

# Religion from the Viewpoint of Tradition Ecology – Lauri Honko’s (1932–2002) Contribution to Comparative Religion<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In this article I propose to analyze Lauri Honko’s contribution in comparative religion in terms of tradition ecology, the general research framework Honko himself saw – at least in retrospect – as the unifying theme in his work. My aim is to provide an analytical account of his theoretical contribution in the study of religion that started already in his dissertation *Krankheitsprojekte* (1959) and culminated in his last major work, *Textualising the Siri Epic* (1998). Lauri Honko’s research topics ranged from folk beliefs, myths and rituals to ethnomedicine, oral epics and cultural identity. Yet religion, understood as culturally mediated interaction with the culturally postulated supernatural entities, remained one of his constant objects of interest. Moreover, I will argue that the fluid nature of contemporary post-secular religiosity is well captured by the tradition-ecology tools developed by Honko. I will end up by discussing the contribution of Honko’s doctoral students in comparative religion and folkloristics.

*Keywords: Lauri Honko, comparative religion, tradition ecology, concept of religion, post-secular religiosity*

## The Concept of Religion

The pioneers in anthropologically oriented study of religion like Bronislaw Malinowski, E. B. Tylor, Émile Durkheim and Franz Boas accepted a commonsense concept of religion as their starting point: religions are about supernatural entities like gods, evil spirits and gnomes. Consequently religious actors utilize cultural resources of religion in interacting with these entities. This unproblematic notion of religion enabled the pioneers in comparative religion to concentrate on the functional cultural contexts where actors use religious resources for the purpose of solving various kinds of problematic situations. Lauri Honko adopted this commonsense concept of religion, and throughout his career, to study the situations where religious cultural

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resources are used. This commonsense concept of religion enabled Honko to focus on the issues of context and use, instead of theorizing on the issue of how to demarcate religion from other cultural phenomena. The contexts where religious contents were used were captured by means of tradition ecology, which was the central theoretical tool devised by Honko. Therefore, in Honko's thinking, the concept of religion (as well as other concepts like those of tradition, culture, identity or folklore) was backed by and operationalized by tradition ecology.

But let us first look at the concept of religion used by Honko in his various projects and after that analyze tradition ecology more deeply.

Already in his dissertation *Krankheitsprojekte* (1959) Honko investigated the use of supernatural illness explanations in different ethnomedicinal traditions. The supernatural elements of spirit intrusion and projectile explanations were embedded in the explanatory systems and contexts of use, and the specific cultural meanings of these supernatural elements were explicated by means of systemic and functionalist analysis: the idea of spirit intrusion, for example, has functional roles in the explanations and healing sessions. Honko summarized the central tenet of his dissertation in what he called the ideal scheme of healing session. The scheme, or general model, included the various elements of healing, and this scheme was then instantiated in different contexts. Being a religious element meant participation and exemplification in those systemic connections.

The functionalist framework for comparative religion was further developed in his book *Geisterglaube in Ingermanland* (Honko 1962). Honko asks what is a 'barn spirit', as a cultural entity, and proceeds to construct a complex answer: this supernatural being is characterized by set of functional roles where it is experienced, described, talked about, embedded in memories, beliefs and narratives, further passed on to younger generations, and so on. The barn spirit has a life, so to say, as an element in the process of tradition. In reconstructing the origins of the barn spirit, Honko postulated a perceptual mechanism that was particularly tuned to anthropomorphic features. Thus in the long orientating introduction to *Geisterglaube*, Honko described not only the mechanisms of culture that would sustain and modify the content of barn spirit, but also the cognitive mechanism that was fine-tuned to find human-like features in the environment. In this field, Honko anticipated later theories about anthropomorphism, influential in the cognitive study of religion (Guthrie 1993).

In *Geisterglaube* as well as earlier in *Krankheitsprojekte*, religion is exemplified in religious contents, and the scientific study of religions would

amount to the study of how these contents are processed in the course of cultural actions and interactions. In *Geisterglaube* Honko had other ambitions as well, namely, to describe the whole pantheon of supernatural entities belonging to the Ingrian folk religion.

Honko's collection of essays titled *Uskontotieteen näkökulmia* ('Perspectives in Comparative Religion') was an influential textbook in the Finnish field of comparative religion (Honko 1972b). The book included essays on functionalism, genre analysis, theories of myth and rites of passage, and two essays on the application of role theory in comparative religion. As I have argued elsewhere (Kamppinen 2012; Kamppinen & Hakamies 2013), functionalism is the common nominator for these different studies. Honko argues that religious contents should be studied in their contexts of use, since it is only at that level where the different meanings can be decoded. The book on perspectives in comparative religion was the dominant textbook in Finnish study of religion for almost three decades. Together with Honko's *Uskontotieteen oppisanastoa* (Basic Concepts in Comparative Religion, Honko et al. 1971) it helped to formulate the paradigm for comparative religion, as these two publications served the role of introducing new students to the field. For the international arena, Honko started two lines of 'Reprint series', where his and his students' publications were reprinted and widely distributed: one was *Studies in Religion – Articles and Reprints*, and the other was *Folkloristics and Comparative Religion Reprint Series*. In line with the paradigm building, the global conference of the International Association of the History of Religions (IAHR) was organized by the Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, led by Honko, in 1973 in Turku, and the conference proceedings *Science of Religion – Studies in Methodology* were published in 1979 (Honko (ed.) 1979). Honko's own contributions in that volume (Honko 1979a and 1979b) emphasized the processual nature of knowledge formation and fieldwork-based study of religion.

After Lauri Honko took up the position as Director of the Nordic Institute of Folklore in the 1970s, and furthermore became involved in the UNESCO program for the safeguarding of folklore, he became profiled more and more as a folklorist, and less as a scholar in comparative religion. Yet his contributions in tradition ecology, study of identity and especially his work on the oral Siri epic testify to the fact that his contribution in comparative religion was a life-long project.

Honko's last project, on the South Indian oral epic Siri and its textualization, is a perfect example of how he used the concept of religion: religious elements are studied in their multiple contexts of use, and their meaning,

as well as the overall meaning of the epic myth, unfolds as these contexts are ethnographically described and interpreted. In *Textualising the Siri Epic*, Honko (1998) gives a general description of the *buuta* festival, where the women (called Siri after the protagonist of the Siri epic) are occupied by supernatural entities. These women have come to renew their contract with the gods, and:

They do this by rendering a sacred service to God, by making their bodies available for the divine spirit, by enabling the spirit to enter the human world using that body as its vehicle and by sharing the ritual power permeating all the participants in the process. [...] As gods become humans, they share the conflicts met by the latter in social life, yet not by addressing them directly but by moulding the grievances of their devotees closer to the social conflicts which the divine beings once experienced while being part of the early life. (Honko 1998, 389.)

Religious elements in multiple rituals linked to the Siri epic become understood as the ecological contexts are made visible. In Honko's work, folkloristics and comparative religion served each other, and the tools of tradition ecology provide the framework for carrying out cultural analysis of religious contents. Let us next look at the framework of tradition ecology, which served the unifying role in Honko's comparative religion and theory of culture in general.

### **Tradition Ecology**

Ecology as a concept, and particular ecological theories, have served many purposes in the study of culture. First, they have provided tools for relating cultural systems to natural environments, and have given rise to such concepts as social-ecological systems. Second, they have enabled researchers to investigate cultures as 'households', where there are links of dependence between different parts and elements of culture. In biology, ecological theories describe and explain the relationships between organisms and their environments, the flow of nutrients and the ecosystem services provided by the complex systems of organic and inorganic factors.

Åke Hultkrantz (1991) noted in his review that Honko added an important element to ecological theories of culture (see also Pentikäinen 2005). Whereas the mainstream ecological theories had purported to explain the interaction between culture and its natural environment, Honko introduced

the idea that 'the environment' incorporates both the natural and the cultural environment. The traditional view holds that only natural (and economic) conditions can exert selective pressure on culture. This view is attributable to at least Julian Stewart (1955), Leslie White (1959), Åke Hultkrantz (1979) and Marvin Harris (1979). According to this paradigm, cultures 'reflect' their natural environmental and other material conditions. For example, the mythologies of American Indians reflect the natural environments of the American continents: animal myths second the real fauna, and the myths relating the origins of livelihoods, for example, are rooted in the material conditions where the myths were born in the first place. This paradigm could be labeled as environmental determinism, and it seeks to explain cultural facts by means of environmental conditions.

In biology, environmental determinism has taken a step forward. Lumsden and Wilson (1981) and Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981) have proposed ambitious theories that aim at explaining cultural traits by means of natural selection, and have postulated lawful links between genes, mind and culture.

The second view, exemplified by Honko, holds that the selective pressure can come also from the cultural environment: the interactions between cultural contents and their different environments, especially cultural environment, can be accounted for by means of applying ecological perspective on these interactions. For example, in the Amazonian folk religion, the forest spirit *yashingo* is conceptualized differently in the Protestant and Catholic versions of Christianity (Kamppinen 1989; 2010). In Protestant Christianity, the forest spirit is seen as an evil spirit, a demon that is working for Satan; but in the Catholic version of the folk religion, where there is more room for various spiritual beings, the forest spirit is conceptualized as a more benign being. Thus the properties of cultural contents are determined by the ecological context of the culture, where the contents undergo constant adaptation. The similarity and variation of forest spirits, is explained by referring to different cultural models.

### **Origins of Tradition Ecology**

The basic idea of tradition ecology is quite simple and widely, if implicitly accepted in religious and cultural studies: cultural traits should be studied in their contexts. Honko's major contribution was to introduce theoretical tools – concepts and models of tradition ecology – for carrying out this kind of study.

In his earliest article on tradition ecology (where he introduced the term ecology of tradition), Honko pointed out that the concepts of biological ecology could be fruitfully used in the study of culture (Honko 1972a). He argues that we should use analogical inferences when inventing explanations for cultural phenomena. Explanations by analogy are widely used in science in general, and the fields of research in humanities should utilize this method as well.

In his next approach (Honko 1973), he dropped the term 'ecology of tradition' in favor of tradition ecology, Honko utilized explanations from both biological ecology and economic ecology to sketch potential explanations for cultural traits. Theoretical concepts like 'tradition barrier', 'adaptation' and 'niche' were used to explain the supply and demand of tradition, the dynamics of different cultural traits. Individuals and communities that use their cultural resources in this selection process select cultural traits.

Honko expanded tradition ecology into a full-fledged research framework in his article – written in Swedish – 'Traditionsekologi – en introduction' (An introduction to tradition ecology), which appeared in an anthology *Tradition och miljö – ett kulturekologiskt perspektiv* (Tradition and milieu – a cultural ecology perspective) edited by Honko and Orvar Löfgren (Honko 1981a). This 63-page article is comparable to the introduction in *Geisterglaube*, a piece of writing that has been used as an independent text. A concise summary of tradition ecology with minor corrections was provided later on in the article 'Rethinking tradition ecology' (Honko 1985), where he writes:

Tradition ecology studies the adaptation and use of elements of tradition, systems of tradition, the structures and inherent nature of culture in time, space and population, societies and milieus. This is done by observing the following factors within tradition processes: 1) migration, 2) learning, 3) adaptation, 4) production, 5) use, 6) variation, 7) distribution, 8) continuity, 9) development and 10) disappearance in a given physical milieu, among given tradition bearers and social groups or in a given area, making special allowances for factors and changes influencing the uniqueness of the tradition and trying to understand the processes of selection and production. Thus at least ten different aspects are needed to describe the life span of tradition. (Honko 1985, 71.)

Each of the ten factors includes several research topics, and Honko's outline of tradition ecology easily fits the definition of a research program, or general research project.

## Adaptation

Not all factors are equal, in Honko's theory: adaptation is the most important aspect. For example, the general patterns of migration can be studied on the basis of how tradition adapts to different contexts. Correspondingly, variation, development and disappearance of tradition are based on their mechanisms of adaptation. Especially in his article (1981b) Honko gives several examples of how adaptation takes place: he differentiates between

- 1) milieu-morphological adaptation (where tradition adapts to its natural environment)
- 2) tradition-morphological adaptation (where tradition adapts to its cultural environment);
- 3) functional adaptation (or minor variation), and
- 4) ecotypification (where the contents and uses of tradition are harmonized with the living conditions, cultural ethos and history of the group).

The fourth of these mechanisms seems redundant, however, since it can be reduced to adaptations 1 and 2. Functional adaptation is central, since it includes all those contextually generated variations that result from the selective decision-making of the individual who utilizes the cultural resources of tradition.

In his *Textualising the Siri Epic*, Honko (1998) studied functional variation and individual performance in depth. The singer Gopala Naika, who performed the Siri epic in its totality, adapted the oral tradition to fit the context of the performance, for example the expectations of the audience. Gopala Naika used different parts of his mental text for different purposes. The recording session was a unique performance, *sui generis*, where the mental text was used to reproduce the whole story. In the healing sessions, parts of the mental text were used and adapted for the purposes of healing, and in the theatrical displays other parts were used. The individual singer, Gopala Naika, could carry out all the functional adaptations, since he had not only the mental text at his disposal, but also the required practical knowledge of the different contexts of use.

In the case of the Siri epic, the milieu-morphological adaptation was effective as well. The natural formations near Gopala Naika's residence were, according to tradition, the places where the mythological happenings of the Siri epic had taken place. Thus the tradition has adapted to the local physical environment by means of anchoring itself to concrete places.

### Examples of Tradition Ecology

In her dissertation (Huuskonen 2004, see also Huuskonen & Kampainen 1994), Marjut Huuskonen (1953–2010), one of Honko's students, investigated the milieu-morphological adaptation of Sámi folklore. She studied how a tradition-dominant culture hero called Stuorra-Jovni was anchored into the natural environment of the Teno River by the Sámi people of the Talvadas village. Originally this character was a real person, but in time and the course of tradition formation, he became mythologized into a culture hero who received the role of the dominant tradition. New tradition elements like stories, legends and jokes became linked with him, and features in the natural surroundings were named after him. For example, on one hillside there were visible tracks that looked like a giant had skied there: these were named 'Stuorra Jovni's ski tracks'. Unusual natural formations, too, were linked to this mythological character, and the folklore items adapted milieu-morphologically to the physical environment. Huuskonen also discussed the modes in which the informants commented on the elements of tradition: how they questioned or ridiculed items that had earlier been recorded as firmly believed. A colleague of Huuskonen, Pasi Enges, has deepened this discussion in his recent dissertation on how supernatural elements are treated in the Sámi oral tradition (Enges 2012).

As another student of Honko's, I have applied the general theory of tradition ecology to several specific case studies (Kamppinen 1989; 2010; 2012). In my study of the Amazonian folk religion and medicine, I encountered several examples of tradition-morphological adaptation. One such case was mentioned above, where the forest spirit *yashingo* adapted to the different cultural systems of Protestantism and Catholicism. Another case was the adaptation of Marx and Jesus in the hybrid system of Marxist-Catholicism. Catholic Christianity is the default religion in the Peruvian Amazon. To be a human being means that you are Catholic. Yet in the 1980s Marxism in its various forms was popular, especially among the labor unions like cultivators of rice. One of my informants, Wilver Arrevalo from the village of San Rafael, was active in the labor union, a devout Catholic and a devout Marxist. When Wilver Arrevalo was asked about the relationship between these two worldviews, he explained that Marxism is actually very Christian in its norm to help the poor, and Jesus was really the first Marxist. Thus the theme of Marxism adapted to the boundary condition of Catholicism, and Catholicism adapted (less) to the conditions set by Marxism. The interaction between Catholicism and



Marxism is actually a good example of co-adaptation, where both parts of the interaction adapt themselves. Catholicism is good in adapting itself to various other systems. Liberation theology is a mixture of Christianity and social policy and politics, and *teología indígena*, indigenous theology, is a version of Catholicism where the elements of indigenous philosophies are included in the Christian worldview.

The central factor in the adaptation of tradition is the tradition barrier, a feature that acts as the counterforce against the invasion of a tradition, something that hinders the spread of a tradition (Honko 1973). In the above example of the forest spirit *yashingo*, the Protestant worldview and especially its dualistic division between good and evil acts as a tradition barrier. In the dualistic worldview, all entities are either good (on the side of God) or evil (on the side of Satan). This worldview element functions as a tradition barrier, since it does not recognize folklore entities that are 'beyond good and evil', like the forest spirit *yashingo*. Therefore, in the Protestant worldview, the traditional *yashingo* has no chances of survival, but must transform itself into a devil that fits the dualistic worldview.

Honko defined 'ecotypification' as adaptation where the contents and uses of tradition are harmonized with the living conditions, cultural ethos and history of the group. I proposed earlier that his category 'ecotypification' could be analyzed in terms of tradition-morphological and milieu-morphological adaptation, and thus would be redundant. Let us take the example of the Sámi culture. Various cultural items belonging to the Sámi folklore or religion are anchored in the reindeer economy, both in terms of content and use. The reindeer economy provides the living conditions into which traditions adapt, and this could be called 'ecotypification'. But the same descriptive force is achieved by using milieu-morphological adaptation as the theoretical term.

Another example: In the Peruvian Amazon there is a traditional custom of co-operation, *minga*, which is used when paths or gardens are made or maintained in the forests. *Minga* has a predictable, almost ritualistic pattern: all the able people of the village are supposed to participate; food is served by the women, and in the evening there is a fiesta with drinking and dancing. *Minga* is a recurrent theme that comes up in various parts of oral culture. It is mentioned in stories about witchcraft, in healing stories and in the origin myths. This model of co-operation is an active element in the Amazonian communities, and it is grounded in the natural environment, the division of labor, and the model of mutual trust and help that motivates the *minga*. It is clear that the new elements of tradition must adapt themselves

to the *minga* and its preconditions, which have long environmental and traditional histories, and this if anything could be called ecotypification. Yet, again, these adaptations can equally well be captured in terms of tradition-morphological and milieu-morphological adaptation.

Both the living conditions and the history of the group are reflected in the natural and utilized environment as well as in the tradition into which the new elements have to adapt themselves. Therefore we can sustain our original claim that ecotypification is a redundant category of adaptation.

To recapitulate, Honko's tradition ecology was constructed as a research framework within which various lines of research could be pursued. What is characteristic of tradition ecology is that it takes into account not only the natural environment, but also the cultural environment. The selectionist view has been used in the study of culture, religion and folklore, and Honko captured and crystallized some of its central ideas in tradition ecology. Tradition ecology is based on functionalism, systems theory and process thinking, and it sees the elements of culture as being in constant flux.

An important theoretical device that is essential to Lauri Honko's tradition ecology is genre analysis (Honko 1968; 1989; 1998). Cultural contents are processed in different genres, and it makes all the difference, at least from the viewpoint of religious studies, whether a cultural content is expressed and transmitted in the context of a joke or of serious belief. The genre system is a part of the tradition, and the adaptation to genre is part of the tradition-morphological adaptation.

### **Migration of Cultural Contents**

As early as 1964 Honko wrote about the importance of beliefs and memorates in the study of folk religion. Memorates (or verbal accounts of supernatural experience, like 'I saw a forest spirit yesterday') are the major genre from which beliefs can be inferred. If the forest spirit is processed in another genre, for example in a joke or in children's wonder tales, there is no straightforward way to infer the existence of belief. The tradition bearers telling jokes about forest spirits do not necessarily hold the belief, and therefore there are no grounds for holding them as religious actors at all (if we regard belief in the supernatural to be the hallmark of religiosity). What can be done with those genres from which beliefs cannot be inferred, is to construct an ideal intentional system capable of containing the beliefs implied by wonder tales.

The migration of cultural contents from one context to another and their shift from one genre to another is well captured by the concepts provided by tradition ecology. Honko constructed the concept of 'folklore process' to denote this transformation of cultural contents.

According to Honko, the concept of folklore process

covers the story of folklore in culture from its discovery and definition, fieldwork and archiving, analysis and theory, recycling and application (the second life paradigm), authenticity and ownership, revival and commercial use, cultural and political functions, its relevance to national, local, social and ethnic identity and the emergence of emancipatory folklore work in developing communities and nations (Honko 1990, 120).

Folklore (or patterned oral culture and related cultural behavior) migrates from one context to another, and different actors and communities, most notably traditional and scientific communities facilitate these processes. The management of folklore processes is one of the main tasks of applied folkloristics.

The folklore process is an adequate description of what happens to oral folklore materials in the research and development process, and it can be applied to cultural contents and their material bases in general. How about religious contents? For Honko, the context is everything. In what follows I will show how the tools of tradition ecology and the concept of folklore process helps us to identify the dynamics of contents as they migrate from one context to another.

### **Folklore Process and Religious Contents**

Discordianism is an invented religion-like system or a parody of religion, where the ancient Greco-Roman goddess Eris of discord is put to novel uses. Discordianism was founded in the United States around 1957 by Greg Hill and Kerry Wendell Thornley, the former of whom wrote the main text of the movement, *Principia Discordia* (Cusack 2010). The text is full of irony and it makes fun of organized religion in line with the basic idea that chaos rules the world. In Hanna Lehtinen's ethnographic study of Finnish discordianists (Lehtinen 2011), the goddess Eris is described as a cultural resource by means of which one can cope with the absurdities of the world. Eris is described as a goddess with a weird sense of humor, a trickster figure who can show up in unexpected situations. Eris is beyond good and bad, and escapes all the traditional dichotomies.

Their shared cultural lore enables the 'followers' to form a loose community and to share ideas about the challenging chaotic features of the world. The use of the Internet is central in this otherwise loose movement; the current cultivation of its 'doctrines' is carried out in the Internet.

Discordianism is not a religion, but a humorous comment on religion, a para-religious phenomenon, in the same way as the Church of Satan is a comment on Christianity. Discordianism may provide perspective and intellectual and emotional comfort for its members, but it does this in the same way as Douglas Hofstadter's book *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1985) provides intellectual perspectives. In Discordianism, the originally religious content referring to Eris has been removed from the context of belief into the context of entertainment.

### **Mediatization**

Mediatization is a social and cultural process where different cultural systems are adapted to the structure and dynamics of the media where they are embedded or transmitted, and where contents are transferred (or copied) from context to another, for example from the context of belief to the context of entertainment. Originally proposed for the purpose of understanding change in politics and political discourse, mediatization has become the general concept that denotes the processes where cultural contents are transformed as they move from one context or medium to another. Meyrowitz (1993) proposes that the constituents of media that affect the adaptation of cultural systems are the conduits, the languages, and the environments of media. The elements of the media process and transform different contents for media display, and create new media entities for original cultural systems. Religious cultural systems provide a good example of how mediatization works, as argued by Stig Hjarvard:

By the help of the most sophisticated media technology, supernatural phenomena have acquired an unmatched presence in modern societies. In recent blockbuster movies like *Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and the *Harry Potter* film series, magicians, ghosts, elves, unicorns, monsters possessed by evil and spirits working for good are vividly alive and inhabit the world on a par with mortal human beings. (Hjarvard 2008, 9.)

Hjarvard (2008) argues that mediatization can be considered as a part of gradual secularization – functions that were served earlier by organized

religion are provided by media: rituals, worship, mourning and celebration. We may ask further how to understand the fact that the process of secularization coexists with a growing visibility of religion in the media? The answer is to adopt the tradition-ecology division between context and content. When religious contents are used in the context of belief, action (attendance) and identification, we have paradigmatic religion. Identification can be understood as a variety of belief. What the media do is that they detach religious contents from these religious contexts and transform them into something else –still formally religious contents, but having lost their religious context. Tradition ecology provides us with tools for conceptualizing the system and getting a grip on secularization (cf. Clark 2009).

The thesis of secularization can be formulated in a compact way by saying that in secularization the contexts of religious belief and action become ever more rare.

What happens in the mediatization of religion is that the contents are disconnected from their 'original' contexts. That process takes place also in other fields of culture: cultural items are detached from their original contexts and put into a context of display in the media. An illustrative example is the cultural practice of cooking. The contemporary media are full of cooking programs and recipes, which media consumers then adopt. At the same time, all the more households, especially single households in Scandinavia, prepare their daily dishes from heavily processed food that can be quickly heated. If the earlier wisdom was that you are what you eat, the slogan for contemporary culture is that you are what you heat. So the strong visibility of cooking practices is consistent with the decline of original cooking contexts.

In the case of religion, the contents displayed in the media can certainly be further put to religious use, when religious actors use the media for their own purposes. Therefore the general process of mediatization that enhances secularization is compatible with the fact that in some cases religious contents in the media can facilitate religious activities, or irreligious contents can be adapted as parts of religious or spiritual activities (cf. Lynch 2006).

In media and religion studies, it has been argued that religious contents are mediatized when they are subsumed under the genres of popular culture, for example. Honko's folklore process helps us in understanding that the media (in their various different forms) provide a storage facility where cultural contents or memes are preserved and processed. *Prima facie* religious contents that refer to supernatural entities or are derived from religious traditions can be displayed in the media in line with the folklore

process; different actors can use them for different purposes. Collective rituals provide good examples of how religious contents are transformed and used for various purposes (cf. Hepp & Krönert 2009). The strong presence of religious materials in the media does not indicate the phase of the folklore process active at that moment, but it needs to be studied separately. As in the case of para-religious phenomena, the abundance of these phenomena does not indicate the growth of religiosity.

### **Religion in Tradition Ecology**

As discussed above, Lauri Honko operated with the commonsense concept of religion, and was therefore able to concentrate on the functional contexts where religious elements were used together with other cultural resources. The framework of tradition ecology provided the main theoretical tool for carrying out this functional study of contexts. The notions of genre analysis and folklore process provided further concrete tools for conceptualizing religion and culture so as to highlight their dynamic, ecological features.

If we anchor religion to belief in the supernatural, then the tools of genre analysis and of folklore process become crucial in religious studies. In order to identify and differentiate its study objects from among all the materials of culture, religious studies must first analyze the genre of the cultural content in question. This is done by contextualization, that is, by situating the item in the relevant folklore processes. The systemic analysis of relevant folklore process will inform the researcher about the status of cultural content – whether it is used as belief content, or for the purposes of entertainment, for example.

In his recent study of Lauri Honko's and Juha Pentikäinen's Talvadas Sámi Village Project, Pasi Enges (2012) argues that it can be at times difficult or practically impossible to tell the difference between contexts of belief and contexts of entertainment, and therefore impossible to differentiate religious materials from other cultural resources. I think that Honko's detailed studies, especially concerning the Siri rituals, show that the possibility in principle should motivate researchers in religious studies to perform contextual genre analysis and systemic analysis of relevant folklore processes. The contexts of apparently religious beliefs in the supernatural vary, and their identities are more easily detected if beliefs, for example, are studied in the context where they steer behavior. Archive materials on belief systems provide only haphazard information on contexts of actualization, and therefore scholars investigating folklore processes is better off if they can

conduct ethnographic fieldwork and study how people act out their beliefs and desires. As Honko argued already in *Geisterglaube*, culturally patterned interaction with supernatural entities gives rise to beliefs and desires that are different from memorized and retold encounters with the supernatural. The researcher in comparative religion, especially in ethnography, should aim at investigating the situations where beliefs are put in practice and where their behavioral value is cashed out. The framework of tradition ecology together with fieldwork techniques provide optimal tools for identifying those situations.

### **Honko's Doctoral Students**

The lasting impact of Honko has actualized also in the research projects carried out by his students and colleagues. When Honko was appointed as the Professor of Folkloristics and Comparative Religion in 1963, he was only 31 years old. Consequently, he had a long career ahead in supervising doctoral dissertations and other scholarly book projects both in folkloristics and comparative religion. It is worth noting that in the Finnish academic culture of the humanities, the doctoral dissertation is assumed to be a scholarly book that can be published in an international forum. This is different from British or American academic culture, where the PhD thesis is usually a manuscript from which one can cultivate a scholarly book. Therefore it is informative to take a short look at the dissertations and projects that were either supervised or initiated by Honko or inspired more or less by his theoretical ideas.

Honko's first assistant was Juha Pentikäinen (b. 1940), whose doctoral dissertation *The Nordic Dead-Child Tradition. Nordic Dead-Child Beings – A Study in Comparative Religion* (Pentikäinen 1968) was an articulated and systematic study where the cultural materials of folk religion were analyzed by means of genre analysis, tradition ecology and other tools of folkloristics and process-oriented cultural research. Pentikäinen's dissertation received international attention and was seen as a successful application of the Finnish paradigm in cultural research, the paradigm that Honko had been building in his *Geisterglaube* (1962), for example (Anderson 1969). Pentikäinen launched a successful career in academia and became Professor of Comparative Religion in Helsinki University in 1972. His collaboration with Honko continued in the Talvadas (Sámi Oral Tradition) project, which set an example for field research projects and provided materials for later dissertations (Huuskonen 2004; Enges 2012). A major outcome of the collaboration between Honko and Pentikäinen was the Finnish publication

*Kulttuuriantropologia* ('Cultural anthropology'), the first general presentation of this discipline written in Finnish (Honko & Pentikäinen 1970). The book was reissued several times and has played an important role in the training of Finnish scholars in cultural studies. Pentikäinen has continued his scholarly career and published, for example, on shamanism and Kalevala mythology (Pentikäinen 1990; 1997).

The next doctoral dissertation supervised by Honko was Olli Alho's (b. 1943) study *The Religion of the Slaves – A Study of the Religious Tradition and Behaviour of Plantation Slaves in the United States 1830–1865* (Alho 1976). This was specifically a study of a religious cultural system. As Alho argues in his introduction, the religion of the slaves can be explained as an independent socio-cultural complex. Following Honko (and many others), Alho assumed that religion is about interaction between humans and supernatural/superhuman forces and beings. Another assumption made by Alho was that in the study of folk religion, the distinction between religion and magic is irrelevant and even counterproductive. In this he followed Honko's understanding that both magic and religion subsume under the category of human/superhuman interaction, which has also prevailed in anthropology of religion in general. Olli Alho continued his career as a docent in several Finnish universities, and had a major impact as one of the leading cultural intellectuals and as the Director-General of YLE, the Finnish Public Broadcasting Company.

In the academic world it is perhaps Anna-Leena Siikala (b. 1943), Professor Emerita of Folkloristics at the University of Helsinki, who together with Juha Pentikäinen can be considered Lauri Honko's most influential students. Anna-Leena Siikala defended her dissertation *The Rite-Technique of the Siberian Shaman* in 1978. This was a systematic analysis of shamanizing séances and initiatory visions in several Siberian shamanistic cultures. In a sense, Siikala's study replicated the research setting of Honko's dissertation *Krankheitsprojekte* (1959): an ideal-type model of the healing session is abstracted from the various empirical examples. Siikala's study went deeper and also covered theoretical questions not previously addressed, and was characterized in reviews as a trendsetting and thought-provoking examination of shamanism (Knecht 1980; Black 1980). Anna-Leena Siikala continued her academic career in folkloristics and anthropology of religion, publishing works on general theoretical issues in cultural studies such as *Interpreting Oral Narrative* (Siikala 1990) and *Return to Culture – Oral Tradition and Society in the Southern Cook Islands* (Siikala & Siikala 2005), as well as studies on Kalevala: *Mythic Images and Shamanism – A Perspective on Kalevala Poetry* (Siikala 2002).



The very same year 1978 when Anna-Leena Siikala defended her thesis, Päivikki Suojanen defended her doctoral dissertation *Saarna, saarnaaja, tilanne* ('The Spontaneous Sermon – Its Production and Context'). She investigated the dynamics of sermons in a Finnish charismatic religious movement, utilizing the tools of sociolinguistics. The actualization of tradition in the concrete contexts of culture, the general theme that interested Honko, received a disciplined and empirically-based analysis in Suojanen's work, and it showed that if one wants to study the actualization of tradition in detail, one needs to employ the methods from a discipline such as sociolinguistics in order to obtain respectable empirical results (Suojanen 1978). Suojanen continued her research on ethnography of religious and other communication. Later, she wrote a textbook on the history and paradigms of religious studies, especially in Finland (Suojanen 2000). She notes that the sheer number of different theoretical viewpoints evident in Finnish religious studies does not by itself enhance better scientific inquiry, but that one needs methodological reflection and philosophical analysis of theoretical tools.

Honko's interest in Ingrian laments and rites of passage (Honko 1978) was elaborated in Aili Nenola-Kallio's (later Nenola) dissertation *Studies in Ingrian Laments* (Nenola-Kallio 1982). Laments as 'improvised songs of complaint performed in the context of rituals connected with death and marriage' provided a laboratory case of how tradition is actualized in various contexts of use. Furthermore, Nenola-Kallio's study opened up the women's oral tradition as a special research object at the time when departments for Women's Studies were built in Scandinavia. In reviewing Nenola-Kallio's thesis, William McNeil (1984) criticizes the overall structuralist interpretation, claiming that as a mechanical technique 'it ignores the human element' even though McNeil gives credit to Nenola-Kallio for keeping the technical vocabulary to a minimum (McNeil 1984, 80). Curiously, McNeil congratulates Nenola-Kallio for not using her study for feminist or liberation purposes: 'From a contemporary liberal perspective there is much in the lament tradition that one might find objectionable but a scholarly monograph is not the proper channel for such remarks. In avoiding such folly, Nenola-Kallio does a great service for scholarship.' (McNeil 1984, 81.) After a post-doctoral period in Folkloristics and Comparative Religion, Aili Nenola was appointed Professor in Women's Studies at the University of Helsinki in 1995.

The folklorist Satu Apo (b. 1947) defended her dissertation on Finnish fairy tales in 1986, and the English version of the book was published in 1995 as *The Narrative World of Finnish Fairy Tales – Structure, Agency and Evalua-*

*tion in Southwest Finnish Folktales* (Apo 1995a). Apo utilized the toolbox of structuralism but combined it with the content-sensitive analysis found in fields of history and cognitive study of culture. Especially in her later studies *Naisen väki* ('The magical power of women') and *Viinan voima* ('The magical power of alcohol'), where she traced the folk models of magical powers in Finnish folk culture, she managed, like Anna-Leena Siikala, to combine the problematics of traditional folklore research with the new concepts provided by the cognitive paradigm (Apo 1995; 2001). Apo's research settings and the toolbox she used comes close to what Honko could and perhaps should have used if he had decided to follow the cognitive paradigm. Unfortunately for the international community of cultural studies, Apo's trendsetting work on the magical power of alcohol has not been translated into English. As Professor of Folkloristics at the University of Helsinki, Satu Apo has been able to influence new generations of folklorists and other students of culture.

Matti Kamppinen (b. 1961) became Lauri Honko's doctoral student in 1987, and defended his thesis on Amazonian ethnomedicine in 1989. In his study Kamppinen utilized Honko's ideas about health behavior system, tradition ecology, culture and tradition, and illness explanations. Kamppinen's study was not only inspired, but also literally supervised by Honko, who wanted to participate actively in the presentation and further elaboration of his ideas. Honko was indeed delighted to see his ideas being related to the cognitive studies of culture. (Honko did not embrace the cognitive paradigm, even though many of his central concepts were based on assumptions shared with the cognitive study of culture, and could be easily systematized by means of the cognitive theory (see Pyysiäinen 2000)).

Another prominent folklorist whose dissertation was supervised by Honko was Lauri Harvilahti (b. 1950), whose dissertation (in Finnish) on the production mechanisms of Ingrian oral epics was published in 1992. Harvilahti utilized and developed further the Parry-Lord theory on oral formulas, and set himself the ambitious task of recovering the mechanism of the rules that generate oral epics. Harvilahti also proposed a computer model of these rules, and in this respect his work came close to cognitive and computational linguistics.

The year 1996, when Honko was serving his last year before his retirement, was exceptionally prolific in terms of dissertations at the Department of Folkloristics and Comparative Religion at the University of Turku.

One of Honko's field assistants and collaborators from the Talvadas Project, Lassi Saressalo, who was intensively involved in the field research on Sámi oral tradition, wrote his dissertation on the cultural identity of the

Kven people of Northern Norway. Although Honko was not the formal supervisor, his influence can be detected in the theoretical resources of Saressalo's work (Saressalo 1996).

Martti Junnonaho wrote his dissertation on new religious movements, analyzing the cultural dynamics of the Transcendental Meditation, Divine Light Mission, and Hare Krishna movements (Junnonaho 1996). His understanding of the new religious movements as part of larger cultural processes was especially seen as an innovative and constructive perspective (Gothóni 1997).

Issues of cultural identity were also addressed in Tuula Kopsa-Schön's dissertation on the cultural identity of the Finnish Romani (Kopsa-Schön 1996). Kopsa-Schön conceptualized cultural identity as the outcome of a process of continuous negotiation and interpretation in various contexts, and the Romani cultural identity as constructed through several identifiable folklore processes.

Three students of Honko who finished their dissertations after Honko's death were Marjut Huuskonen (2004), Tuija Hovi (2007), and Pasi Enges (2012). Huuskonen studied the milieu-morphological adaptation of Sámi environmental stories, and her contribution was analyzed earlier in this article. Tuija Hovi investigated the social construction and maintenance of the religious worldview in a Finnish charismatic movement. Pasi Enges questioned the standard central assumption of field research on folk religion, namely that the informants really believe what they say they believe. Especially in the Talvadas project there was evidence to the effect that the informants were learning from the researchers, and that they wanted to be interviewed by the main professor, namely Honko, or that they were fabricating stories they knew would interest the researchers. Honko himself understood the risk of being led by informants, and therefore in the Siri project he focused on analyzing the details of healing rituals, for example, where the beliefs are operationalized in action rather than merely stated. As I argued earlier, a study of folk religion that relies too much on decontextualized descriptions of what 'they' believe is always in danger of being led astray. Belief as it is acted out in human action allows the researcher to perform the budget analysis of action instead of relying on mere content analysis of what people say (Kamppinen 2010).

The research project on Tanzanian ethnomedicine on which Honko commented in his 1977 article involved a scholar of religion, Raimo Harjula (1937–2012), who had already completed his dissertation in theology. In Tanzania, Harjula had continued his studies and conducted a detailed

study of a Tanzanian healer, Mirau, investigating the cultural knowledge system behind the healing practices. In his book *Mirau and his Practice – A Study of the Ethnomedicinal Repertoire of a Tanzanian Herbalist* (1980), Harjula reports how during a field work period stretching from 1966 to 1974, he became an apprentice of the healer Mirau, and in that role was able to learn about Mirau's vast ethnomedicinal system: 51 diseases, 187 cures, and 130 medicinal plants. Mirau was a cultural specialist, the kind of key informant with whom the researcher constructs and shares cultural knowledge. Harjula's research setting with Mirau was an instance of the ideal type of cultural learning (where an apprentice learns from a specialist) which Honko repeatedly referred to in discussions and articles. This type of research setting he was finally able to pursue in the Siri project. Raimo Harjula went on to publish a Finnish translation of his Mirau study (Harjula 1981). Later on, he wrote an extensive study on the cultural explanations of illnesses where guilt is used as an explanatory principle (Harjula 1986). In this work Harjula's debt to Honko's ideas is evident.

From Honko, his doctoral students and colleagues received fruitful ideas, added their own expertise, and developed these ideas further. In a broader picture, the development of Finnish comparative religion and folkloristics – from the 1960's onwards – can be seen as a phase of paradigm construction, where shared starting points enabled incremental yet cumulative scientific progress.

If we compare the conditions of scientific progress in the humanities and natural sciences, we can argue that in the humanities there is a persistent need for constructing stronger paradigms or research frameworks that would enable young researchers to work effectively, whereas in the natural sciences where paradigms are more readily built, it is the cyclical breakdown of paradigms which facilitates scientific progress.

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