior position in relation to its “human grandchildren”, will benefit both parties as conflict is avoided. If, however, one calls the bear by a name that is considered derogatory from the perspective of the bear, it will become enraged:

Han har mange Navne saasom Bjønn, Basse, Breiðfot og Bestefa’r (Goðfar). Han liker bedst at man kalder ham Bedstefa’r, og naar man kalder ham med dette Navn, og taler vakkert til ham, saa kan man bede ham fra sig, om han end er nok saa vred. Mange Hjuringer og Getslegenter saavelsom frugtsommelige Koner have paa den Maade snakket ham tilrette, saa han ikke har endset dem. Men kalder man ham Basse da bliver han vred og skaffer dem nok at bestille.<sup>144</sup>

He has many names such as Bear, Beast, Broadfoot and Granddad (Godfather). He likes it best when you call him Grandfather and when you call him by this name, and speak gently to him, you can make him go away – even if he is angry with you. Many herders, as well as pregnant women have in this way talked sense to him. But if you call him Beast, he will become enraged and you will be in trouble.

A mutual respect often times seem to be the preferred mode of relating of both parties:

Bjørnen har været betragtet med megen Respekt. Der var en Mand, som traf Bjørnen paa sin Vei. Den sad der og begyndte at reise paa sig. Da sagde han til den: «Gofar (Bedstefader), du tar kje gaa afveien for me; e ska” gaa afveien for de,» dermed gik han tilside (Mand.).<sup>145</sup>

The bear was regarded with great respect. There was a man who met a bear on his way – it sat there and began to rise up. Then he said to it; “Grandfather, you don’t have to step aside for me, I’ll step aside for YOU”, with that, he stood aside.

Another way of naming the bear is simply calling it *kar/karen* (“man/the man”). Examples of this type of naming are numerous and found throughout the corpus, although they are generally embedded in complex accounts rather than reflexively commented on, as in the sentence *Mang ein veidemann hade vore i kast med karen* (“Many a huntsmen had come to grips with the man”) in the example above.<sup>146</sup> The frequency with which this way of referring to the bear is found testifies to its importance. For some or even many of the people telling and writing these sources, referring to a bear as *kar/karen* may simply be an idiomatic convention, yet such an idiom would presumably be historically rooted in a way of thinking that allowed bears to be

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<sup>144</sup> Landstad, Magnus Brostrup, *Fra Telemarken: Skik og Sagn : efterladte Optegnelser*, Oslo, 1927, p.70.

<sup>145</sup> Storaker, Johan Theodor, *Naturriggerne i den norske folketro*, Oslo, 1928, p.111.

<sup>146</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger. 1*, Oslo, 1930, p.34.

lexically identified as belonging to the same category as male human beings. Such usage in the lexicon would also reinforce speakers' correlation of bears with categories of humans, especially when this was part of a broader discourse that placed bears in diverse social relations where their roles are equivalent to those of humans. This use of *kar/karen* undoubtedly points to identifying bears and humans as somehow belonging to a common category "(male) person".

### 3.3.5 Bears are Trolls too: Evil Bears

As observed above, it is not surprising that the largest and most powerful predator in the environment could be seen as connected to evil supernatural powers. Although there are a few examples that suggest all bears are enchanted, there are plenty of accounts that represent bears positively and many suggest that only bears who harm people or livestock are deemed "trollish" or affected by black magic. In an account from Hardanger, a marauding bear is collectively hunted by the local community and is finally killed after a dramatic hunt. The account concludes with the statement: "This bear was supposed to be a dire troll"<sup>147</sup>. Another example where the bear is deemed to belong to "evil powers" seems to link this to shapeshifting as malevolent sorcery:

Men Bjørn og Ulv staa i de onde Magters Tjeneste, ja Troldmænd kunne endog kaste Bjørne- og Ulve-Ham paa sig og gjore Skade.<sup>148</sup>

But bears and wolves are in the service of evil powers, yes – sorcerers could cast themselves in bear- and wolf-shape and do harm.<sup>149</sup>

The conception that only bears who are somehow affected by magic or other supernatural forces are the ones who cause harm to people and livestock is not exclusive to Scandinavian traditions. It is also well attested in the Finno-Karelian sources.<sup>150</sup>

Whereas bears can be referred to in ways that indicate kinship with human beings, one account from Hardanger states that a bear was actually the son of a local troll woman (*gyger*). This bear had to be shot with a silver bullet, and the giantess later avenged her son's death:

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<sup>147</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger*. 1, Oslo, 1930, s.32:

Denne bjørnen skulde vera eit sværa troll, sa dei.

<sup>148</sup> Storaker, Joh[an] Th[eodor], *Tiden i den norske folketro* (Storakers samlinger 1): Ved Nils Lid, Kristiania, 1921, p.233.

<sup>149</sup> Storaker, Joh[an] Th[eodor], *Tiden i den norske folketro* (Storakers samlinger 1): Ved Nils Lid, Kristiania, 1921, p.233.

<sup>150</sup> Piludu, Vesa Matteo, *The Forestland's Guests: Mythical Landscapes, Personhood, and Gender in the Finno-Karelian Bear Ceremonialism*, doktorsavhandling, Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2019, p.69f.

Ingjald Haustveit skaut ein illgjeten bjørn på Ingjaldsflöt med ein sylvknapp. Sidan kom det for dagen at bjørnen var son åt Hausogygri. Ho vart harm då, og bar snjo frampå eggj utetter heile hausten. Um vetteren kom den store skreda som sopa heile garden på sjøen (K.).<sup>151</sup>

Ingjald Haustveit shot an infamous bear on Ingjaldsflöt with a silver button. Later it was discovered that the bear was the son of Hausogygri. She was angered and carried snow on to the ledge (of the mountain) throughout the autumn. In the winter, there was thus a great avalanche that swept away the farm and into the sea.<sup>152</sup>

The connection between the bear and a female guardian spirit or deity is well attested in Swedish and Finno-Karelian traditions.<sup>153</sup> That this is a troll woman is exceptional.

### 3.3.6 People are Bears too: People Named after Bears

Thus far, ways talking to and naming the bear have been examined. Here we shall instead look at the use of bear-related names for *human* persons. The bear was seen as an extraordinary being and a human person with traits reminiscent of a bear could be named accordingly:

That is also why the strength of the bear has given rise to a saying, and a man of extraordinary strength is given the honorary name Bear.

Derfor er ogsaa Bjørnens Styrke bleven til et Ordsprog, og en kjæmpestærk Karl faar ogsaa Hædersnavnet Bjørn.<sup>154</sup>

Bearing in mind the account above, one could argue that bears addressed as “Grandfather” is respectively an honorific, rather than a name referring to actual kinship. Either way, the naming of bears as humans and humans as bears, both phenomena hint at intimacy and reciprocal esteem.

Some examples explicitly designate the bear as an ancestor of certain family or kin group. In one account, a pregnant woman is attacked by a bear, which tears the fetus out of her and runs away with it to raise the baby as its own. The bear is later killed and the young boy, who is still with the bear, is returned to the human community. The child’s whole body is covered with hair. He is taken to church and baptised. As the holy water touches his head, the fur falls off. He is named *Bjødne* (“Bear”) and becomes the progenitor of a “great family line” that retained its “Bear”-name for a long time.<sup>155</sup> This account unequivocally describes totemic ancestry, given

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<sup>151</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger*. 2, Norsk folkeminnelag, Oslo, 1934, p.60.

<sup>152</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger*. 2, Norsk folkeminnelag, Oslo, 1934, p.60.

<sup>153</sup> See af Klintberg 2010, E11-18, p.100-101, Piludu 2018, p.63-66,

<sup>154</sup> Storaker, Johan Theodor, *Naturriggerne i den norske folketro*, Oslo, 1928, s.111.

<sup>155</sup> Opedal, 1930, p.24.

the consanguinity and retention of the name – an emblem for a certain group of people who claim descent from an other-than-human person. This can also be compared to the Bear’s son tales reviewed in section 3.1.

In a similar account, yet another child is torn from his mother’s womb. The people go after the bear and, when they find him, he sits with the child in its paws, cradling it. They ask to have the child back but the bear refuses. They then try to take it by force but fail. Finally, they promise to name the child *Bjørn* (“Bear”) and at last the bear yields, walks up the people and places the child in their arms.<sup>156</sup> Just as with the calming of a bear by addressing it through terms of kinship, it is evident here that honoring the bear by alluding to the intimate relationship between bears and humans serves to re-establish peaceful relations.

Apart from the previous examples of human persons named after bears, there are also accounts mentioning what are called *bjødnafanter*, a word which roughly translate as “bear-tramps”. In contrast to the story of *Bjødne* – the progenitor of “a great family”, a *bjødnafant* is normally spoken of in a far less positive way. A *bjødnafant* is a large, hairy and exceptionally strong man that is said to have been raised by a bear. This is no doubt an indirect reference to the numerous accounts of foetus-stealing bears exemplified above. They are described as vagrants and as having retained a certain wildness that shows in their behaviour in various ways. One story speaks of a *bjødnafant* who always wanted to be present whenever a woman was in childbed and that his mouth was watering for the baby.<sup>157</sup> Here the reader should be reminded of the account in section 3.1 where a *bjødnafant* occasionally killed and ate the livestock of others. Twelve men hunted him, caught him and held him down, tore his *ham* off and set it on fire. As the fire burned, his superhuman strength diminished until he was no stronger than an ordinary man. These accounts do not claim that the men adopted by bears have actual blood ties to their foster parent, but that living with bears, *as* a bear, is in fact *being* a bear, which relates to the performative aspect of having a body. It appears people imagined that the social setting (living in bear culture) shapes the inner dispositions (the desire for infants) and outer properties (being strong and hairy) of the subject.

Stories of bear-descent and human persons named after bears, then, can be framed in both positive and negative terms. This is expected, given the complexity and paradoxical nature of

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<sup>156</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger*. 2, Norsk folkeminnelag, Oslo, 1934, p.65.

<sup>157</sup> Opedal, 1934, p.66.



bear-human relations. Sometimes the transgression of cultural boundaries (having offspring with “the other” or being adopted by them) are deemed positive, sometimes negative.

### **3.3.7 Overview of taxonomies and naming**

The vernacular taxonomy implies that bears were thought of not as one homogenous category, but that they were differentiated in terms of physical properties as well as mental and moral dispositions. The division into benign/malignant bears reflects the nature of the relations such a difference entails; symbiotic or competitive. What is more, often times bears that act in socially unacceptable ways, for example by hurting human persons or their livestock, are thought to be under the influence of malevolent supernatural forces. When interpreted in this way the responsibility for harm is transferred from the bear to a hostile agent of sorcery; the bear becomes either a victim or a hostile agent who has taken the bear’s form. The bear is implicitly seen as subject to social norms of interaction with humans that excludes harm to their persons or property, except when taking what is owed them through an “implicit contract”. When malevolent acts are attributed to enchantment, it implies that bears will not themselves breach those norms. Bears are referred to in ways that may suggest kinship and some groups of human persons are explicitly mentioned as descendants of the bear. Addressing a bear in kinship terms as well as naming a human person after a bear de-escalates conflict to the benefit of both parties.

### **3.4 Christian Contexts, from Bears’ Behavior to Human Weddings**

Above we have seen that bears were not thought of as an undifferentiated mass of mindless beasts, but that there were clearly demarked categories that had various ways of relating to humans depending on which category they belonged to. These different categories, which were, to put it in simple terms, either “good” or “bad”, seem to be connected to a set of inter-species cultural and social norms. As proposed above, the normal state of bear-human relations is one of mutual respect and at least *relative* peace. A bear may guard the livestock and graze with them, in which case people will not begrudge the bear taking of a sheep or goat. In contrast to other predators, such as wolves, bears moderate their negative impact on human affairs; the bear took what it needed, and possibly *deserved*, and then stayed away.<sup>158</sup> Against the backdrop established in the previous section, the following discussion further demonstrates how the bear was a social being and how it, in that capacity, had to abide by social norms and rules. The bear

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<sup>158</sup> Mo, Ragnvald, *Gard og bygd: [folkeminne frå Salten V]*, Universitetsforl., Oslo, 1972, p.96.

appears as a subject in relation to important human social institutions such as the Church and Christian religion, laws and conventions, and in relation to marriage and courtship.

### 3.4.1 Christianity and the Church

As we saw in the previous section, marauding bears may be perceived as being under supernatural influence – anti-social behaviour is connected to sorcery or malevolent supernatural beings. To counter these forces, the laity exhorted their ritual specialist to help them. In a similar fashion, the following two examples suggest that supernatural influence may indeed be exerted on the bear in order to make it abide by the given standards of acceptable social behaviour:

Er han mannisk, fær han ikkje ganga i hi med hausto, segjer dei, men må vera ute. — Ein bjørn på Jødno var mannisk og skamreiv ein mann tå Kvandal, Lars Bu. Den bjørnen måtte ganga ute um vetteren.<sup>159</sup>

If he is hostile towards people, he is not allowed to go into his den in the autumn but must stay outside, they say. – A bear in Jødno was hostile and mauled a man from Kvandal – Lars Bu. That bear had to stay outside during the winter.

Naar Bjørnen har dræbt et Menneske, faar den det til Straf, at den ikke kommer til at ligge i Hide om Vinteren.<sup>160</sup>

When the bear has killed a human being, it receives as punishment that it will not sleep in its den in the winter.

It is hard to determine with any certainty the identity and nature of the force that sanctions these punishments. At any rate, we can conclude that there are powers in place with the ability and authority to regulate bear-human interaction.

### 3.4.2 Virgin Mary and the Bear

Supernatural forces influencing the bear are not limited to malevolent sorcery or “divine punishment” but may also include the bear being conferred with privileges on account of its good nature. In a Norwegian etiological animal tale, recorded in three different versions within the NFLS corpus, we can see the interaction between the bear and the Virgin Mary. The longest version reviewed here tells that Mary came to a stream and was unable to cross it without help. A fox came along and Mary asked him for help. The fox excused himself and claimed that he was not strong enough to carry her across the stream. “Weak you shall be”, replied Mary, and

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<sup>159</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger*. 1, Oslo, 1930, p.24.

<sup>160</sup> Storaker, 1928, p.112.

since that day the fox has been a weak and paltry creature. Shortly thereafter, a wolf came walking and Mary instead asked him for help. He too made excuses and said that he didn't have the time to help her because he was hungry and had to continue his search for food. The Virgin Mary thus condemned the wolf to eternal hunger that could only be remedied by eating dog meat. Finally, the bear came walking along and Mary asked him for help to cross the stream. The bear willingly accepted and carried Mary on his back across the stream. As thanks to the bear, Mary then applied some of her breast milk onto the bear's paws and told him that he would never again have to endure the hard conditions of winter, but would, from that day forth, sleep peacefully in his den all winter and need only to suck on his paws for nourishment. The story also mentions that the bear turns around in his den once each winter, on Candlemas.<sup>161</sup>

In a much shorter version of the same tale, both Jesus and God the Father are mentioned:

Frå først av så var bjørnen som dei andre dyra, han måtte eta vinter som sumar. Men så hende det at jomfru Maria med Jesubarnet kom til ei elv. Ikkje var der båt, og slett ikkje ferje-mann. Då kom bjørnen og bar dei over. Og fordi han gjorde det, så fekk han den løna av Vårherre, at han sku' sleppa å eta så lenge vinteren varde, og endå vera like feit.<sup>162</sup>

In the beginning, the bear was like all the other animals – he had to eat both in winter and summer. But then it happened that the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus came to a river. There was no boat and certainly no ferryman. Then the bear came and carried them over. And because he did this, Our Lord rewarded him in that he should not have to eat for the duration of the winter, yet will still be as fat.

In the two accounts above, the good-natured bear appears as a cherished helper of the divine powers, which is contrasted with the selfish dispositions of the wolf and the fox. In a third version of the same tale, the etiological element is absent while the Virgin Mary motif remains

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<sup>161</sup> Storaker 1928, p.114f: "Jomfru Maria kom til en bred Bæk (eller Vand) og skulde over; men der var ingen til at hjælpe hende. Da kom en Ræv gaaende; og hun bad ham hjælpe sig. Men Ræven undskyldte sig med, at han ikke havde Kræfter nok til at bære hende, han var for svag: 'Svag skal du blive,' sagde Jomfru Maria. Men fra den Dag er Ræven saa ussel, at man kan slaa Ryggen av paa den med en Læggesok.

"Kort efter kom Ulven gaaende. Hun bad ham hjælpe sig. Ogsaa han undskyldte sig og sagde, han havde ikke Stunder dertil, for han var sulten og maatte vidt omkring. Da gjensvarede Jomfru Maria: 'Aldrig skal du faa Stunder; du skal løbe 7 Blaa og endda ikke blive mæt; kun hver Gang du faar Hundekjød, skal du ikke kjende noget til Sult.' Fra den Tid af vanker Ulven vidt omkring uden at standse paa noget Sted og uden Hvile, sjelden faar den fyldt sit slunkne Skind, og for at blive mæt efterstreber den alle Hunde.

"Endelig kom ogsaa Bjørnen gaaende, og Jomfru Maria bad ham om at hjælpe sig over. Han var straks villig og bar hende over paa sin Ryg. Til Løn derfor melkede Jomfru Maria Brystmelk paa Bjørnelabberne og sagde: 'Hele Vinteren skal du ligge rolig i dit Hide, og du behøver ikke andet end at suge paa Labben; kun en Gang skal du vende dig om paa den anden Side.' Derfor sover Bjørnen fra den Tid af sin Vintersøvn og vender sig kun om paa Leiet hver Kyndelmessedag (Mandal)."

<sup>162</sup> Strompdal, Knut, *Gamalt frå Helgeland I*, Oslo, 1929, p.61.

and is conflated with an explanation sometimes given as the reason why bears want human fetuses:

Bjørnen bar jomfru Maria yver ei elv. Då så ho: «Æ du kar te ta ait badn or mors liv å ala da upp te ain kristen, ska du fao vetta ain kristen sjø'lu.» Ein laut difor venta at han freista få tak i mannefoster.<sup>163</sup>

The bear carried the Virgin Mary across a river. Then she said: "If you are man enough to take a child out of a mother's womb and rear it up to be a Christian, you shall become a Christian yourself". One should therefore expect that he wants to get a hold of the unborn children of men.<sup>164</sup>

Although animal tales are not usually interpreted as reflections of actual belief systems, these three examples still make up an interesting subset of bear lore. In the Norwegian animal tales, the bear usually plays the role of the large and dim-witted character who is played the fool by the sly fox.<sup>165</sup> This role seems incompatible with perceptions of the bear as an exceptionally intelligent being that was held in high regard and thus the animal tales of the oafish bear and the sly fox might belong to a different layer of lore altogether.

What is noteworthy here is the connection between the Virgin Mary and the bear. In these tales, the Virgin Mary takes on a role very similar to the widespread mytheme of the bear's female ruler, who often times is said to provide food (milk is common) for the bear during its winter sleep.<sup>166</sup> This connection may also be in the background of a further link to the Virgin Mary found in examples where the Day of Our Lady is given as the date when bears awaken in the spring.<sup>167</sup> In the last example above, the Virgin Mary sets a condition for the bear which has consequences that clearly do not fit into basic Christian morals nor into the vernacular moral system. It is implied that the bear should be expected to wish for salvation – which suggests that bear persons may have a spiritual life similar to that of human persons and that they have a soul that may be saved.

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<sup>163</sup> Opedal, Halldor O., *Makter og menneske: folkeminne ifrå Hardanger*. 2, Norsk folkeminnelag, Oslo, 1934, p.62.

<sup>165</sup> UIO web resource on tale types. Retrieved 5/5 2021, Link: <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/tjenester/kunnskap/samlinger/norsk-folkeminnesamling/eventyr-sagn/eventyr/eventyrene-etter-typenummer/dyreeventyr.html>

<sup>166</sup> See af Klintberg 2010, p.316. R22 - *The bears last meal*.

<sup>167</sup> See for example; Storaker, Joh[an] Th[eodor], *Tiden i den norske folketro* (Storakers samlinger 1): Ved Nils Lid, Kristiania, 1921, p.90, Moe, Moltke, *Folkeminne frå Bøherad*, Oslo, 1925, s114 and Storaker, Johan Theodor, *Naturriggerne i den norske folketro*, Oslo, 1928, p.111.

To sum up, it seems that we are dealing with a conflation of many layers and genres in these stories. The etiological animal tale is in dialogue with lore pertaining to the female ruler of the bear. The calendric rites of the Church (the Day of Our Lady and its connection to spring festivities) are also synchronized with widespread traditions where the bear is tied to spring festivities.<sup>168</sup> The last version is distinguished by incorporating an element from the lore of foetus-stealing bears, which projects bears as concerned about their spirituality and Christian salvation.

### 3.4.3 Courtship, Engagement and Marriage

Another phenomenon connected to new life is the institution of marriage. Here, too, the bear appears as an important figure in various ways. In effect, human persons may ritually *become* bears in certain phases of establishing a new marriage, and within these rituals the bear hide was used as a sort of ritual space. The rituals may be viewed in comparison with the corresponding elements of bear ceremonialism, with which there are strong parallels. No evidence of these traditions was found in the NFLS corpus, yet the traditions are crucial to include for consideration of bear-human interaction and how people imagined and potentially mirrored bear culture.

Evidence for these traditions comes from Swedish folkloric and ethnographic material recorded in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The traditions were mainly documented in central and northern Sweden, including Dalarna, Härjedalen, Jämtland and Medelpad. In two articles from 1926 and 1931 respectively, the school teacher, lay researcher and folklore collector Einar Granberg presents a set of customs related to marriage, mainly with reference to practices in his home region of Härjedalen, but which were also present in other places in the aforementioned area.<sup>169</sup>

### *Härjedalen*

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<sup>168</sup> See Hammarstedt, Nils Edvard, *Vår- och bröllopsbjörn*, 1929 which compares Scandinavian, Finno-Karelian, Sámi and continental European traditions. See also. Ridderstad, Marianne P. "The Bear and the Year: On the Origin of the Finnish Late Iron Age Folk Calendar and Its Connection to Bear Cult" in *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry. International Journal*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 335-341, 2016.

<sup>169</sup> See Granberg, Einar, *Friarsaker och giftermålsbestyr i det gamla Härjedalen* i Festin, Eric (red.), *Jämtens Länsmuseets och Heimbygdas årsbok. Årg. 20(1926)*, Heimbygdas förlag, Östersund, 1926 and Granberg, Einar "Är björnen vår gamle fruktbarhetsgud? I Festin, Eric (red.), *Festskrift till Carl J. E. Hasselberg på hans 75-årsdag 16/5 1931*, Östersund, 1931.

In Härjedalen, bear-related practices were tied to both courtship and engagement as well as to the publishing of the banns of the wedding itself. A young couple that was not yet engaged but was courting would be subjected to certain pranks carried out by the young man's friends. When the couple had been courting for some time, the young man's friends could decide that it was time to *spåra björn* ("track the bear"), which essentially meant to find out whether the couple was present in the same house together. If this was the case, the pranksters would fire off a salute outside of the house. This was called to *skjuta in björn* ("shoot in the bear"). If and when the couple was properly announced as being betrothed, the prospective groom to be would put on a feast called *bjönkalas* ("the bear party"). Here, too, the guests would fire off a salute in order to wake "the bear [the betrothed man] in his den". Up to this point, only the prospective groom has been ritually identified with the bear. Another bear then appears at this point in the festivities in the form of one of the guests dressed in pelts. This "bear" was followed by a "bear handler" and was expected to entertain the guests with different shenanigans, including chasing the women present.<sup>170</sup> Finally, the "bear" was to be killed and a blank was fired at it, after which the guests "slaughtered" it. This marked the end of the ritual as the guests "drank the blood of the bear and ate its meat", in the form of mutton and spirits.<sup>171</sup>

It was customary that the betrothed couple could move in together before they were wed. This happened after the couple had been engaged. Being engaged was called *björnats* ("being beared"). The move of the bride from her parental home to her new home was called *bjönnfärd* ("the bear journey").<sup>172</sup> During this journey, the couple were again subjected to practical jokes. The pranksters would find various ways of hindering the carriage that was the couple's means of transportation. When the couple had finally moved in together, yet another feast was held – the *bjönnsöd* ("bear seething"). The bride's dowry was called *björnhuden* ("the bear hide").<sup>173</sup> When a woman had given birth, it was said that she had *björnne* ("beared").<sup>174</sup>

### **Dalarna**

In the region of Dalarna too, the same kind of ritual expressions and associated bear-vocabulary are found. On the first publication of the banns, a *björngrånka* ("bear-fir") or *björntåll* ("bear-

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<sup>170</sup> This last detail suggests perceptions about the bear's inherent threat to women.

<sup>171</sup> Granberg 1926, p.127f.

<sup>172</sup> Pranking during this process of moving a bride to be to her new home is known in other forms as well, where the bear-theme is not present. See for example: Odstedt, Ella, *Norrländsk folktradition*, Gustav Adolfs akademien, Uppsala, 2004, s.172.

<sup>173</sup> Granberg 1931, p.49f.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p.47.

pine”) was erected against the door of the farm where the announcement had been made. This was done in order to “trap the bears in the den”. On this day, the woman wore a *björnkjortle* (“bear-skirt”) and she was called *björnkäring* (“bear-woman/-wife”), just as the man was called *björnkarl* (“bear-man/-husband”). These epithets were also used for actual bears, which is interesting as *käring* and *karl* denote a social position, besides being ways to specify the gender of a certain bear. The couple together were simply referred to as *björnarna* (“the bears”) and the act of announcing their betrothal was called *björnas* (“being bear:ed”). Firing a salute for the couple was called *skjuta björn* (“to shoot the bear”). After the first publishing of the banns a feast was given. This was called “bear-beer” (*björnöl*) or “bear-celebration” (*björnkalas*). A specific kind of dance, performed by one or two men imitating the movements of a bear, was called *björn-dans* (“the bear dance”). The bear-party itself could also be called *björn-dans*. This same type of dance could also be performed at the wedding, sometimes called a *björnvals* (“bear-waltz”). At the wedding a similar kind of bear-mumming as mentioned above took place. The last round of drinks for the entire wedding was called *dricka björn* (“to drink the bear”). The last drink was put on a table and underneath the table the bear mummer lay “dead”.<sup>175</sup> Thus, the bear is ritually framing the entire process of getting married, from the publication of the banns to the closing moments of the wedding. The result of the wedding is ideally that a child is born, which seems to be related to the broader bear-discourse.

It is relevant to note that the word *björn-kalas* (“bear-feast”) was used both for the type of marriage-related celebrations described above as well as to denote a party held after a successful bear hunt. An account from Jämtland hints at this same conceptual overlap between celebrations pertaining to the bear hunt and those related to marriage:

Här i Bergsbyn var det på ett bröllop då jag var lillpojke som det var en som klädde ut sig till björn och hade en svart fäll på sig. Han klev upp på stalltaket, och så var det en som ”sköt” honom så han föll ner. Sen bar dom in honom och hade bråk med honom. Och så skulle dom nog få kalase då allihop, då dom hade skjuti en ”bjänn”.<sup>176</sup>

Here in Bergsbyn, at a wedding when I was a little boy, there was someone who had dressed up as a bear and he wore a black pelt. He climbed up on the roof of the stables, and then there was someone who “shot” him so that he fell down. Then they carried him inside and had a brawl with him. And so they were going to have a party, since they had shot a bear.

<sup>175</sup> Levander, Lars & Björklund, Stig, *Ordbok över folkmålen i övre Dalarna Bd 1 A-F*, Dialekt- och folkminnesarkivet, Uppsala, 1961-1970, part 2, p.117-121.

<sup>176</sup> Odstedt, Ella, *Norrländsk folktradition*, Gustav Adolfs akademien, Uppsala, 2004, p.177.

This account tells us not only that there was bear-related ritual behaviour in connection with weddings in Jämtland, but, as the last sentence implies, that there also seems to have been a similar tradition for celebrating a successful bear hunt.

### ***Medelpad***

In the region of Medelpad, where the mock bear hunt was also performed at weddings, another ritual called “paying fines on the bear hide” (*böta på björnhuden*) followed. After having slaughtered the bear, its skin (the pelts worn by the “bear”) was spread out on the floor of the room where the younger (and thus unmarried) guests of the wedding had spent the night. The wedding couple was seated behind the “bear hide” and then a jury, a prosecutor and a judge were elected from among the other guests. Then followed a mock trial where the youths were brought up in pairs to sit on the “bear hide” to receive their fine for alleged unchaste behaviour due to the situation of the accommodations. After each sentence, the couples would drink to the newlyweds. During the ritual, the drinks raised to the couple were understood to be the “blood of the bear”.<sup>177</sup>

### **3.4.4 Overview of Bear Weddings**

Bear weddings were integrated into Swedish Lutheran society. They present a complex network of associations that offer indications of the significance and personhood of the bear through how this is mapped onto society. First, the groom is identified with the bear and as having his betrothed in his den, connecting with motif of the bear cohabiting with a human woman and impregnating her. Associations with sexuality and fertility seem to run through the ritual. The mumming practice connects the wedding celebration to a celebration of a successful bear hunt, which parallels the ritual wedding integrated into the bear ceremonialism in Finno-Karelian and Sámi traditions, where the bear or its spirit marries into the human community. This does not necessarily mean that these rituals reflect an earlier bear ceremonialism among Scandinavians; it might equally be a comic and farcical adaptation of the traditions of neighboring people, yet it still reflects and constructs close ties between bears, fertility, and roles filled by humans in the wedding, as well as between weddings and bear hunting with its associated celebrations more generally.

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<sup>177</sup> Granberg 1932, p48.



### **3.4.5. Overview of Christian Contexts**

This subsection has shown different ways that bears are ritually and mythically engaged in relation to important human social traditions such as vernacular Christian mythology and the institution of marriage. Bears are obligated to maintain peace with human society or they will be forced to stay awake through the winter. The privilege of winter sleep is sometimes described as being sanctioned by the Virgin Mary, a central figure of Christian mythology and belief. The Virgin Mary can also sanction the abduction of human children, a phenomenon which is most commonly connected to the breaking of an enchantment, linking stories of the Virgin Mary as the patron of bears to stories of bear-human transformation while also implying that bears' souls are similar to those of humans. The interaction with the Virgin Mary coupled with the code of non-violence seems to indicate that the bear is treated as subject to the same religious and moral paradigm as human persons. This indicates an instance of ideological overlap between bear culture and human culture.

### **3.5. Concluding Remarks**

Previous sections have shown that the theme of transformation is generally present in the material at hand. Another prevalent feature is the bear's connection to pregnant women and child birth. The north-Swedish marriage rituals should be understood in the light of these central themes. Here, too, there is a transformation at hand. All the way through the process of establishing a new matrimony, marriage being a pre-requisite for the successful and socially acceptable continuation of the family, human persons are ritually transformed into bears. Here, it seems that the beariness taken on by the couple is liminal – they are humans to begin with, but must then pass through bear transformation in order to be initiated as a legitimate married couple. This can be compared to stories of a human put under a spell, who must live as a bear until he has raised a human child (or bears who can only obtain salvation by the same means). Both types of stories illustrate the instability of categories and that the bear is somehow tied to progeny. When humans and bears are understood as belonging to different cultures, this subsection has shown a case of cultural crossover or exchange – bears have souls that need saving and humans must perform beariness in order to establish the fundamental social institution of marriage.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Recapitulation**

The survey has attempted to identify bear culture through stories of bear-human interaction in the source material. Here humans are understood to represent human culture and bears as representing bear culture, rather than as individuals. This is because bear culture does not appear explicitly in the stories beyond their interaction with humans. Unlike the Amerindian ethnographies to which Viveiros de Castro refers,<sup>178</sup> very little is told in the sources about the culture of bears outside of behaviors, tendencies and actions that somehow involve interaction with humans. These interactions nevertheless imply that bears are cultural persons in various ways. The *hug/ham*-complex has shown that categorical distinctions may be understood based on bodies as performative and therefore inherently malleable. Draping oneself in a bear-*hamr* and thus becoming a bear coupled with the notion that bears and humans cannot be distinguished except by their cultural instruments makes the categorical distinction between bears and humans a cultural one.

One form of cultural clash happens when bears attack pregnant women and steal their unborn children. Whether the desire to steal fetuses is something universal among bears is ambiguous; sometimes this is tied to transformed humans and sometimes not. Distinguishing between the two may be a moot point. It would seem that some bears<sup>179</sup> want human fetuses in order to become human. Conversely, some humans want to steal the afterbirth or caul of a bear in order to become bears. Although the examples referred to in section 3.1 may be understood as outliers and not reflecting a current, broad social tradition, they bring the question of transformed humans or bears and their connection to fetuses full circle. A perspectivist interpretation of this would be that bears and humans see humans and bears the same way but see different things – and wants to transform into that thing. Viveiros de Castro concludes that: “*Animals see in the same way as we do different things*”.<sup>180</sup>

Another cultural trait of bears are their morals. Bears are sometimes unwilling to take the fetuses of unmarried women and may even punish women who are pregnant with such a child. In the same vein, they become shy and flee if they are shown a human woman’s private parts. These examples highlight those instances where human and bear morals seem similar.

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<sup>178</sup> Viveiros de Castro mentions for example the family life of different animals being elaborated on in his material. In the material used for the present work, however, bears appear almost exclusively as loners, rather than living in “bear societies”. See Viveiros de Castro 1998, p.470.

<sup>179</sup> They ARE for all intents and purposes bears, even if they used to be a human. They can be distinguished as bears because of the outer form, their *ham*.

<sup>180</sup> Viveiros de Castro 1998, p.478.

Bears are viewed by humans as a differentiated group, as shown in section 3.3. From the human perspective, some bears are “good” and some bears are “bad”, which is reflected in different ways of naming them. Section 3.3 also highlighted the fact that bears seem to adhere to a sort of code of conduct towards human society. This relationship is ideally symbiotic and includes exchange of services (guarding livestock in exchange for meat or medical services). Furthermore, some accounts express that only magically influenced bears break the rules of bear-human engagement, placing the bear in the position of innocence, further implying the moral standards of bear culture. The bear prefers to be addressed through kinship terms and doing so helps prevent bear-human conflict. Emphasizing bear-human kinship by calling it “Grandpa” pleases the bear, while calling it something alluding to its “beastliness” angers it. Acknowledging the bear’s cultural closeness (such as kinship) to humans is conducive to good relations.

The last subsection of the survey has shown how the bear was integrated into vernacular Christian mythology. The stories of the Virgin Mary and the bear certainly imply that the bear has a soul similar to the soul of humans and that there is a potential for sameness, in one case connected to the divine sanction of foetus theft. The last subsection also highlighted that the initiatory process of becoming a legitimate family unit involved being ritually conflated with bears.

#### **4.2 Transformation as a Common Theme**

A common theme throughout the survey is transformation. Subsection 3.1 dealt with magical transformation and the implications of the *hug/ham*-complex. Subsection 3.2 was centered around the bear’s threat against pregnant women. This is sometimes an extension of the themes presented in the preceding subsection. It also dealt with the kind of indirect transformation that may affect an unborn child, even if the mother escapes an attack. Sometimes the effect of bears on pregnant women were seen as positive, as in the case of body parts of the bear or bear men helping to ease the pains of childbirth. In subsection 3.3, we saw that bears were sometimes honored as ancestors and that certain family lines were named after their ursine progenitor. This is transformation in terms of hybridity – certain humans *are* bears by ancestry. This is seen as a positive by bears and humans alike: the bear surrenders the kidnapped human child when promised to be elevated to a position as totemic ancestor, while the humans happily retained that bear-name for a long time. Ursine ancestry is similarly acknowledged in the long tradition of Bear’s son-tales that have been circulated at least since the time of Saxo Grammaticus, i.e.

the late twelfth- thirteenth century. In the last subsection (3.4) we saw how ritual bear-transformation was an important aspect of courtship, engagement and weddings.

### 4.3 Implications of Transformation

This theme of transformation connects in different ways to the theoretical framework applied to the material. That the material displays an animist mode of bear-human relations should be beyond doubt; bears have clear and differing agendas and motivations, they have morals and abide by certain social rules while breaking others. Bears are treated by human persons who are victims of sorcery, as thieves, as ancestors, as employed herdsman and so on.

Perspectivism is shown to be present in the reviewed material in different ways. The fact that bears need human foetuses in order to transform into humans, and that humans need the caul or afterbirth of a bear in order to transform into bears might suggest a deictic understanding between the categories “bear” and “human”. Another instance where this seems to be the case is that of the concept of *klumsing* (being spellbound/dumbstruck). Bears can *klumse* humans and humans can *klumse* bears – the two categories have the same supernatural effect on each other. Perspectivism also connects to the *hug/ham*-complex. The *ham* can be understood as a cultural clothing<sup>181</sup> that is the seat and cause of a certain perspective and that any person is inherently prone to transformation because of the fact that bodies are socially and culturally *performed*:

The performative rather than given character of the body, a conception that requires it to differentiate itself 'culturally' in order for it to be 'naturally' different, has an obvious connexion with interspecific metamorphos.<sup>182</sup>

In perspectivism, then, all interaction between humans and other-than-humans is social and cultural by definition, since the difference between the categories are defined by culture and because the ontological baseline of existing as a subject in the world is cultural, rather than “natural”.<sup>183</sup> This may then be compared to the basic similarity between bears and humans when they are stripped of their cultural instruments. Here, the worldview coming to the fore in the Scandinavian material seems to have a different set of parameters than the basic “interiority/exteriority” that Viveiros de Castro, Descola and Harvey seem to work from (see sections 1.4.2 and 1.4.3 above). A bear looks like a human once its outer form is removed but the outer form does not reveal an “inner essence” or something similar but rather another level

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<sup>181</sup> Viveiros de Castro 1998, p.470-471.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p.481.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p.472.

or aspect of corporeality. This “inner body” of the bear is so similar to a human that it can only be revealed as being a transformed human if human cultural instruments are attached to said body. This implies that the inner physicalities, stripped of cultural clothing, are the same between humans and bears. This would correspond to Descolas “continuity of physicalities” and thus leads us into the domain of totemic aspects of bear-human relations. I suggest that totemic thinking is a relevant way to approach the continuous categorical oscillation between bear and human in the material reviewed. As Sahlins notes in dialogue with Descola’s and Godfrey Leinhardt’s works on the Dinka of South Sudan:

Given the “hybridity” or shared being of totemic species with their human congeners, as Philippe has emphasized, the Dinka answer is quite logical: the totem species is the inner nature of its human fellows, and the human species is the inner nature of its totem fellows; hence some men may change into lions, and vice versa.<sup>184</sup>

The animist mode of relating and the perspectivist understanding of cultural corporeality, playing into instances of totemic sameness would suggest that bear culture indeed can be identified. The permeating theme of transformation is then in and of itself tied to modes of relating between bears and humans that are cultural.

## **5. Summary**

The purpose of the thesis was to further the understanding of bear-human relations as they appear in Scandinavian folklore. This was done by theorizing that bear-human relations can be understood as cultural interaction. To test the hypothesis, the concept of *bear culture* was developed. This new perspective is based on recent developments in anthropology such as new animist theory, perspectivism and aspects of current research on totemism.

The research material consisted of Norwegian and Swedish folkloric materials and was approached through mythic discourse analysis, which looks at the use, variation and circulation of smaller units of lore rather than focusing on tale tracking and constructing ideal forms of larger narratives. In order to survey and organize the material, a motif-index was constructed, according to the standard folkloric method.

The survey was divided into four subsections corresponding roughly to motifs and themes deemed to be related. There was however a considerable overlap between the subsections. Subsection 3.1 dealt with transformation and ursine descent. Subsection 3.2 highlighted the threat that bears pose to (pregnant) human women. Subsection 3.3 explores the vernacular bear-

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<sup>184</sup> Sahlins 2014, p.286.

taxonomy, noa- and honorary names as well as traditions of giving human persons bear-related names. The last subsection of the survey (3.4) looked at how the bear was integrated into vernacular Christian mythology as well as the bears role in courtship, engagement and marriage.

Transformation was identified as a permeating feature of the survey as a whole. This theme was discussed in relation to the theoretical framework, asserting that aspects of animism, perspectivism and totemism can be identified in the material. The implication of this assertion, given the fundamental characteristics of said theoretical frameworks, is that bear-human relations in Scandinavian folklore can be understood as cultural and that the working theory is a valid and relevant model for understanding the material.

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