"Laments Are Made by Life and Pain": Ethnographic Interviews as a Context for Performing Greek Death Laments

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This article investigates how death laments were constructed by their performers as a genre and acquired their meaning through ethnographic interviews conducted in three Greek mountain villages in 2017. The analysis is based on anthropological and folkloristic performance-oriented research. The situational communication with and about laments, especially the process of negotiating an appropriate performance, proved to be a fruitful source of knowledge about the local lament genre. It is argued that the role of musical features of performance, such as the tempo of singing, could be established as prominent in the process of constructing the local genre of the death lament in the interviews.

▪ **Keywords**: ethnographic interview, folklore as communication, performance research, entextualization, Greek death laments

Avtorica je preučila, kako so izvajalci v etnografskih intervjujih, opravljenih v treh grških gorskih vaseh, ustvarili žalostinke ob smrti kot žanr in kako so v intervjujih pridobivale svoj pomen. Situacijska komunikacija z žalostinkami in o njih se je pokazala za ploden vir znanja o lokalnem žanru žalostinke. Avtorica dokazuje, da je bilo mogoče ugotoviti, da je v intervjujih vloga glasbenih značilnosti izvedbe v ospredju pri oblikovanju žanra.

▪ **Ključne besede**: etnografski intervju, folklora kot komunikacija, raziskave performance, entekstualizacija, grške žalostinke

Figure 1: View across the Pindos mountain range from the village of Eratyra in April 2017. Photo: Riikka Patrikainen, 26.4.2017.

Introduction

It is April 2017, and spring is in full bloom in the highlands of West Macedonia, Greece. A fresh green mountain view with red poppy fields passes by the car window, and far to the east one can see the snow-covered peak of Mount Olympus. Only a week has passed since the cheerful Orthodox Easter Sunday, so visibly celebrated throughout Greece, and now is the forty-day celebration period of it. We are on a fieldwork journey in the home region of my husband Ioannis, and our aim is to interview people that have practiced lamenting at funerals. Unlike in Greece, in my home country, Finland, ritual lamenting is found nowadays only in archives. Although Greece belonged to my life for over twenty years, I had never experienced a lament performance, and neither had my husband.

The lamenting tradition is known to exist in certain mostly rural areas in various places of Greece. Finding lamenters was not easy, and our quest resembled the work of a detective more than a scholar. Eventually, the path to the source of information in the north passed through the south, through the folklore studies communities in Athens and through scholars and traditional enthusiasts familiar with it in Thessaloniki. Laments were also expectedly challenging to perform in interviews for various reasons. First, the subject is delicate because performing laments evokes difficult memories of death and loss. Second, death laments are meant to be performed on ritual occasions, a context quite different from ethnographic interviews. Finally, laments are ritual songs mastered by elderly women, and they present a vernacular worldview – one that is pre-Christian in their poetry – that stands in opposition to the main religion of Greece, Eastern Orthodoxy (see, e.g., Caraveli-Chaves, 1980: 129). Would our informants find it comfortable to perform these ritual songs in front of a foreigner and a scholar, who even brought along her husband, an Orthodox priest?

The oral poetry of laments depicts an ancient worldview. Unlike the Christian paradise, the place where dead people go is called *Hades* (Άδης);[1] it is the land of the dead under the earth and is ruled by an ancient divinity of the same name. This place is also called the *Káto Kósmos* (Κάτω Κόσμος), literally meaning the 'place or the people under the earth'. The ancient deity that collects the souls of the dead is called *Cháros* (Χάρος), who acts in laments by the command of Hades or the Christian god (Du Boulay, 2009: 228). Many of the laments include quite brutal images of how the Black Earth eats the buried dead. In her thorough study of Greek death laments, *"Black Earth" and Helen: Rituals of Death and Rebirth: Chthonic Mythology, Ceremonies of Death and Laments in Contemporary Greece* ("Μαυρηγή" και Ελένη: τελετουργίες θανάτου και αναγέννησης: χθόνια μυθολογία, νεκρικά δρώμενα και μοιρολόγια στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα, 2008), largely

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[1] This article uses pronunciation transliteration in Greek. If there is already an English equivalent for some words and names, I use them. In direct quotes, I have also retained the stresses of the Greek words.

based on her fieldwork, the Greek lament researcher Eleni Psychogiou (2008) states that the *Mavrigí* (literally, 'Black Earth') in Greek death laments represents Mother Earth, a divinity even older than the gods in ancient Greek mythology.

In her research on lamenting, Anna Caraveli already wrote in 1980 that "[t]he present generation of lament poets is undoubtedly the last link in an uninterrupted chain of transmission" (Caraveli-Chaves, 1980: 129). Despite this assertion, the chain of transmission of laments remains unbroken until today; however, the custom of lamenting for the dead has become even more marginal. According to Caraveli's definition, Greek death laments are "performed during ritual activities such as funerals, memorial services, and visits to the cemetery […]. The poetry accompanying such ritual activities is sung unaccompanied to various melodic patterns which differ from locality to locality" and they "[a]re usually punctuated by stylized wails and intersections of pain." Laments are an "orally transmitted" genre that is "composed and performed by women only" (Caraveli-Chaves, 1980: 129).

During our fieldwork journey, we recorded knowledge about funeral customs, laments, and lament performances in three West Macedonian mountain villages. The interviews took place in the interviewees' homes as group interviews. In general, the funeral customs were the same in these villages, with only Eratyra standing out as a village with a lost culture of lamenting. On the first day, we interviewed the lamenters of Aiani, a small town of two thousand people in the regional unit of Kozani. On the second day, we conducted interviews in the neighboring regional unit of Voio – first in the small town of Eratyra, which has a population of about one thousand, and then in the small village of Horigos with approximately fifty people.

The livelihood of these villages has long been based on agriculture but, along with urbanization in the twentieth century, working-age people largely left these areas. All my interviewees were elderly women (who told us that younger ones did not know how to lament), born between the 1920s and 1940s. Following Greek custom, the women wore only dark colors as the symbol of the death of a close person, usually a family member. They had married young and they had performed their life work as housewives that had taken care of the house and the family as well as working in the fields. They all had a personal relationship with the lamenting tradition, whether living or now forgotten.

Greek laments as a focus of research

Much prior research on Greek death laments in the twentieth century is characterized by a focus on the written form of lament poetry. Initially, our informants also thought we were only interested in "collecting" poetry texts. In any case, Greek culture is unique with its long literary tradition of poems; one can trace the roots of the ritual

laments back to the time of Homer. This opportunity to study laments by comparing modern laments with historical sources makes Greek laments a unique research topic in the European context (Håland, 2014: 4). *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (2002 [1974]) by Margaret Alexiou was the bedrock study presenting this continuity of oral tradition to an international audience.[2]

The focus on laments as a part of the life of society, and not as contextless poems, started to interest scholars toward the end of the twentieth century. Long-term research based on fieldwork by scholars such as Anna Caraveli, Loring M. Danforth, Nadia Seremetakis, and Juliet Du Boulay has served as an inspiring model because their work provides profound insights into how oral poetry works as a part of the life of the community, how laments are used as female power in the life of an otherwise patriarchal society (Danforth and Seremetakis), how laments form a female culture providing information about the values and hardships concerning women's role in society (Caraveli), what their function is as part of the rites of passage of the village and in an Orthodox context (Danforth), or as a genre that communicates with other genres of the society connected with its central values, which are strongly influenced by Orthodoxy (Du Boulay).

This research adds to previous fieldwork-based research by analyzing ethnographic interviews, with a focus on the analysis of situational communication with and about laments in the contexts of the interviews. The aim is to produce information about the meaning of Greek death laments for their performers by analyzing the process through which they were performed in the interviews.

Articulating the central concepts of studying folklore as communication

The term *performance* already gained popularity in various academic disciplines in the mid-1950s. Simon Shepherd, a professor emeritus of theater and drama in London, studied the popularity and development of the concept of performance in scholarly use in his comprehensive work *The Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory* (2016). According to him, the work of the Canadian sociologist Erwing Goffman in particular had an impact on thinking about performance. Most accounts of the development of a non-theatrical concept of performance begin with his 1956 work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Shepherd, 2016: 1, 3).

According to Shepherd, articulating a general theory of performance is difficult, among other things because "[i]n terms of performance the substantial change, over the last sixty or so years, has been a new understanding of what it is that we are meant

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[2]   With regard to the Balkan Peninsula, the Slavic tradition of funeral laments has been studied by Oksana Mikitenko (1992).

to be studying" (Shepherd, 2016: 221). Bringing together his observations, he suggests the following definition for the concept of performance: "[It] is both a practice and a mode of analysis. It is communicative behavior for which there is no other name […]. It is a mode of analysis that works by framing, thinking of, its material as if it were performed, which is to say as if it were a deliberate communicative practice" (Shepherd, 2016: 222–223). The wide use of the same term creates ambiguity in using performance as a mode of analysis. The folklorist Richard Bauman describes the many uses of the performance approach by stating that "[t]he term 'performance' and its grammatical variants and compound forms cover a lot of ground, and the terrain is far from clearly marked […] none of these approaches are mutually incompatible and, in the hands of various practitioners, they often combine quite freely" (Bauman, 2011: 707). Therefore, one should be exact about describing the method of performance analysis in use – also in folkloristic performance research.

This article follows the example of U.S. performance-oriented folklorists, anthropologists, and linguists, such as Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, and Dell Hymes, in understanding the concept of performance. Since the early 1970s, the development of folklore studies has been multidisciplinary, and this has taken place with one main focus of interest: the situational use of language. This approach first appeared in research by Dell Hymes, in "the ethnography of communication" (Bauman, 1975: 290; Shepherd, 2016: 36). Basically "[a] crucial move in the establishment of performance approaches was a shift from the study of texts to the analysis of the emergence of texts in contexts" (Bauman, Briggs, 1990: 66).

This direction of research, in which the context of the emergence of oral folklore was central to its interpretation, had already been indicated by Alan Dundes in 1964 (the aim of folklore studies is "to discover exactly how language is used in specific situations") and Dan Ben-Amos in 1971 (the crucial context for the text is "the performance situation" (Dundes, Bronner, 2007: 6; Ben-Amos, 2020 [1971]: 24–25). In folklore studies, this "new emphasis on performance directed attention away from the study of the formal patterning and symbolic content of texts to the emergence of verbal art in the social interaction between performers and audiences" (Bauman, Briggs, 1990: 60). This shift in focus started the development of a whole new field of study and thinking. The questions that performance-oriented research on oral folklore poses are the following: What does one actually *do* in using verbal art in the interaction between the performer and audience in specific situations? What is the function of oral folklore as communication? What do we need oral folklore for in the conduct of social life?[3]

Richard Bauman has been developing the concepts of performance-centered research, starting with his well-known article "Verbal Art as Performance" (1974). In this article, Bauman says that he develops "a conception of verbal art as performance, based

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[3] See Bauman and Briggs, 1990.

upon an understanding of performance as a mode of speaking." In his articulation of this new object of study, Bauman makes it clear that "not every 'doing' of an item of folklore is necessarily a performance in the more marked sense of the term" (Bauman, 2012: 101). Bauman qualifies the term *performance* as a "distinctive frame, available as a communicative resource along with the others to speakers in particular communities" which "as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence" (Bauman, 1974: 293). For Bauman, performance is always a joint achievement of the performer and the audience, based on the communicative skill of the performer. As communication, it stands out as a way of influencing the audience with a special intensity (ibid.).

In creating terminology for studying this phenomenon, Bauman borrows the concept of "keying the performance" from the sociologist Erwing Goffman (Bauman, 1974: 295, 1992: 45), which means that "each community will make use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means to key the performance so that communication within that frame will be understood as performance within that community" (Bauman, 1992: 45). According to Bauman (2012: 100–101), these "[k]eys to performance" are "'metasignals' that alert co-participants to interpret the act of expression as performance," which "are to be discovered ethnographically, not assumed a priori."

Nonetheless, not all the keys are necessarily culture-specific (Bauman, 1992: 45). As an example of possible keys he gives, for example, special framing formulas; formal patterning principles or devices; special speech styles, or registers; special prosodic patterns of tempo, stress, and pitch; special paralinguistic patterns of voice quality and vocalization; appeals to tradition; special kinds of bodily movement; special settings conventionally associated with performance; and disclaimers of performance (Bauman, 1974: 295; Bauman, Braid, 1998: 110–111). What is important about Bauman's list is that we are not simply dealing with language but also with "paralinguistic features" (Shepherd, 2016: 39), meaning the elements that are left in communication by speech after subtracting the verbal content.

Entextualization and laments as text

The development of performance-centered research brought about new thinking of the semiotic process through which the performance of oral folklore gains its meaning as part of social life. In the article "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life" (1990), Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs introduce the concept of entextualization as "the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting. A text, then, from this vantage point, is discourse rendered decontextualizable" (Bauman, Briggs, 1990: 73). This concept defines a phenomenon

that is close to the former formulations of the study of performance but not exactly the same: "The means and devices outlined as 'keys to performance' […] may be seen as indices of entextualization"; performance is one mechanism of entextualization, which "as a frame intensifies entextualization" (Bauman, Briggs, 1990: 74). "Keying" is about meta-signaling the audience how to interpret the communication in question as performance within that community (Bauman, 1992: 45), whereas "entextualization" means the elements of communication – whether the communicative frame is performance or something else – that make the communication recognized as a certain genre also outside the performing context and render quoting possible.

The new approach to interpreting the meaning of oral folklore eventually changes the understanding of the bedrock concepts of folklore research such as genre. In their article "The Ethnography of Performance in the Study of Oral Traditions," Bauman and Braid (1998: 114) state that "[g]enre is commonly used as a classificatory concept, a way of grouping oral traditions into normative typological categories – fairy tale, legend, myth, ballad, riddle, and so on – each with its conventional defining attributes." They continue that "[i]n terms of performance, though, genre is better understood as a socially provided and culturally shaped framework for the production and reception of discourse, a model (or frame of reference, or set of expectations) that serves as a guide for the fashioning of an appropriately formed, intelligible utterance." It is "the system of generic discriminations employed by the members of the performance community" the researchers are looking for, "not the more universal analytic categories formulated by scholars for comparative purposes" (ibid.).

In his international study on lamenting, "Crying Shame: Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament" (2009), the U.S. anthropologist and lament researcher James Wilce defines the genre of laments by their performance. His research is a synthesis of his own fieldwork across different continents and written sources, and he sets out the following general definition of what unites this genre across the world: the "combination of three elements – tuneful, texted weeping" (Wilce, 2009: 1). The genre cannot thus be identified without the simultaneous occurrence of these three performance elements. For the purpose and goal of performing laments, Wilce (2009: 2) states that "Lament is a typically improvisational genre in which women (and some men) have expressed grief and aired grievances, one in which communities have ritually reconstituted themselves in the face of loss."

In his book, Wilce takes the definition of the process of entextualization by Bauman and Briggs a step further. He says that "Bauman and Briggs' (1990) treatment of entextualization dealt primarily with language – the poetics of linguistic performance – and for good reason. Of all the modalities performances exploit, language may be the most portable, the most memorable" (Wilce, 2009: 34). However, "[t]extuality is more than words. Text is a repeatable, coherent set of signs – and this definition fits musical signs such as melodies as well as lyrics" (see also Laskewicz, 2003). What

makes laments memorable or quotable is more than words: "[p]eople feel that lament melodies convey or bespeak grief, with or without words. Thus, musical and not only lyrical textuality help give laments their meaning" (Wilce, 2009: 14).

Wilce points out another process of reproducing culture, which he calls "the flip side of entextualization"; namely, contextualization. It is "the process whereby discourse takes root in very particular moments" (Wilce, 2009: 34–35). "The play of contextualization and entextualization – processes by which laments come to appear as texts despite their shifting contextualized grounding, dialectically engaging with actions that submerge any sense of the old in a flood of immediacy – reproduces culture, and laments as a particular cultural achievement" (ibid.). The performance of laments thus always gains its meaning in a given community in the particular moment of performance of two simultaneous processes of meaning-making: contextualization, which provides the situational meaning of the performance, and entextualization, which makes the laments a specific mode of communication in a certain community.

Not everything that is otherwise visible to the interviewer in the interviewing situation is necessarily part of the meaning-making process of interviewees in the interviews. On the contrary: as a researcher, I need to observe the "contextualization cues" (Bauman, Briggs, 1990) of the interviews for finding out what contexts are situationally relevant for my interviewees.

The visibility of a researcher is an ethical choice

The data of ethnographic interviews are not born in isolation, but as a result of interaction between the interviewer and interviewees at a certain specific time and place. Anthropological and folkloristic performance-oriented research understands oral folklore as communication that is rendered meaningful in specific situations. When doing research on interaction, it is important to describe as comprehensively as possible all the parties that take part in the interaction, and the positioning of the researcher is part of this process.

As the researcher Amanda Coffey states about the position of an ethnographer, "[o]ur analyses of others result from interactional encounters and processes in which we are personally involved" (Coffey, 1999: 2). In ethnographic research, the researchers are part of the field, whether they want it or not. Coffey says that "[t]o remain silent is to deny our existence and our biographical place" (Coffey, 1999: 11). To write only about the interviewees is like hiding half of the picture of the interviews: the interviewees are responding to someone in a manner most suitable for the situation and for the message to be understood. The fact that I present my own background in this article is thus simultaneously an ethical research choice and an important part of the performance study method based on the interaction analysis.

Figure 2: The interviews in Aiani are about to start. I, Ioannis (taking the photo), Grigoris, Maria, Panagiota, and Matina are waiting for more women to arrive. Photo: Ioannis Lampropoulos, 25.4.2017.

Although performance research focuses on the interaction between the audience, the performers, and the stage, not everything can be written openly in the name of ethical research – not about the subjects or the researchers. The challenge of such research is therefore to find a balance in how to describe the performers and the information they are providing without telling too much about them. This applies to the interviewers too: one must be aware that knowledge of religious conduct and private life can put both the researcher and the interviewee in a difficult position in front of the reading audience.

With the consent of my interviewees, I have decided to refer to them by their first names. This is because attending interviews was also a matter of honor for them. Their complete anonymization in this article would not be right either – they were lamenters that wanted their skills to be recognized.

Research questions

As noted above, there is more than one way of carrying out performance-centered research on oral folklore. In this study, the aim is to determine what is accomplished when death laments are performed as part of ethnographic interviews. I use the insights of Bauman, Briggs, and Wilce to understand what kind of communication (speech,

gestures and expressions, bodily movements, and their interpreted meanings) death laments are in my fieldwork villages, and what their connotations are for the participants in my interviews.

Three types of communication can be distinguished within the interviews. The first is communication based on words; that is, diegesis. This is not just the use of words, but the communication in relation to the words in the presentation, how they are attached to the words, and how meanings are created in them. The second is non-verbal communication, or mimesis, which includes facial expressions and gestures and is the communication between the words of the performance and the audience. There is also communication between performers about issues related to the performance.

The third type, performance, is the communication that I focus on in my analysis. I ask how performance is keyed and how appropriate performance is negotiated within the interviews. The central focus of this approach is how folklore texts emerge in their contexts and what we can learn about the community through this process of communication. I present the process connected to the performance of death laments with the theoretical model introduced and compiled by Richard Bauman. How do the interviewees lift up the performance frame in a performance situation not so typical for laments, and how do they "key" the performance to be understood as a certain genre, here death laments, within the community? How did we as interviewers influence the interaction of the interviews, or the situation and the place where the interviews took place?

Finally, I construct a picture of death laments as a local genre by also asking what makes them recognizable, memorable, and quotable outside the interviews. I utilize the insights that the lament researcher James Wilce offered about the process of entextualization of laments and his understanding of laments as text, which is based on their performance. I expand the concept of entextualization, first introduced in research on oral folklore by Bauman and Briggs, following Wilce's model, by including the musical and emotional elements in the "text" of laments.

Conducting the interviews

Aiani

The road from the city of Kozani became narrower and more winding the closer we got to the small town of Aiani. As our guide, we had Grigoris, a teacher and philologist, who had published an anthology about the laments of Aiani, his home village, the previous year and his wife, Maria. The interviews took place in Grigoris's mother's kitchen, where we began talking with Panagiota and her friend Matina over coffee while waiting for two more women, Vaia and Thomai, to arrive. While waiting, Matina

Figure 3: Vaia, Thomai, Panagiota, and Matina did everything they could to help me understand the custom of lamenting the dead in Aiani. Photo: Riikka Patrikainen, 25.4.2017.

praised Panagiota's lamenter skills, saying that in her eighties Panagiota knew many more laments than the younger women in the interviews.

The number of interviewees surprised me because I thought the interviews would take place individually, not as a group of many lamenters and even other people. For the locals, however, it was self-evident that the interviews would be crowded with people. When everyone was present, Grigoris introduced us to women, who were relatives and long-term friends, starting with things that united us: that we were married, Orthodox, and have children, and that Ioannis was born here.

The fact that I was a cantor was something extraordinary. *"She is a real cantor [kanonikí psáltria],"* although I was a woman, *"just like Antonis in our church,"* Grigoris clarified to the women. This was a matter of respect because in Greece women cantors are exceptions: the arena of women's ritual agency is the home, and men's arena is the church; the ritual laments for the dead are a good indication of this. The women said they were doing everything they could to make me understand them; their desire to help and the focus was impressive. Throughout the interview, we were treated respectfully with ecclesiastical titles – Ioannis was referred to as *páter* 'father' and I was called *papadiá* 'the priest's wife'.

It was clear that the women did not want to proceed to death laments straight away. Only after singing us some Easter songs and playful songs about priests (probably out

of uncertainty regarding Ioannis's attitude towards them) led by Matina, the women told us about the traditional wake. The first set of laments for the dead was performed after the deceased was placed in the coffin and decorated with evergreens. The people of the village knew about the wake by the church bells and went to bid farewell to the deceased. *"Each and everyone who is able to 'sings her pain'* [*ton póno tis*]*, and brings a candle and flowers with her,"* explained Vaia. Performing laments continued until after sunset. When the darkness was broken at twilight, the *sávano*, the death garment, was lifted from the face of the deceased and it was washed with wine. After this, laments were performed until the priest came for the deceased to lead the funeral procession to the church approximately twenty-four hours after the death. The next time the women in Aiani sang laments was on the third day after the death, in the cemetery. Except for these key points, the order of the laments during the wake was free. At home, the repertoire was nevertheless different than in the cemetery.

Performing death laments is an adult women's skill, learned alongside women older than oneself. The women started attending wakes after they got married. Thomai said that she had to learn the laments early because she had lost a child. When we asked whether men also lamented, the women laughed: they only knew one man, but he was an exception, one in a thousand.

We asked whether the women lamented when the priest was present, and they said yes, but not during the holy services. If the priest at some point stopped the women from singing, it was not because the local church had a negative attitude toward the laments, but because the songs provoked strong sorrowful feelings. Once a doctor had forbidden Thomai to sing after a brain hemorrhage; strong emotions were not allegedly good for her health. All the women agreed with this: performing laments was physically demanding.

The categorization of laments, in Greek *moirológia* (laments) or *nekriká tragoúdia* (death songs), turned out to be complicated. It could be that the same song was a *moirológi* in one village but in the next village it was an Easter song. The lament was recognized as a lament of Aiani through its melody, and the same poems could be sung in different melodies. The usual meter of laments was an iambic fifteen-syllable metric line (Kontos, 2016: 20), just like in other folk songs and dances.

The most common lament in Aiani today was *Mana'm ti stolistikes?* that is, 'Mother, why have you dressed up?' The deceased was addressed as though she had dressed up to go to a wedding. In the lament, the deceased replies that she is going to be entertained by Charos – the Grim Reaper in Greek mythology. The women told us that the lament was always adjusted to the person in question; for example, if the deceased was a father, he was addressed as *Babá mou* 'my father'.

The women first recited the words of the lament, but they were uncertain how they should perform it: laments and crying belonged together, and they were not sure whether they could cry when we were present. Vaia told us a story about one woman

in the village who would not drop a tear, even if the deceased was a young person and this was very difficult for the other people present, and Thomai continued: *"My whole body shakes and the song breaks when I start crying."* When I finally asked them if they could sing for us, after telling us so much about laments, Vaija said: *"If we start to sing, we'll start to cry,"* and Ioannis answered her: *"Let us cry together!"* The tension burst into laughter and the women performed "Mána mou ti stolístikes," adding after each line "Wake up my dear mother!" The women were singing this lament, like all the following, together, which was a typical way to sing laments in Aiani.

> Μάνα μου τι στολίστηκες, μάνα μου τι στολίστηκες
> Τι στέκεις στολισμένη, ξύπνα μανούλα μου
> Μηνά σε γάμο σ' καλνούνι, μηνά σε γάμο σ' καλνούνι
> Μηνά σε πανηγύρι, ξύπνα […]
> Ούτε σε γάμο μ' καλνούνουν, ούτε σε γάμο μ' καλνούνουν
> Ούτε σε πανηγύρι, ξύπνα […]
> Μ' κάλιασεν ου Χάρουντας να, ακάλιασεν ου Χάρουντας να
> Πάω να μη φιλέψει, ξύπνα […]

An abridged translation of this fragment of the longer lament performed is as follows: "My mother, why have you dressed up? Wake up, my dear mother! Are they calling you for a wedding? They aren't calling me for a wedding. I was called by Charos to go to be entertained by him."

Many laments were performed after this. The moment they started singing, the direction of their gaze turned downward, and their thoughts started to focus more on their own memories than on us. Maria shared handkerchiefs with the women to wipe tears in the same way that she had served coffee previously. Thomai wondered aloud if it might not be right to lament the dead in an interview, and that a few examples would suffice. She sharply pointed out to Vaia in the middle of performing a lament that the name of the deceased should not be mentioned during the interview: *"Clap wood* [instead]*!"* For the women the laments were clearly a sacred language, the real situation of their performance being funerals – a language that the deceased would hear in the Otherworld (*ston állo kósmo*). There was no excuse for performing them in vain.

The laments that were first performed for us were connected directly to the ritual, but, when the interview went on, the most prominent feature of the laments was the women's pain of being left alone. When with the words of one lament the deceased said that *"Everyone tells me to leave,"* Thomai commented emphatically that *"This is not true; does anyone really want the deceased to leave?" "Maybe the daughter-in-law?"* asked Vaia playfully, and everyone laughed. Speaking and singing about relatives that have moved abroad and stayed there, which is the meaning of *xenitiá*, was another occasion when the women started crying tears. Referring to *xenitiá*, Panagiota said *"All*

[the laments] *have their meaning.*" Laments also showed how difficult the life of a widow was in the village: *"If you walk fast, they say that you are going to a wedding, if you walk slow, they say you are proud." "All of them are made of life, my daughter"* (Εμ, όλα είναι απ΄τη ζωή βγαλμένα μα κορίτσι μ΄), Vaia said after this lament, showing her personal relationship to the lament just sung. At this point, at the end of the interviews, I was not addressed as a *papadiá* but as a daughter, a term of endearment.

Eratyra

Our second day of fieldwork was directed to the regional unit of Voio, northwest of Kozani. We drove with Ioannis first to the age-old mountain village of Eratyra with a population of about one thousand, built around a beautiful spring between two large mountains.

Our interviews took place at Katina's house. To start, we went downstairs to a small room, where there were two beautifully made beds around the fireplace in the traditional style. The old mistress of the house, Katina, served coffee and a traditional sweet confiture to me, Ioannis, Kalliopi, and Anastasia (or Anastasula), a sister-in-law of Katina in her late eighties. At coffee, the women immediately told me that laments were not performed in Eratyra anymore. The women, now in their seventies and eighties, told me recollections of the wakes they witnessed in their childhood. The deceased was placed on a wool blanket on the floor and the older women, their mothers and aunts, knelt around the deceased and performed death laments. As children, the laments had not interested the women, and nowadays the custom of lamenting at wakes is no longer practiced. Katina thought that the tradition had ended with the arrival of commercial burial activities and coffins. The women knew that there had been a lot of laments in Eratyra – they even remembered a few great lamenters by name – and they regretted not being as familiar with the tradition as they wished.

Anastasia said that she did not want to learn how to lament because she had been orphaned by her mother as a child, and the laments felt too painful. According to her, the entire life of the deceased was told in the laments. In her view, laments were no longer performed because people did not want to feel pain: *"Oh, how they cried in those days!"* The women remembered the past, also Ioannis's late grandmother, who had been their friend and neighbor. They were very well aware of our existence, of Ioannis already when he was born. Here Ioannis was treated as a grandchild of Rina, and not so much as a priest.

We took the stairs to the salon upstairs, which was a festive room, and the temperature was cold due to it seldom being used – *"just like at my grandma's house,"* Ioannis remembered. When the camera was turned on, the tone of the interview became more official. The interviews began with the presentation of the interviewees. *"We three never left Eratyra,"* said Katina, meaning herself, Anastasula, and Kalliopi, *"We were born here, and here we will die."* All three women had married young through

matchmaking and started a family, as was the common custom in the 1940s. All of them earned their livelihood from agriculture. Cultivating tobacco had been an important part of the financial management of the families, and with that income they were able to buy land, build houses, and marry off their children.

Eratyra had a dark history with the bloody battles of the civil war (1946–1949), especially in 1948, when the battle of Eratyra (*i máhi tis Erátyras*), had taken place. The war divided the population of the village based on a communist-dominated uprising against the established government of the Kingdom of Greece. This was also reflected in the women's narration. With the stories of the women, the horrors and injustices of the civil war suddenly came alive before our eyes. Anastasia's first betrothed had been killed in a bell tower in the center of the village, which was right next door – in the bell tower that we had just passed. After this, she had married a younger brother and life had continued.

In addition to the civil war, the women also reported other losses and injustices in their lives. Katina's son had died in an accident, and that had taken all the joy from life for years. However, raising grandchildren with the help of a young widow helped her forget the pain for a while. Now that the grandchildren had already grown up, there was time to think about her son.

Haido, a friend of Katina, arrived at the salon a little later and, because of the solemn selection of the interview place, immediately said to Katina that *"you brought us to the salon like to an engagement party!"* Haido was originally from a neighboring village, but she had moved to Eratyra due to her marriage. Perhaps it was because of Haido's comment that the women started singing songs from the engagement ceremony: five long and happy songs altogether. When they finally started speaking about laments, Haido expressed regret at the negative attitude of the village toward those that would have liked to perform laments at wakes: in the neighboring villages around Eratyra, the custom was still practiced. *"You just gossip at the wake!"* Haido accused the women, which showed that the lack of laments also meant a lack of respect for the dead. The women born in Eratyra stated that it might be so nowadays, but it had not always been like that. Haido said that this must have been long ago because she had arrived forty-two years earlier and she had never heard laments in Eratyra. However, she could not say what had caused the laments to stop.

Jannis asked Katina if she lamented to her dead son. It came as a surprise to the other woman that Katina said yes; *"Could I have let him leave without a song?"* At the end of the wake, when the bishop was already approaching the house, Katina had asked *"Isn't anyone really going to sing anything?"* Her son had been a happy person, a singer, and *"he deserved a song,"* Katina explained. Here lamenting clearly functions as a rite of passage that marks the moment of leaving home permanently (see van Gennep, 1960 [1909]). And so she performed a lament, and everybody cried along with her song. Ioannis asked if she could sing this song to us, but Katina said she

needed a little time to get ready for it. When she felt ready, she asked, *"Is the camera on?"* and started to sing a lament about the mother of Charos. All the women looked down, some of them were humming with Katina. Listening to the deep sorrowful voice of Katina and seeing the reactions of the women was difficult; I was not even able to hand handkerchiefs to Katina.

> Του Χάρου η μάνα κάθουνταν ψηλά σε μια ραχούλα.
> Δεν κελαηδούσεν σαν πουλί κι ούτε σαν χελιδόνι.
> Μόν' τραγουδούσιν κι έλεγε, μόν' τραγουδάει και λέγει.
> Χαρείτι νιές, χαρείτι νιοί, χαρείτι παλικάρια.
> Γιατί έχου γιόν πραματιφτή κι γιο πρώτο κουρσάρη.
> Δεν πραγματεύει πράγματα, δεν πραγματεύει ρούχα.
> Μόν' πραγματεύει τις ψυχές κι δεν χαρίζ' κανέναν.

> Charos' mother sat high on the mountainside.
> She didn't sing like a bird or like a swallow.
> She just sang and said, he just sings and says,
> Rejoice young girls, rejoice young men,
> For I have a merchant son and a son like a pirate.
> He doesn't offer things for sale, he doesn't offer clothes for sale.
> He only trades souls and doesn't miss anyone.

After singing the sorrowful, descending melody of the lament, Katina commented that the words of this lament are true: Charos is coming to take each and every one of us one day.

After the emotional performance by Katina, Haido also started to tell about a lament from her own village, very similar to the one Katina had just sung. She was apologizing that this lament was a bit different than in Eratyra, but other women encouraged her to sing. Katina said that she needed a little time to get over her lament, but she would follow soon in singing Haido's lament. Haido started a lament very similar to Katina's, but with a different melody than Katina. The melodies of the laments were clearly village-specific because Haido and Katina always sang their own songs with the same melody.

In the end, after we stopped recording and asking questions, the women were happy and relieved, and they thanked us for offering an interlude to their otherwise dull everyday life. The moment we left the house, Katina told us with a happy voice, *"When you come next time, count us!"* meaning that they were already old, and that maybe this would be the last chance to meet them all.

Figure 4: At the end of the interview, the women of Eratyra gathered on the steps of Katina's house for a group photo. "When you come next time, count us!" said Katina cheerfully. Photo: Riikka Patrikainen, 26.4.2017.

Horigos

After half an hour's drive from Eratyra, we were in the small village of Horigos, again with Grigoris and Maria. We sat down outdoors in the afternoon sun in the garden of Maria's mother, eighty-three-year-old Garifallia, and the song of a canary was overwhelming in the silence of the small village. Garifallia was used to being interviewed, and she had sung the liturgies in the village church in the past. *"I know all the laments* [*ola ta moirologia*]*"*, said Garifallia at coffee because she really was aware of her talent as a singer, and we also were convinced of that a few hours later.

We decided to have the interviews downstairs in Garifallia's house. After discussing her singing in the church, Garifallia asked *"Are you ready?"* and she started to sing her first lament. This commemorative lament was dedicated to her husband because during the forty days of Easter the souls of the deceased were "out" due to the resurrection of Christ. Garifallia told us, with a twinkle in her eye, that she was not sure whether her husband would hear the song because he had worked in Germany for eight years – maybe he was there and not here. Later, when introducing us to actual funeral laments, Garifallia stopped singing at the point where the name of the deceased should have been mentioned.

Later she asked me whether I wanted to hear songs or laments. I answered laments, but afterward I regretted this when I understood that the line between songs and laments was thin. Garifallia told us that she knew very sad, very *"heavy* [*βαριά*]*"* laments and very *"light* [*ελαφριά*]*"* ones, and she said that because of problems with her thyroid she could not perform very sorrowful laments, otherwise her throat swells shut. For the same reason, she could not perform the first laments for her own husband at the wake. The heaviest lament, according to Maria, was that one that was sung when the deceased was taken to church and leaving home: as the lament said, even the mountains bowed then. One should not be left without a song at that sacred moment, said Maria, thus emphasizing the importance of laments as a rite of passage at funerals.

While Garifallia was singing one of her laments, Maria asked, *"Do you really sing laments this slow or a bit faster?"* Garifallia answered that if she sang any faster the lament would turn into a dance. Garifallia said that in this interview she was performing the laments faster so that they would not last too long. The laments had thus two presentation speeds: very slow at real funerals and a bit faster for the interviews.

Garifallia said that she creates her own laments. This surprised Grigoris, and he asked: *"On the spot?"* Garifallia said *"Yes!"* and performed one of her own laments:

> Θέλτε δέντρα μ' ν' ανθίσετε, θέλτε να φουντωθείτε.
> Δεν κάθομαι στον ίσκιο σας, ούτε και στην δροσιά σας.
> Μόν' φεύγω, φεύγω μακριά πάνω στον άλλο κόσμο.
> Πάνω να βρω τους φίλους μου, να ιδώ τους ιδικούς μου.

My trees, if you want to bloom, if you want to grow.
I do not sit in your shadow, nor in your dew.
I'm just leaving, I'm walking away up[4] to the other world.
Up there to find my friends, see my own people.

After singing this lament, Garifallia said that *"Laments are made by life [Αυτά βγάνει η Ζωή]"*, from the soul (*μές´απ´την ψυχή*). The atmosphere of the interviews became more intimate, and Maria started telling us about the lonely life of her mother in the village and what the laments had to do with it. *"When my mother feels lonely or sad, she sings laments."* Garifallia said that *"the laments are born out of life and pain, that moment [Αυτά βγάνει η ζωή, ο πόνος […] εκείν την ώρα]"*, and that there had been a lot of pain in her life, but she was grateful for her life.

Maria said that, when her father had died, she had wanted to sing to her father as well but she did not know any laments. She had sung a children's song, which she had sung often when her father was working in Germany and she had missed him. After everyone had settled around Maria's father, Maria sang a song about a bird that

Figure 5: Garifallia is a skillful lamenter, able to compose her own laments according to the situation. Photo: Riikka Patrikainen, 26.4.2017.

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4   Referring to the Otherworld as a place whose location is "up," as in paradise, and not "down," as in the Underworld, might be a Christian influence in her lament.

had broken its cage and flown away. Garifallia had taken the words of the song and made it a lament by changing its melody. *"It's* [originally] *a lament,"* said Garifallia to Maria. First Maria sang a children's song about a little nightingale that escaped from a broken cage, after which Garifallia changed a few words of the song, *"the little nightingale"* now being *"dear mother,"* and the melody, turning the song into a lament. After performing this lament, there were tears in Garifallia's eyes. It was time to finish the interview.

Discussion

Although I speak Greek, for my interviewees as a Finnish woman I represented *"blond people, a different race* [ξανθιά ο κόσμος, άλλη ράτζα]*"*, as Anastasia in Eratyra said. The women's desire to help me understand them and bring me into their experience's inner circles was touching. The informative power of the interviews was precisely in the contrasts that coming together from different cultures, backgrounds, and positions created in our interaction – even the other people present at the interviews learned many new things about these death customs because they were explained to me. I was nevertheless not a complete foreigner, a *xéni*, to them, which created trust: I was Orthodox, a woman, and a mother, like the interviewees. The fact that my husband was a priest caused a certain tension at the beginning, but it quickly resolved after the interviewees got to know us better.

The process of keying the performance frame was similar in the interviews; no direct progress was ever made to the performance. At first, the interviewees told us about other village-related customs than death customs, such as Easter songs. After disclaimers – that is, first stating that the old lamenters knew more death laments than the young (Bauman, 1974: 295) – the interviewees recalled the words of the laments, and then the village-specific melody to perform them, a feature that was already mentioned by Caraveli (1980: 129). Finally, before the lament performance, it was ensured that the performance of the feeling of sadness inherent in the lament was, as it were, permissible. Only after we said that the tears were welcome could the performance of death laments truly begin. All these characteristics – disclaimers, words, melody, and tears – of death laments also served as keys to performance in the interviews (Bauman, 1992: 45).

When the performance frame was keyed, the performance of death laments affected the emotions of all in attendance to such an extent that the choice of laments from then on was influenced by the personal memories associated with them, not just their place at the funeral. In the body language, the direction of the gaze during the performance was important as well: after the lamenters turned their gaze away from other people, the presence of the audience did not influence the performance as much as their own memories.

Figure 6: Ioannis and Grigoris next to the cemetery in Aiani; the discussions continued long in the evening after the interviews. Photo: Riikka Patrikainen, 25.4.2017.

At the end of the interviews, coming back to the level of everyday life, the atmosphere became free, and the room was filled with laughter.

Many things were achieved through the performance of death laments. Death laments functioned as a genre for expressing pain and loss (Wilce, 2009: 2) and they showed care for the dead. They also served as transitional rites for structuring death-related category changes (van Gennep, 1960 [1909]), a feature that was especially prominent in the laments said to be performed when the deceased was taken out of the home to the church.

The negotiation process of an appropriate performance within the interviews provided interesting information about the difference between real funerals and the performance of death laments within the interviews. In the interviews, the death laments were not to be performed with the names of the deceased, and it was not suitable to perform too many of them. The prominent difference-making feature was the pace of singing. In Greek culture, slowness, and in general a slow pace, is an important symbol of death, and a fast pace is a symbol of the joy of life, such as at weddings (*"If you walk fast, they say that you are going to a wedding"*). The discussion in Horigos between Garifallia and her mother is a good example of the interconnectedness of dance and funerals: if the pace of singing were faster, the song would become dance-like; if slower, it would be like at a funeral.

For my interviewees, the poetry of laments alone did not suffice as a definition for death laments, and singing laments did not form an appropriate performance of death laments as such. This resembled very well Wilce's definition of laments as "tuneful, texted weeping" (Wilce, 2009: 1). However, what makes laments memorable and quotable outside the performance situation and constructs them as a local genre is more than this. As Wilce says, "musical and not only lyrical textuality help give laments their meaning" (Wilce, 2009: 14). These features that make the laments a text, that define the local genre of death laments for the locals, are best found ethnographically. I argue that, in the case of the Greek death laments in the interviews, the role of the musical features of performance, such as the tempo of singing and the use of locally specific lament melodies, could be established as prominent in the process of constructing the local genre of death lament in the interviews.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to determine what was achieved by performing death laments as part of ethnographic interviews. In addition to this, the aim was to ascertain how the interviewees themselves defined the genre of death laments; that is, how they themselves identified laments as a separate mode of expression. As an aid to the analysis of the interviews, I used folkloristic performance research, especially Richard Bauman's

idea of the regularity with which folklore performance is defined; that is, "keying the performance frame." I also used the concept of "laments as text," formulated by the lament researcher James Wilce based on the concept of entextualization developed by Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs.

In particular, the performance of laments within the interviews, a foreign context for performing death laments, and performing to interviewers foreign to the lamenters, influenced the "negotiation process" of the performance: the interviewees had to explicitly negotiate what would be appropriate in this situation and why, and they also often had to make sure that I had understood what they meant.

Laments were especially an expression of feelings of pain and loss as communication, but these experiences were not necessarily associated with death, but with other sorrows of the lamenters' personal lives. Death laments were identified as death laments, as Wilce (2009: 1) had also defined them, by the fact that they were "tuneful, texted weeping." In the musical expression, in addition to the village-specific melody, a typical feature was also the tempo at which the laments were performed, and the particular slowness of the laments. If the laments were not performed slowly enough, this would significantly change the understanding of the nature of the lament to dancing. This raises the question of what relationship death laments have to other local genres and what kind of network these genres form culturally.

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»Žalostinke so stkane iz življenja in bolečine«: etnografski intervjuji kot kontekst izvedbe grških žalostink ob smrti

V članku avtorica raziskuje, kako so izvajalci žalostinke ob smrti v etnografskih intervjujih oblikovali kot žanr in kako so pridobile pomen v teh intervjujih, izvedenih v treh grških gorskih vaseh aprila 2017, ko je zapisovala znanje o pogrebnih šegah, žalostinkah in njihovih pomenih. V analizi, ki temelji na antropoloških in folklorističnih performativno usmerjenih raziskavah, razkriva, kakšna vrsta komunikacije (govor, geste in izrazi, telesni gibi in njihovi interpretirani pomeni) so žalostinke v vaseh, kjer je potekalo terensko delo, in kakšne so njihove konotacije za udeležence intervjujev. S tem si prizadeva ugotoviti, kaj je bilo doseženo z izvajanjem posmrtnih žalostink v okviru etnografskih intervjujev in kako so intervjuvanci sami opredelili žanr posmrtnih žalostink – tj., kako so sami v žalostinkah videli poseben način izražanja. Pri analizi intervjujev si je avtorica pomagala s folklorističnimi raziskavami performance, zlasti z idejo Richarda Baumana o pravilnosti, ki določa folklorno izvajanje, in s konceptom »žalostink kot besedila« Jamesa Wilcea, ki temelji na konceptu entekstualizacije, kakor sta ga razvila Richard Bauman in Charles Briggs. Situacijska komunikacija z napevi in o njih, zlasti proces dogovarjanja o primerni izvedbi, se je pokazala za ploden vir znanja o lokalnem žanru žalostinke. Avtorica trdi, da je bilo mogoče ugotoviti, da je v intervjujih vloga glasbenih značilnosti izvedbe, kot je tempo petja, v ospredju pri oblikovanju lokalnega žanra žalostinke.