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COGNITIVE MATRICES IN FOLKTALES AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES OF DELIBERATION: FROM THE UTILITARIAN MINDSET OF MOJCA POKRAJCULJA TO THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE LAUGHTER OF THE BEAN

Marjan HORVAT

Institute IRRIS for Research, Development and Strategies of Society, Culture and Environment,
Čentur 1f, 6273 Marezige, Slovenia
e-mail: marjan.horvat@irris.eu

ABSTRACT

*The aim of the paper is to illuminate how folktales, with their specific conceptualization of universal dilemmas, reflect culture-bound patterns of decision-making in relation to the contemporary socio-political discourse in a given society. In this respect, I perceive folktales firstly as a reflection of embedded cognitive/cultural matrices that determine »cognitive-instrumental rationality«, linked to traditions and cultural norms (Jürgen Habermas). I explore these matrices using a new methodological approach which connects the sociological theory of fairy tales, deliberative democracy and cognitive history. This approach is then applied to the analysis of the conceptualization of dilemmas in three Slovenian folktales (*Mojca Pokrajculja, The Ant and the Lazy Cricket, The Bean, the Straw, and the Coal*). The analysis asserts correlations between traditionally and culturally conditioned forms of decision-making, and contemporary practices of decision-making / deliberation, thus shedding light on the specifics of national epistemology from a comparative and historicist perspective.*

Keywords: folktales, cultural perception, decision-making, deliberative democracy, cognitive history, case studies

LE MATRICI COGNITIVE NEI RACCONTI POPOLARI E NELLE PRATICHE CONTEMPORANEE DI DELIBERAZIONE: DALLA LOGICA DELLA RAGIONE UTILITARISTICA DI MOJCA POKRAJCULJA AL RISO INCOMPRENSIBILE DEL FAGIOLO

SINTESI

L'articolo si propone di fare luce su come il racconto popolare, con la sua particolare concettualizzazione di dilemmi universali, rifletta i motivi culturalmente caratterizzati del processo decisionale in relazione al discorso sociopolitico contemporaneo in una

data società. In tal senso i racconti popolari possono essere percepiti innanzitutto come rispecchiamento delle matrici cognitive/culturali impresse che determinano la «razionalità cognitivo-strumentale», legate alle tradizioni e alle norme culturali (Jürgen Habermas). Queste matrici vengono esplorate attraverso un approccio metodologico nuovo che collega la teoria sociologica delle fiabe con la democrazia deliberativa e la storia cognitiva. Questo approccio viene quindi applicato all'analisi della concettualizzazione di dilemmi in tre racconti popolari sloveni (Mojca Pokrajculja; La formica e il grillo ozioso; Il fagiolo, il carbone e la pagliuzza). L'analisi ha rilevato correlazioni tra le forme di processo decisionale condizionate dalla tradizione e dalla cultura, da una parte, e le prassi del processo decisionale/deliberazione contemporanee dall'altra, lumeggiando così le specificità dell'epistemologia nazionale in una prospettiva comparativa e storicistica.

Parole chiave: racconti popolari, percezione culturale, processo decisionale, democrazia deliberativa, storia cognitiva, casi studio

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the paper[1] is to explore the social function of folktales in relation to culture-bound decision-making patterns and in relation to contemporary socio-political discourse. In this respect I consider folktales, which over the course of history have been subjected to a process of continuous transformation[2], as a reflection of specific cultural/cognitive matrices that regulate traditional patterns of decision-making in a given community.[3] In this sense I am interested in folktales as

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1 This paper is the result of research carried out in the research project "Social Functions of Fairy Tales" (ARRS J6-1807), in the research project "Political Functions of Folktales" (ARRS N6-0268) and in the research program "The Practices of Conflict Resolution between Customary and Statutory Law in the Area of Today's Slovenia and Neighboring Countries" (ARRS, P6-0435), funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).

2 Until their linguistic representation, i.e. by writing down these narratives either in the context of the Italian and French court cultures of the 16th and 17th centuries (Zipes, 2006; 2011; 2012; Bottigheimer, 2010) or in the context of the national awakening movements of the 19th century. The boundaries between oral tradition and literary fairy tales are difficult to define, as the motifs circulated and were also transmitted from written material to oral tradition, in particular in medieval times (cf. Ziolkowski, 2010). However, the very invention of the fairy tale as a literary genre marked a change in the social function of fairy tales, as they became part of a mediated public space, first of the aristocratic salon, then of the bourgeois public, which by default is embedded in ideological and political matrices.

3 This view is supported by folklore scholar Sara Graça da Silva who emphasized that most of »the motifs present in fairytales are timeless and fairly universal, comprising dichotomies such as good and evil; right and wrong, punishment and reward, moral and immoral, male and female... Ultimately, despite being often disregarded as fictitious, and even as a lesser form of narrative, folk tales are excellent case studies for cross-cultural comparisons and studies on human behavior, including cooperation, decision making, [and so on].« The Guardian, 20. 1. 2016: *Fairytales Much Older than Previously Thought, Say Researchers*. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/20/fairytales-much-older-than-previously-thought-say-researchers (last access: 2022-05-06).

an expression of »cognitive-instrumental rationality«, linked to teleological decision-making, conditioned by tradition and culture (Habermas, 1984, 10). My thesis is that these »embedded« matrices underlie the development and characteristics of social-integrative discourse in the field which I have termed proto-political. The formation, contents and the specifics of the proto-political, as they are manifested in folktales and in contemporary political discourse, are the research topics of this paper.

By the term proto-political, I refer to specific traditional patterns of decision-making, conflict resolution and perceptions of a good society, which were inscribed into a specific national political culture in the era of industrialization, and especially within the evolution of the nation-state. In this sense, historically, proto-political applies to Hobsbawm's notion of »pre-political people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world« (Hobsbawm, 1965, 2), but also to his analysis of proto-nationalisms. The historian namely observes that different understandings of »national feeling« had an important role in establishing specifics of political culture within new-born modern nation-states, defining perceptions of democracy and notions of political community in a given society (Hobsbawm, 1990, 46–79; Hobsbawm, 1979). Hobsbawm thus offers a birds-eye-view of translating the proto-political into the realm of the nation-state politics. In this respect he focuses on the outcomes of nation-building, but he does not scrutinize the transition of micro-patterns of past forms of decision-making within these processes. A completely different approach to the proto-political was developed by cultural critic Fredric Jameson in his influential study *The Political Unconscious*. Also taking into consideration Propp's structuralistic approach to folktale analysis, Jameson devised a complex, three-part hermeneutic scheme for the interpretation of past literary narratives in relation to Marxist dialectics. Given that his particular interest was how social conflicts are manifested in these narratives, his aim was to detect »ideologemes … the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes« (Jameson, 2002, 61).

In comparison to the mentioned approaches in an analysis of the proto-political in a historicist prism, which either offer a broader picture in patterns of transition or unfold the inherent mechanisms of class struggle, my interest lies in studying the proto-political in relation to the development of socio-political discourse in a given community. For this purpose, I use proto-political firstly as an operational term, which encompasses a transhistorical set of norms or referential code within a community, i.e. culture-bound patterns of dilemma conceptualization / resolving. These were developed in the period before the »invention« of the national political community, but had a strong impact on the development specifics of political culture within the nation-state.

The content of this referential code will be explored in this paper. This will be implemented by projecting the principles of deliberative democracy, i.e. inclusion, mutual respect, argumentation and notions of the common good (cf. e.g. Habermas, 1975; Cohen, 1986; Dryzek, 2009; Mansbridge et al., 2010) into the context of the narrative tradition. Structurally, this approach is similar to Habermas' tour de force endeavor in his *Theory of Communicative Action*. In this study he devised the tools of

deliberation in order to validate the norms of teleological rationality, including those which stem from »cognitive-instrumental rationality«. Compared to Habermas (1984), my approach, which connects narrative folklore with the discourse of social integration through the principles of deliberative democracy, is more open and contingent in relation to traditional norms, while the embedded patterns of decision-making will be studied in the epistemic logic of narrative folklore. This logic, as was most precisely defined by Walter Benjamin in his essay *The Storyteller*, is initially marked by unintentionality, tied to the primordial community-building role and transmission of experience, which is accessible only by intuitive »reasoning« (Benjamin, 2019, 48–76).[4] Studying the patterns of embedded decision-making is also advocated by recent research in the field of deliberative democracy, while acknowledging that social and cultural contexts play a pivotal role in the perceptions of dilemmas, thus impacting our notions of what is beneficial for society as a whole (Parthasarathy & Rao, 2018; Min, 2009; Schneiderhan & Khan, 2018; Boswell & Corbett, 2021; Horvat, 2021).

The starting points presented above follow Jack Zipes' approach to understanding the evolution of fairy tales within the theory of memetics (Zipes, 2006; 2012).[5] At the core of his theory is the understanding of the transhistorical and cultural transmission of fairy tale motifs as memes, easy-to-remember basic narrative elements, which adapt – in accordance with the »classical« theory of evolution – divergently to the new cultural environment. Since the number of fairy tale motifs is limited, it can thus be analyzed how they changed and adapted to the cultural context by studying versions of the same motif in different cultural and socio-historical environments.[6] Henceforth I thus supplement Zipes' theory of fairy tales

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4   More space would be needed to fully elaborate Benjamin's views on the role of narrative tradition and fairy tales. His essay The Storyteller, written in 1936, is namely essential in the understanding of the relationship between oral tradition and literary fairy tales, while Benjamin saw the decline of oral storytelling vis-a-vis literature as an epistemic change in the transmission of knowledge and experience (Benjamin, 2019).

5   It must be emphasized that Zipes's notion of the evolution of fairy tales applies also – or even predominantly – to folktales. Compared to some other fairy tale theorists (especially Bottigheimer, 2010), he namely stresses the origins of classic fairy tales in older sources, especially in oral tradition (cf. Zipes, 2012, 157–174).

6   The first researchers of fairy tales, the founders of the Finnish school of fairy tales, knew that the number of fairy tale motifs is limited. The mentioned thesis, well established in the sociological theory of fairy tales (Zipes, 2012), is supported also by the phylogenetic analysis of 275 fairy tales, carried out by folklorist Sara Graça da Silva and anthropologist Jamie Tehrani. The results of their study prove that most canonized fairy tales have an Indo-European origin, which in some cases goes back to the Bronze Age (da Silva & Tehrani, 2016). For instance, already at the end of the 19th century Marian Roalfe Cox (1893) annotated and published 345 variants of Cinderella (ATU 510A), noting medieval analogues, while today's folklorists list at least 1500 variants of this motif. Different versions of this fairy tale vividly show how fairy tales adapt to a new environment, sometimes also in the form of a collage of different stories, which creates completely new meanings. In the Slovenian version (cf. Unuk, 2002, 290–296), for instance, a male protagonist, Pepelko, appears, which is similar to the Irish fairy tale Liam Donn (cf. Brenk, 2017, 238–250). In the latter story, which is reminiscent of Scandinavian sagas, the main character, Prince Liam Donn, sets out across Europe to rescue a Greek princess, who was sent away from home by her father to protect the house from curses. Donn, who defeats three giants on the way to the Peloponnese and fights a sea monster for three days on his arrival in Greece, the last day in front of an audience, tries then to retreat into anonymity, but the princess slips his shoe off. The rest of the story is similar to the classic Cinderella, with the difference that in Irish version Greek men cut off their heels and toes to put prince's shoe on.

by shifting its research focus. In the dialectic between universal contents and their particular adaptations, within which fairy tales developed, and following Slavoj Žižek's conception of the »concrete universal« (cf. Kisner, 2014, 44–50), I will focus on how the universal forms were particularized, i.e. as embedded in specifics of the sociocultural community. Rather than the process of the adaptation of the particular fairy tale narrative matrix in different environments, I am interested in what the results of this process tells us about the cultural / cognitive matrices of the community in which adaptation took place. I will illustrate this approach with an example of the fairy tale motif from »The House of the Flies«, which will be discussed in greater detail further on. There are several versions of this motif in which the (animal) protagonist offers shelter to animals in distress. However, there are also significant differences between versions. In the first part of the Slovenian fairy tale *Mojca Pokrajculja*, the protagonist gives shelter to animals provided they have certain skills, while in the Ukrainian fairy tale *The Glove,* the protagonist accepts all the animals unconditionally. It is thus evident that in both communities different coordinates of seeing and resolving problem were established; in the case of this particular fairy tale motivated by the binaries of selfishness / solidarity on the one hand and utilitarianism / altruism on the other. One could argue that the different dilemma settings in the mentioned folktales are not necessarily causal in relation to decision-making patterns in the contemporary communities in which they have evolved. Nevertheless, it is evident, especially from the many new reinterpretations of this narrative in Slovenia, that folktales reflect the spectrum of dilemmas of the Slovenian social-political discourse, which society as a whole has not yet been able to resolve. The key challenge is thus to understand how folktale narratives, with their specific conceptualization of universal dilemmas, reflect culture-bound patterns of decision-making in relation to modern social and political discourse.

I will tackle this challenge in two steps. In the first I will unfold, in relation to the specifics of folktale narratives, the spectrum of methodological approaches that enable the analysis of the proto-political, i.e. cognitively and culturally conditioned decision-making matrices in a given society. I will then apply relevant methods to a comparative analysis of three fairy tales, which in the Slovenian environment form an important part of the narrative canon (*Mojca Pokrajculja*, *The Ant and the Lazy Cricket*, *The Bean, the Straw, and the Coal*). In the conclusion I will reflect upon the findings in relation to today's political discourse and suggest possible paths for further research of the narrative tradition in this prism.

FOLKTALES AND COGNITIVE MATRICES OF COMMUNITY

The relationship between fairy tales / folktales and the sphere of politics and ideology has been widely studied for at least half a century (Snyder, 1951; Zipes, 1975, 116). Mari Ness (2018) is namely quite right in stating that all classic fairy tales are »inherently political«. According to her, the only difference is that some are »expressly political«, others »subversively political«, and

still others are »accidentally political«.[7] On the other hand, it can be noted, along with contemporary folklorists, that with the development of a scientific approach to collecting and analyzing the folktales in the form as they are known today, folktales were not subjected to political instrumentalization.[8] In this respect it can be concluded that folk tales, although they have been adapted into a more reader-friendly form, are presented as they were passed from generation to generation, from one cultural community to another. In this sense, one can detect in folktales – although culturally and socio-historically bound – »effort on the part of both women and men to develop maps for coping with personal anxieties, family conflicts, social frictions, and the myriad frustrations of everyday life« (Tatar, 1999, xi). All fairy tales namely »begin with conflict because we all begin our lives with conflict. We are all misfit for the world, and somehow we must fit in, fit in with other people, and thus we must invent or find the means through communication to satisfy as well as resolve conflicting desires and instincts« (Zipes, 2012, 2). According to Zipes, fairy tales embody worlds of naïve morality and reveal universal dilemmas characteristic of all human societies throughout history. Over the centuries, fairy-tale motifs were adapted to new cultures; however, they were not subjected to the requirement to look French, German, Spanish, Slovenian, and so on, while they were spontaneously installed in corpora of pre-existing conflicts and dilemmas specific to the »host« community. In this respect, the patterns of transformation can be illustrated by the reflections of Jewish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer on writing within his native culture: »When I sit down to write a story, I am not saying to myself I am going to write a Jewish story. Just like when a Frenchman builds a house in France. He doesn't say he's going to build a French house. He is going to build a house for his wife and children, a convenient house. Since it's built in France, it comes out French« (Singer, 1992, 156).

When defining the transhistorical character of folktales in relation to (national) culture, one must rely on the sociology of nationalism. It is evident that narrative folklore cannot be captured within essentialist attributes of the nation (Smith, 1991), while it is the result of the pre-dated practices of communica-

7   The author mentions canonized fairy tales, which were scrutinized from the perspective of the "civilizing" process by Zipes (2021). In the socio-political context in the 16th and 17th centuries this primarily meant the legitimization of (new) social relations and the affirmation of certain patterns of appropriate behavior (Tratnik, 2020), and especially the disciplining of the role of children and women in society (Tratnik, 2022). But most (if not all) modern fairy tales are »political« in this sense, especially those in which the authors used the form of fairy tales to express subversive criticism, for example in the Weimar Republic (Zipes, 1997), in the Soviet system (Balina et al., 2005), or tried to induce a specific view of society, especially by using national folklore to affirm national pride / cultural nationalism, as the Grimms did (Norberg, 2022).

8   In Slovenia, for instance, the first collectors of folktales worked under the influence of nation-building ideas, however the desire for a mythological interpretation of the Slovenian oral tradition was already stopped towards the end of the 19th century by a younger, critical generation of philologists (Kropej Telban, 2021).

tion and deliberation (Anderson, 2007), which have been transformed over the centuries, i.e. already in the period before the invention of the cultural nation in the 19th century. This process of »inventing« the cultural substance, which was to become »national culture«, was always subjected to the dialectic between the particular and the universal, whereby culture, especially the specifics of language – as emphasized by cognitive linguists (Ungerer & Schmidt, 2013) – was an important »vehicle« on which universal dilemmas were concretized within the specifics of cultural community. It is also important to note that this process of building a referential code of past experiences, embodied in narrative folklore, took place spontaneously and before the creation of national public spheres (Habermas, 1989), although the results of this process were later transposed into the specifics of the (national) public sphere. Folk tales contain traces of the formation of this code, while in every version of the fairy tale »it is possible to find a trace of its context, i.e. the time and environment and other« conditions in which it was created« (Kropej Telban, 2021, 12). On this basis, for instance, Robert Darnton (2009) reconstructed social relations in pre-revolutionary France by analyzing fairy tales. However, an analysis of narrative folklore in the Slovenian environment, for instance, shows significant discrepancies between the world embodied in fairy tales and factual socio-historical circumstances (cf. e.g. Kropej, 1995). It is also necessary to stress the role of the storyteller in the process of the historical transmission of oral tradition. Anja Štefan, who is herself an excellent storyteller, points out that storytellers differ in their talents, in the ways in which they tell stories, and above all in their ability to weave everyday events into an already existing narrative and innovate it by adapting it to the external context. The narrator's personal creativity is thus manifested »both in the creation of the narrative and in the interpretation of this narrative, whereby the narrator not only follows his internal impulses, but also actively responds to external influences, the context« (Štefan, 1999, 28). The result of such a process in the historical transmission of the narrative tradition is various degrees of match or mismatch between the world of folktales and the socio-historical context in which they take their current form. In this current, always transitional form, folktales can act as meta-commentaries on social or moral conditions in a given community. They can, however, only exercise this role when they preserve their original non-intentionality, bound to the transmission of experiences and the community-building role that arises from the act of storytelling. Only in this way can folktales remain a trans-historical medium of expressing universal human dilemmas. If, on the other hand, they adapt too close to the concrete cultural and socio-historical specifics of the environment, they lose their universal appeal. From this point of view the difference between folktales, created through oral tradition, and literary fairy tales can be best expressed. The literary fairy tale, including classic and modern renditions of folk motifs, namely suspends the original function of folktales, tied to the specific transmission of knowledge through an intuitive understanding of reality. The

literary fairy tale inevitably binds the folk narrative in the specifics of the public sphere, which by default is a place of intentional reasoning. It is precisely this change, the suspension of the initial function of folktales that enables later political appropriation of the oral tradition.

The aforementioned studies suggest a more nuanced approach to the analysis of culture-bound decision-making and community cognitive matrices in the prism of its narrative tradition. An approach that is empirically necessarily based on folkloristic, ethnological and anthropological insights into the process of the transmission of fairy tales, but at the same time considers the primordial epistemic function of folk tales in the transmission of experiences (Benjamin, 2019). On the other hand, the important role of cultural matrices in the formation of today's decision-making patterns is confirmed by research in the field of cultural cognition and cultural perception (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983; Harre, 1984; Gastil et al., 2008; Hammack, 2008; Manosevitch & Friedman, 2021), although Yates & De Oliviera (2016) stress that most research is focused on comparisons between decision-making in (Eastern) collectivist cultures and (Western) individualistic ones, which according to them, is not sufficient to explain the nuances of decision-making in a particular culture.

It is telling that in his analysis of »cognitive-instrumental rationality«, Jürgen Habermas (1984) relied on the findings of Jean Piaget, one of the pioneers of cognitive sciences. Cognitive sciences namely understand human development as cultural and biological co-evolution. They are based on the premise that consciousness is not separated from the body, brain and interactions (embedded cognition), while human cognitive process also runs outside the brain (extended mind), it thus needs an environment that it adapts to and at the same time changes, while this environment includes interactions with other people as well as with cultural formations and nature (situated cognition). A new discipline in this field, cognitive history (cf. Dunér & Ahlberger, 2019), addresses the question of how cognitive patterns were formed within a specific cultural environment and how cognition regulates interpersonal relationships. It must be stressed, however, that proponents of this line of research point out that one should not see cognitive history as a deterministic discipline. It can illuminate certain aspects of behavior and decision-making from a new perspective, but it is necessary to take into consideration other factors that form individual cognition and cognitive matrices, i.e. cultural development and socio-historical changes. They also stress that the essentialization of cognitive matrices can lead to a new form of – scientifically supported – exclusivism. In this respect they point to the research which confirms that the basic cognitive patterns are common to all, but there are variations as the result of the community's adaptation to the environment (Dunér, 2019, 6).

A comparative analysis of folktales based on the concepts of cognitive history can offer insight into the cognitive matrices of a community. Following the cognitive historians, it is necessary to include an analysis of perception in such research. The latter namely assumes that the brain looks for patterns and

interprets them through previous patterns specific to a certain culture. At the same time, research also confirms that interpretations of the environment are not limited only to sensory perceptions, but arise from cognitive capacities and the specifics of memorization and categorization. All previous knowledge and experience are preserved in stories, folktales, myths, religious beliefs and shape the meaning of everything that people face, which requires the search for answers as to why only some parts of its tradition have been preserved in a certain cultural community. Cognitive historians also stress that the categorization of concepts is culturally conditioned, and its analysis is essential for understanding the separation of people into ethnic communities, classes, attitudes towards the Other, and so on, while the analysis of the literature can explain the level of intersubjectivity, for instance the role of empathy within the community and towards members of other cultures (Dunér, 2019, 10–22).

The research being proposed here would be an enormous undertaking and would demand the creation of a new methodology, heavily anchored in interdisciplinarity, in order to rethink specific patterns of the narrative tradition in relation to other traditions on the one hand and to universality on the other. Nevertheless, it is possible on the basis of the presented concepts, applied in comparative analysis of folktales, to discern certain images that arise from the collective cognitive matrices, in the case of the following analysis – the Slovenian matrix.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF SLOVENIAN FOLK TALES

Slovenian narrative folklore was influenced by a variety of different currents. In it, traces of antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the ideational heritage of the national awakening movements of the 19th century were identified (Kropej Telban, 2021). In its narrative canon there are tales dealing with the »rise« (Bottigheimer, 2010), that is the tales in which images of castles, princesses, princes and immeasurable wealth alternate with images of extreme poverty, outsiders, while depicting the world in which cunning and resourceful heroes thrive best. There are also tales which warn against greed (e.g. *Money does not bring happiness*, *About the lucky man's shirt, The water man*), and fairy tales that can be analyzed (or used) from the perspective of establishing a romantic canon of national/ literary heroes (*Ajdi*, *Kurent*, *King Matjaž*, *Peter Klepec*). But for our analysis, three folktales are particularly interesting, while all of them, each in their own way, thematize decision-making in relation to the principles of deliberative democracy (inclusion, mutual respect, argumentation, the common good). The latter applies to *Mojca Pokrajculja, The Ant and the Lazy Cricket, The Bean, the Straw, and the Coal*, folktales included in Slovenian anthologies (Brenk, 2021; Unuk, 2002). Our selection is therefore not arbitrary. They all deal with embedded decision-making patterns and reflect dilemmas of the Slovenian social-integrative discourse on the proto-political level.

Mojca Pokrajculja, one of the most famous, reprinted and analyzed Slove-
nian folktales (Blažić, 2021, 267–275; Kropej Telban, 2015, 411–417)[9], tells
the story of a girl named Mojca who bought a cooking pot for a coin. In this
pot she receives animals, asking her for shelter, but always with the question:
»If you know how to work and will help me in the pot, I will let you in.«
The protagonist offers entry to animals on the condition that they have certain
skills and are able to work. For example, the fox is a seamstress, the wolf is a
butcher, and the bear is a shoemaker, and they must prove their skills the next
morning. Kropej Telban (2015) explains that this fairy-tale type (ATU 283B*)
is widespread in the Baltic, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. These versions tell a
story about animals that settle in a »house«, which can also be represented by a
glove or even a skull, and the last to arrive is the bear, too big to enter, so he sits
on the »house« and squashes everybody. A story is usually interpreted by the
message »No good deed goes unpunished« (Dobrota je sirota), which also ap-
plies to Slovenian counterparts *The Girl and the Pot* (*ATU *283C*) However,
the Slovenian folktale *Mojca Pokrajculja* is also different in this respect, which
is why folklorists assigned it a different number (*ATU *283C* + 15A). In
addition to the different treatment of the initial motif, the Slovenian version has
a continuation, an etiological story about why the rabbit has a short tail.

An explanation for this is given in the second part of *Mojca Pokrajculja* with
the role of the fox, which licks the honey collected by the bear, and puts the
blame on the rabbit, who then breaks his front legs while running away from the
animals, while Mojca ends up alone.

Folklorists are thus able to explain the origin and development of this folktale,
also that it is a combination of two narratives, »The House of the Flies« and the
etiological story. In this respect two complex corpuses of meanings collide, which
creates the impression of elusiveness regarding the »message«. However, compared
to the related Ukrainian version of the tale entitled *The Glove* (*Rokavička*, 2021)*,
where the mouse accepts all the animals unconditionally, *Mojca Pokrajculja* calls
for a re-assessment of the protagonist's behavior. For instance, Slovenian writer
Vinko Möderndorfer, grandson of the collector who wrote down *Mojca Pokra-
jculja*[10], interprets the tale from the perspective of the myth concerning the value
of hard work. According to him, Mojca Pokrajculja »demystifies the greatest myth
of the twentieth century, the myth of work, honesty and truth, and at the same time,
the Slovenian tale, ironizes the myth of a working nation on the shadow and sunny
side of the Alps ... In its demythification of the moral imperatives of humanity, it is
relentless, cruel and true« (Möderndorfer, 2002, 99).

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9   It is also necessary to mention diploma theses in this field. Nadja Belič (2016) researched, under the
     mentorship of Milena Mileva Blažić, preschool children's reactions to the fairy tales, including Mojca
     Pokrajculja. Under the mentorship of Tomo Virk, Ines Metličar (2019) researched the perceptions of the
     characters in Mojca Pokrajculja in a group of preschool children and adults / their parents.
10   Mojca Pokraljculja was written down by Vinko Möderndorfer (1894–1958) and was first published in
     1924 in *Narodne pripovedke iz Mežiške doline* (Folktales from Mežica Valley).

Fig. 1: Characteristic of most contemporary illustrations of the fairy tale Mojca Pokrajculja *is the visual characterization of the protagonists. This also applies to Marjan Manček's illustrations, while the artist emphasized the role of the protagonists and, in particular, the unfortunate fate of the rabbit, through their facial expressions (Mojca Pokrajculja, 2022, cover page).*

On the other hand, the most renowned Slovenian fairy tale writers, such as Svetlana Makarovič and Anja Štefan, tried to soften the folktale by bringing it closer to the Ukrainian version, which is also popular in Slovenia. The key questions of these adaptations concern patterns of inclusion and the topic of contributing to the common good. The first issue refers to the role of the fox in this tale. The fox, presented as a personification of hypocrisy, lies and deception in the Slovenian narrative canon is also the most common character in Slovenian animal fairy tales (Kropej Telban, 2015, 35). In the fairy tale *Under the Bear's Umbrella* (*Pod medvedovim dežnikom*), Makarovič (2019) turns the story around in such a way that the kind-hearted bear who takes the animals under his umbrella in the rain is rewarded, while the fox, who denied the animals shelter, is left all alone in the end. Štefan (2015) approached the same fairy tale motif in a different way. In her *Bobek and the Boat* (*Bobek and Barčica*) the main protagonist Bobek, this time in the role of a sailor, also offers entry to

Fig. 2: More than the role of the protagonists, the Ukrainian version of this fairy tale pushes forward the humanistic idea of unconditional inclusivity. The idea of a possible world where everyone who seeks refuge is welcome is supported by illustrator Hana Stupica with dreamy, melancholic images in the background (Rokavička, 2021).

the animals on the condition they have skills and can work. He also welcomes the bear on board, which, heavy as it is, sinks the boat. But in this version, it is the fox, which – in addition to her negative characteristics – is also clever and comes up with the idea to build a bigger boat together. With the message that everybody deserves a chance and everybody can contribute to solving problems / the common good, Štefan somehow »resolves« the question of the fox and the bear; i.e. everyone stays as they are, everybody can help in solving common problems, and no one is left alone.

The fairy tale *The Ant and the Lazy Cricket* (ATU 280A) deals even more directly with the issue of the common good, merit and work. At the core of this story is the relationship between the hardworking ants, who gather food in the summer in preparation of the winter months, while the cricket (in the more widespread versions, the grasshopper) sings and makes music during this period. When the winter comes, he seeks refuge with the ants in vain. The tale is a variation of Aesop's fable, which ends with a moral lesson about the importance of work and careful preparation for an uncertain future. The fable was re-interpreted by the French writer Jean de la Fontaine in the 17th century. He kept the original message but he placed the theme of compassion and almsgiving into the story. In addition, in his version, the ants righteously accept the grasshopper, but the tale concludes with an

Fig. 3 and fig. 4: The tale The Ant and the Lazy Cricket / Grasshopper*, based on Aesop's fable, was depicted by prominent French painters and illustrators from the 18th and 19th centuries. While the illustration (wood engravings), created by J. J. Grandville for the edition of* Fables de La Fontaine 1838–1840*, with its anthropomorphized images of the ant and the grasshopper, still maintains links with the animal protagonists of the fable (picture 3, left), an illustration created by Gustave Doré around 1880 reflects the transfer of the motif to a social context (picture 4, right) (Wikimedia Commons).*

ambiguous ending regarding the value of the artist/ grasshopper in modern society: »You sang, didn't you? Nice. Now dance«. From the 18th century the fable has undergone a series of adaptations, whereby the role of the grasshopper / cricket was increasingly depicted in relation to the position of the artist in modern society, while the writers used this story to expose the pitfalls of a utilitarian mind-set.[11]

The motif also resonated in the Slovenian environment. Almost fifteen different versions of this motif have survived. The 19th century adaptation of Slovenian bishop Anton Martin Slomšek (Kropej Telban, 2015, 404–408) stands out, while in it, already during summer the cricket receives a long and strict moral lesson about the importance of work in preparation for difficult times. In most Slovenian interpretations, Aesop's original message about the value of hard work is preserved. The only

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11 The motif has been used in literature – inter alia – by Jean Anouilh, W. Somerset Maugham, James Joyce, John Updike, while the Italian communist writer Gianni Rodari, in his poem, dismissed all the debates about compassion and alms, initiated by La Fontaine' rendition, with the point that the ant just gives half of its food to the grasshopper.

Fig. 5 and fig. 6: The illustrations of the tale The Bean, the Straw, and the Coal *created by Walter Crane in 1882 for the English translation of Grimm's fairy tales highlight the mischievous laughter of the Bean and the role of the Tailor who – while turning his back to the viewer – sews up the Bean's torn belly (Wikimedia Commons).*

exception is the fairy tale from Rezija, which was recorded in 1969 by the collector Milko Matičetov. In this version the ants agree to shelter the grasshopper in the winter to »sing«, as they »do not know how to do that« (cf. Štefan, 2019, 35–36). Other Slovenian versions also reflect the role of artists and their contribution to the common good. In this respect Maja Kastelic's comic / picture book (2020) stands out, while in her interpretation the ants eventually fall in love with cricket's music.

Fairy tales and folk tales that thematize patterns of inclusion and exclusion, common good, tolerance and empathy are otherwise rare in the narrative tradition. Compared to today's fairy tales, in which these themes are one of the most common in this genre now intended for children, most folktales arise from the feudal world, characterized by a strict tripartite social structure (the clergy, nobility and peasants) and the motto »might is right«. On the other hand, some

fairy tales that emerged from medieval poetry metaphorically problematize who is entitled to what and how to deal with moral and social dilemmas (Ziolkowski, 2010). Among such narratives, *The Bean, the Straw, and the Coal* (ATU* 295) stands out. In its most basic form, it tells the story h ow the Bean, the Straw and the Coal crossed the stream. The Straw offers itself as a footbridge, and when the Coal tries to cross the stream on it, it breaks, and they both fell into the water, while the Bean laughs so hard at their misfortune that it bursts. The evolution of the motif has already been studied in detail (Matičetov, 1959; Grafenauer, 1960; Kropej Telban, 2015, 427–430).

The fairy tale entitled *The Journey of the Straw, the Coal, and the Bean* (*Strohhalm, Kohle und Bohne auf der Reise*) was published in 1812 in the broth-ers Grimms' first collection *Children's and Household Fairy Tales* (Kinder- und Hausmärchen). Later, in 1837, the Grimms published a new version of the tale, which is longer and has a prologue. Analyses show that they drew from two sources. While in the first edition they cite as a source only Dorothee Catharine Wild, the wife of an apothecary in Kassel, in the second edition they mention a humorous hexagram published in 1648 in *Nugae Venales* and a Latin poem from the manuscript entitled *Burkard Waldis*, dated 1542. The latter mentions only a mouse and a coal on a pilgrimage to church, whereby the coal falls into the water, while the mouse does not laugh but responds with penance (cf. Loo, 2014; Grafenauer, 1960).

Different sources cited by the Grimms have led folklorists to different in-terpretations of the evolution of this motif. It is evident that – in accordance with their approach to processing the material, in this case, oral, and then also archival – the Grimms cleansed the story of all religious content and flattened its initial social layers to push forward the point they were trying to make (Zi-olkowski, 2010). If in the 1812 version, two alternative scenarios are mentioned – including the version in which the Bean falls into the stream and his stomach bursts because he drank too much water – in the 1837 collection only the version in which his stomach bursts due to laughing is kept. At the same time, the 1837 version includes direct speech and a prequel, in which it is explained that an elderly woman stokes the fire with straw in order to cook the beans faster. The latter version has all the features of Grimm's fairy tales. Set in a rural setting, it appeals to the lower / middle classes, which is consistent with the Grimms' ef-forts to consolidate the German folkloric tradition (Norberg, 2022). At the same time, in this version, all the protagonists are psychologically characterized. The role of the Straw who laments the loss of »sixty friends« is pushed to the fore. The Straw, also presented as a problem-solver, selflessly offers itself as a foot-bridge over the stream. The Bean is presented as an active, reckless character that encourages retreat to »foreign places«, while the Coal is depicted – just like in Aesop's fable about the scorpion and the frog – as a victim of its impulsive »hot-blooded« character (»hitziger Natur«). Through their intervention in the material, the Grimms thus unraveled the possible dilemmas opened up by the
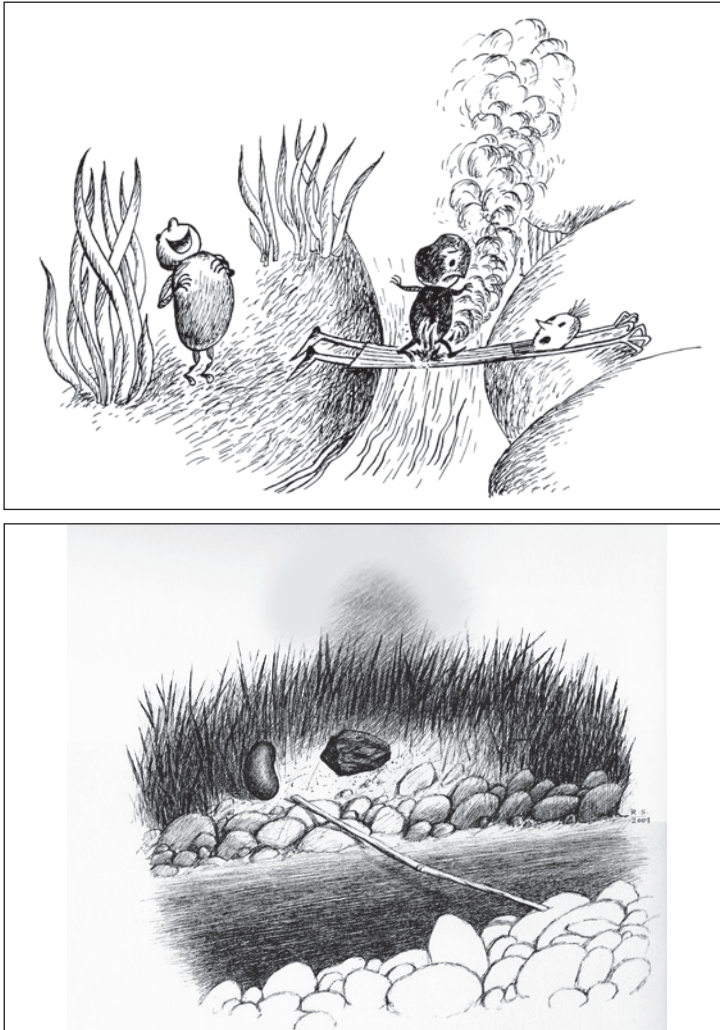
Fig. 7 and fig. 8: The illustrations of the fairy tale The Bean, the Straw, and the Coal *clearly reflect the development and meanings of this motif over the last two centuries. Ančka Gošnik Godec (picture 7, above) visually interpreted the motif in the collection* Babica pripoveduje *(Brenk, 2021, 124) more kindly, but similarly to Walter Crane's illustrations. The illustration by Rudi Skočir, which he created for* Slovenske pravljice *(Unuk, 2002, 112), stands out, while the illustration itself reflects the initial dilemma in the fairy tale almost like a mathematical problem (picture 8, below). It should also be noted that the Russian version of this fairy tale,* The Bubble, the Straw and the Blast Shoe, *also has many visual interpretations. In 1959 the popular cartoon* Three Woodsmen, *directed by Leonid Amalrik, was created based on this fairy tale motif.*

older narratives, but in such a way that the message can only be determined subjectively, or – as Benjamin suggested – intuitively. Following Matičetov (1959) who noted the important role of The Straw in the story, we could conclude that the Grimm brothers – while taking into account their preference for benevolent but righteousness king (Norberg, 2022) – warned that solidarity, »comradeship« between the oppressed classes is always doomed to failure. Such an ideological reading is, of course, speculative. In this case it can also be misleading because in the end the Grimms focus their attention on the fate of the Bean, whose belly the tailor sews up, but using a black thread. So the message of the tale, which takes the form of an etiological story, remains ambivalent, given the fact that the Grimms surely knew that beans with a black seam do not exist. However, as they insisted on this end to the story, even in 1837 and in later editions, it can be concluded that they intentionally marked the malicious laughter of the Bean with a deep scar.

Milko Matičetov (1959) discovered four versions of this motif in the Slovenian narrative tradition. The oldest, in its most basic form, was written in 1874 by Fran Levstik for the edition of *Vrtec* (*Kindergarten*). A new version was published in the same publication in 1892 by Fran Saleški Finžgar, who then reworked the story, entitled *Bobkova zaplata*, for the 1949 edition of school textbooks. Matičetov also cites the versions of the storytellers Lojze Tratar and Ana Kostanjevec, which he recorded himself in the 1 960s. But Finžgar's treatments of the motif from 1892 and 1949 stand out, as in both of them – similar to the Grimms – he brought forward the unfortunate fate of the Straw. His versions differ in that the first contains the moralistic thought of a »punishing God«, while the second ends with an etiological point. However, these kinds of renditions were typical of Socialist systems.

It is interesting that in comparison with Ivan Grafenauer's study (1960), Matičetov does not explore this motif within the Swiss versions of the fairy tale, where the Mouse tries to »heal« its torn belly; the latter is presented in the form of cumulative tales, known in the Slovenian environment as the motif of the Mouse that crawled over the fence (ATU 295+2030). Matičetov, on the other hand, points to the Lusatian-Serbian fairy tale *The Three Good Friends*, where one of the protagonists is a Bubble. This version was evidently transmitted from Russian version *The Bubble, the Straw and the Blast Shoe,* in which all the protagonists end up dead. Characteristic of this version is that the Straw has no say in the decision-making. Namely, the Shoe suggests to the Bubble that they should swim across the stream, but in the end the Bubble's suggestion that the Straw should make a bridge is accepted. When the Straw breaks, both of them drown and the Bubble bursts with laughter (Afanas'ev, 1998, 28–29). The message of the Russian fairy tale is most often associated with a necessity for careful planning. What is highlighted is the need to include different aspects in solving the problem. Namely, the Straw has no say in decision-making, even though it »knows« that it will break if a shoe steps on it.

The version that is canonized in the Slovenian environment is younger than those cited by Matičetov and Grafenauer. It was written in dialect by Tine Logar and was adapted by Kristina Brenk for the anthology of Slovenian folk tales *Babica pripoveduje* (2021) and equipped with the explanation that it is a Venetian fairy tale from Saržento at Čedad. This version stands out with three changes in relation to previous versions. Firstly, instead of an opening about an old woman cooking lunch, it opens with a conflict. In the very first sentence it is revealed that the wife is a chatterbox who neglects her household duties, and she hastily made a fire with a straw so that her husband would not get angry again when half-cooked beans are placed on the table. Secondly, the characterization of the protagonists is also different. The Straw, the Coal and the Bean decided together to run away from the kitchen and the Straw also offers itself as a footbridge over the stream. However, in the forefront is the role of the Bean, which, compared to Grimms's and also Finžgar's tales, is allowed to cross the bridge, although he also end up with a burst belly. Finally, in the Slovenian version the Tailor sews up his belly, not with black, but with white thread. In this respect it seems that the story pushes forward etiological explanation. However, with this intervention, the resolution of the initial conflict is being transferred from the involved protagonists to the mediator, to the »third party« (Ury, 2002), i.e. from the Straw to the Tailor. In the inability of the protagonists to act »reasonably«, a third party gains a prominent role, i.e. someone who is able to »sew up« the conflict, but does not know or care about its initial cause.

CONCLUSION

Folktales, of course, do not offer lessons, and less so moral guidance. They indicate how the space of past experiences, within which the community traditionally seeks solutions to conflicts, is being structured. Because they address dilemmas on an existential, pre-discursive level, from the Life-World, because they are perceived as the last links with the unidentified past of the community, they are effective in exercising this social role even today. In this respect they invoke underlying cognitive matrices through which the political community traditionally thinks itself. Hence attempts to »fix« fairy tales by modern fairy tales writers, knowing that past dilemmas are being transposed into the contemporary socio-political discourse.

In this respect *Mojca Pokrajculja* and *The Ant and the Lazy Cricket* highlight the pitfalls of a utilitarian mind-set in relation to social cohesion, especially with the topical question of who contributes to the common good, thus addressing the notions and role of the Other in Slovenian society (Roma, immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, migrants from the Maghreb and the Middle East, indirectly also the meaning and role of various professions, not only artists, in contributing to the common good and general well-being). All the folktales analyzed, especially *The Bean, the Straw, and the Coal*, thematize the power and powerlessness of deliberation in resolving conflicts, while hinting intuitively at the initial origins of these conflicts.

The present analysis asserts, however, that all readings, interpretations and renditions of the narrative tradition are not only socio-historically conditioned, but inevitably subjective. It should also be emphasized once more that it is not possible to identify specific cognitive or moral matrices that characterize decision-making in a certain community based on particular cases of folktales. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the categorization of collective cognition, it can be stressed that these particular of folktales versions entered into the Slovenian collective subconscious. Retrospectively, it can be concluded – although the selection of today's canonized fairy tales was not random – that they somehow performatively resonate with the cognitive matrices of community and its dilemmas on the intersubjective level (Life-World) and within the System (Habermas, 1984). Finally, the key question is how to deal with tradition in this respect. Habermas claimed the full legitimacy of the principles of the Enlightenment to analyze the pitfalls of teleological »cognitive-instrumental reasoning«. However, acknowledging the tenacity of culturally and traditionally embedded rationality, in particular with a view on their role in community-building, one argues for a more nuanced approach in studying the role of tradition, which ultimately rests on Benjamin's understanding of the value of »past experiences« for today's deliberation.

KOGNITIVNE MATRICE V SLOVENSKIH LJUDSKIH PRAVLJICAH IN SODOBNE PRAKSE DELIBERACIJE: OD UTILITARISTIČNE MISLI MOJCE POKRAJCULJE DO NEDOUMLJIVEGA FIŽOLČKOVEGA SMEHA

Marjan HORVAT

Inštitut IRRIS za raziskave, razvoj in strategije družbe, kulture in okolja,
Čentur 1F, 6273 Marezige, Slovenija
e-mail: marjan.horvat@irris.eu

POVZETEK

Namen prispevka je osvetliti, kako ljudske pravljice s specifičnim konceptualiziranjem univerzalnih dilem odražajo kulturno pogojene vzorce odločanja v razmerju do sodobnega družbenopolitičnega diskurza. Ljudske pravljice zato obravnavam najprej kot izraz kognitivno / kulturno pogojenih matric, ki v polju proto-političnega določajo »kognitivno-instrumentalno racionalnost«, vezano na tradicije in kulturne norme (Jürgen Habermas). Te matrice raziskujem z novim pristopom, v katerem povežem sociološko teorijo pravljic, ki upošteva kulturne, komunikacijske in kognitivne vidike v transhistorični in medkulturni transmisiji ljudskih pravljic (Jack Zipes), novejšo teorijo deliberativne demokracije, ki poudarja vpliv družbenozgodovinskih in kulturnih vzorcev na današnje prakse odločanja, ter raziskovalna orodja kognitivne zgodovine. Obenem vpliv kulture in tradicije na današnje vzorce odločanja proučujem v epistemski logiki pripovednega izročila, kjer je v ospredju neintencionalnost, ki zadeva le njegovo skupnost-tvorno vlogo in prenos kolektivnih izkušenj (Walter Benjamin). Empirični del zajema analizo treh slovenskih pravljic: Mojca Pokrajculja, Muren (kobilica) in mravlje in Fižolček, ogelček in slamica. Kognitivne / kulturne matrice slovenske epistemologije osvetlim v transhistorični in primerjalni perspektivi, torej z vidika razvoja tega motiva v slovenskem in v tujih okoljih. V sklepu sugeriram izhodišča za nove raziskave razmerij med kognitivnimi / kulturnimi matricami in sodobnim vzorci odločanja z vidika neizkoriščenih možnosti, ki zadeva vpliv kolektivnih izkušenj v stabilizaciji družbeno-integrativnega diskurza.

Ključne besede: ljudske pravljice, kulturna percepcija, vzorci odločanja, deliberativna demokracija, kognitivna zgodovina, študiji primerov

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