Call for presentations on "Vernacular Knowledge and Indigenous Traditions: Perspectives from Fieldwork"
A Symposium; November 14-15, 2025

Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, and the Centre for Oriental Studies, University of Tartu

Scholars have long debated post-Cartesian dualities and advocated for moving beyond the frameworks that ethnographers have long utilised in approaching the field. Philosophies that informed, what became popularly known as the "ontological turn" (OT) are not as hotly debated because of the inability of these ideas to provide enough ethnographical examples to support claims about relativism and the positing of a universal ontology. Thus, the search for "social totality" (Graeber 2015), that is the tacit implication of a universalising tendency of the OT continues to be the ethnographer's burden. The central issues of how one approaches difference where they encounter it, persist, with different solutions posited.

The set of ideas and practices that constitute vernacular knowledge (Valk 2022) in the folkloristic approach to the religious lives of individuals, forwards an alternative to epistemic issues that researchers have encountered on debating, what is really, real. Thus, the focus shifts to community and individual representations that researchers include into their own conceptual frameworks that then accommodate a recursive and engaged scholarship that lowers the risk of theoretical impositions onto ethnographic material and lived realities.

Vernacular knowledge thus involves a serious accounting of the role of individuals, communities, groups in interpreting, creating, and transmitting knowledge as they experience it. The folkloristic turn in the study of religion (Primiano 1995, 2012; Bowman 2014;) advocates allowing vernacular categories to inform scholarly endeavours. This symposium allows an analysis of the multiplicity of approaches that focuses on vernacular knowledge as a site for the confluence of methodological enquiry pertaining to indigenous traditions, and a variety of religious phenomena.

We welcome presentations that engage with the diversity of indigenous and/ or religious discourses and practices, alongside talks that deal with extraordinary and uncanny phenomena that the researcher encounters in the field. Please send us your talk title and a short abstract [of max 200 words] by **October 27**, 2025 to **Margaret Lyngdoh and Ülo Valk**:

Ülo Valk: ulo.valk@ut.ee
Margaret Lyngdoh: lyngdoh@ut.ee

References

Bowman, Marion. 2014. “Vernacular Religion, Contemporary Spirituality and Emergent Identities: Lessons from Lauri Honko.” *Approaching Religion* 4(1): 101–113.

Graeber, David. 2015. “Radical Alterity Is Just Another Way of Saying ‘Reality’: A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 1–41.

Primiano, Leonard Norman. 1995. “Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife.” *Western Folklore* 54 (1): 37–56.

Primiano, Leonard Norman. 2012. “Afterword: Manifestations of the Religious Vernacular: Ambiguity, Power, and Creativity.” In *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, edited by Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, 382–94. Sheffield, UK: Equinox.

Valk, Ülo. 2022. “An Introduction to Vernacular Knowledge.” In *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs*, 1–21. Sheffield, UK: Equinox.