

Gender Performativity in Burgenland Croatian Laments

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1. Introduction

Within the musical leave-taking ritual of lament—which is found in most parts of the world in diverse forms—the task of lamenting the dead is often the duty of women. In this chapter, I discuss the various characteristics that are attributed to women in the context of lamenting as well as the connection between mourning and femininity. Ethnomusicologists have repeatedly classified lament as a female genre, an expression within the sphere of women (Auerbach 1987; Tolbert 1990b; Magrini 1998; Porter 2011). This gendered conception calls for a look beyond the label: a discussion of gender's interconnectedness with culture and religion, the tracing of gender imaginaries¹⁾ within lament sounds and texts, as well as gendered expectations of mourning behaviour and their historical shifts.

The chapter focuses on the Croatian minority in the east Austrian province of Burgenland, specifically the village of Stinjaki/Stinatz (Cro/Ger) in southern Burgenland. Coming from Stinjaki/Stinatz myself, I conducted a major part of my fieldwork on laments in the village situated between my status as a community member and a certain outsider position as a young man amongst mostly elderly women. In my fieldwork, the topic's intimate, emotional dimension coupled with its taboo status posed special challenges; however, at the same time, community members, especially the older Burgenland Croatian women with lament expertise, appreciated the interest I showed and the value my fieldwork attributed to laments. The lament examples presented in this chapter are examples from Stinjaki/Stinatz, encompassing historical material and my own recordings.

Burgenland Croats are an autochthonous minority group whose migration dates back to the beginning of the sixteenth century. Emigrants from areas in today's Croatia settled in western Hungary (now Burgenland/Austria) and in neighbouring regions. The collective move was induced by the advances of Ottoman troops in the Balkans; movement continued due to subsequent wars and took place in the form of a resettlement organised by governing landlords. Today, about 30,000 Burgenland Croats live in Burgenland and in the border regions of Hungary and Slovakia, as well as in Vienna. From the time of the settlement, the Burgenland Croatian language developed separately from today's standard Croatian language and without urban language centres. Burgenland

Croatian language competence among younger minority members is declining, with assimilation seeming prevalent over the last decades.²⁾

To provide a general definition of the genre of lament, I offer a brief discussion of the central parameters. While primarily referring to the practice in Burgenland, specifically in Stinjaki, the following section also broadly reflects the qualities of laments in the Balkans and greater south-eastern Europe.

Laments—*javkanje* in the Burgenland Croatian language—are publicly performed in funerary settings. Text and melody are spontaneously improvised; that is, the lamenters evolve the text associatively, partly using fixed phrases, and they sing to repeated melodic patterns. Laments usually recall details of the deceased's life and the relationship between the lamenter and the deceased. The lamenter may also articulate her grief. The sound of this vocal genre not only includes singing and speaking, but also crying, sobbing, sighing, and shouting, i.e. nonverbal paralinguistic and paramusical expressions of grief (Mazo 1994). Laments express emotion, while symbolically performing the emotions that are associated with grief, thus evoking a scenario of ritualised communication with the mourning community as an audience. Lamenting has a therapeutic effect because it provides the psychologically important possibility of channelling grief through the ritual articulation of emotion—both as a public act as well as for the lamenter's own feelings of bereavement and loss. The musical structure of lament among the Burgenland Croats contains a melody that descends in small intervals and in sequences, mostly in a fifth tone range. The metre is oriented towards a stylised rhythm of speaking.³⁾

Laments take place in funerary settings but are also practised outside the funerary context (e.g., at weddings). Laments 'tend to slip out of their original settings, to be quoted, played with, or used in other settings for quite personal, non-ritual purposes' (Wilce 2009: 26). Especially within the lament traditions that have disappeared from public funerary rites, a shift from the public sphere to the private sphere may take place, as was partly the case with the Burgenland Croats during the 1970s and 1980s.

For centuries, laments' significance for the minority took effect in village-bound funeral rituals and personal grieving behaviour. The meaning of lament sounds, however, changed drastically with the idea of a nation state identity in post-war Austria. Whereas during the Habsburg Empire, Burgenland Croats were located in Hungary and constituted just one of many ethnic groups, at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, the minority found itself part of a German-speaking nation. Anti-minority politics and individual discrimination based on poor German language competence largely resulted in minority members denying the language and cultural expressions as well as concealing everything deemed to be indicative of their 'ethnic otherness'.

Laments clearly illustrate this assimilation process. Whereas folklore groups singing pleasing Croatian Schlager songs accompanied by the then newly-imported Tamburica were suitable for musically representing the minority, the sound of lamenting women was obviously deemed too 'ethnic', 'other', and 'backward' to be part of the public soundscape of Croatian villages in Burgenland. Consequently, laments disappeared from the public funeral in most villages throughout the second half of the twentieth century. A



Figure 1 Lament at the edge of a grave, Stinatz/Stinjaki, Austria around 1965
(Source: Gaál 1987: xxi)

particularly striking case is the village of Stinjaki/Stinatz, where a strong and well-documented lament tradition was practised publicly until the late 1980s and is still alive today among elderly women in private settings. Public lamenting, however, became a shameful taboo related to the fear of being labelled as ‘primitive’.

A central aspect of the genre of lament—which constitutes the driving motivation for this chapter—is that it is perceived as belonging to the expertise of women. The female attribution of lament relies on normative understandings of gendered behaviour, shaped by societal and religious structures. Especially in the case of laments—which are located in the field of popular piety—the ritual religious sphere constitutes a habitat for gender stereotypes and gender relations that are on display in the performance of laments, their sounds, and their lyrics.

2. Culture—Gender—Religion

For social structures in Burgenland Croatian villages, the tissue comprising culture, gender, and religion is pivotal. Cultural values and religious beliefs precondition understandings of gender within the community. Likewise, cultural and religious expression serves as a space for the formation and practice of gender. Referring to Catholicism, Tullia Magrini stresses that ‘[...] distinctive views of genders played—and still play—an important role in maintaining the cultural identity of different religious communities’ (Magrini 1998: 2). This intersectional complex of culture, gender, and religion can be particularly significant for ethnic minorities, as religious structures may be crucial for the continuance of minority cultures and languages. Burgenland Croats’

strong connection to the Catholic Church is one such example. Official religious authorities were the most important carriers of language and culture for nearly five hundred years (see Geosits 1986). Given this increased interrelatedness of gender, ethnicity, religious practice, and cultural expression, it becomes apparent that specific collective minority identity narratives rely heavily on intersectional categories.

From a queer-feminist perspective, this set of intersecting categories poses a certain dilemma. Across religions, religious doctrine promotes gender inequality and normative sexual morals. ‘When it comes to gender norms and sexual mores’, J. Jack Halberstam reminds us, ‘Religion really is the root of all evil’ (2012: 28). Ethnic minorities, however, may rely on religion as a main site for enacting ethnic belonging, which makes it hard to leave religious values and gender norms behind without also jeopardising their very ethnic identity.

Ritual religious practices, like laments—activities that are ‘about doing rather than simply about believing’, activities that ‘actually constitute religion [...] rather than “expressing” or symbolizing it’ (Dubisch 1995: 60)—convey strong ideas about ideal gender behaviour. The essential idea is that women are more religious than men, deriving from the observation that women are more active in religious practices than men. Magrini explains this observation with the adoption of Christian ideals that dictate how women should behave, making religious activeness a component of their social respectability (see Magrini 1998).

The significance of Mother Mary as a role model for the everyday lives of elderly Burgenland Croatian women supports the maintenance of societal ideas of femininity and motherhood in particular. The image of the sexually pure and devoted grieving mother directly affects the way death rituals are perceived as gendered. Detached from female agency and sexual autonomy, Mary embodies the suffering, self-sacrificing, modest, virtuous mother—a symbolic figure of both Catholic femininity and grief.

3. Gender and Lament

Studying gender in laments reveals the social efficacy of ritual reactions to death, particularly at the stage of mourning during the intermediate phase between life and death.⁴ Research on lament consistently argues that lamenting helps re-establish social position and individual agency within the social network in the context of mythic imagery (De Martino 1972), via ritual intersubjectivity (Tolbert 1994), and through re-consolidating presence in this world (Wilce 2009). The destabilising event of death—the sense of crisis that death evokes within the community—is followed by the construction of a new reality through the public mediation of the lamenter’s loss, fears, hopes, and tears.

When gender enters this discussion, the ritual’s social efficacy immediately gains a gendered dimension. Lamenting constitutes a prime example of gender performativity through sonic expression, as I will depict in this section. Gender performativity has constituted a paradigm in the humanities for three decades; however, the main fields of gender performative analysis remain queer-feminist readings of popular culture, literature,

and film. Ethnographic research on traditional cultural expressions less often joins the discourse. When it does, however, the approaches are comparatively compelling because they investigate gender in common cultural practice instead of tracing gender in already deliberately designed art creations.

Ethnomusicologists have occasionally transferred Judith Butler's performative approaches to music, particularly vocal music, showing how traditional musical expressions inhabit a 'sonic gender performativity' (Alaghband-Zadeh 2015), not only in texts, but also in vocal style and ornamentation (e.g., Sugarman 1997). Although the concept of gender performativity is popular and widespread, it may be helpful to emphasise that it does not refer to the performance of gender roles. Performance 'presumes a subject', whereas performativity 'contests the very notion of the subject', as Butler reminds us (1996: 111). To refer to the field of music, acts of musicking, singing, dancing, or lamenting produce and reproduce the impression of embodying a certain gender (see Butler 1990). Relevant to ritual laments are their public, temporal, and collective dimensions that help establish the 'action's' performative efficacy in 'maintaining gender within its binary frame' (Butler 1988: 526).

One primary arena of gender performativity is the content of laments. The textual representation of gender imaginaries makes them audible, amplified in power and permanency through the exceptional context of death. The content clearly displays anticipations related to gender, e.g. in the characterisation of the deceased, expectations about the deceased in life and death, their duties in life, as well as their relationship with the lamenter and other mourners. Here, ideas of gender and kinship intricately intertwine,⁵⁾ as demonstrated by the example of a woman's lament for her daughter, who is leaving a young boy behind (Example 1). When children die before their parents and the generational succession is disturbed, laments are exceptionally tragic. The social understanding of femininity that is articulated in the present example is strongly connected to unpaid reproductive labour, namely care. Beneath her motherly grief, the woman is lamenting her daughter's absence for her grandson. Motherly and daughterly duties narrate femininity; that is, caretaking with regard to the aging lamenter and the deceased's young son constitutes the central trope, as can be seen in the lyrics in Example 1 below.

Helga moja, Helga!
 Jâko bi te prâvala.
 O Bože muoj!
 Helga moja!
 A sad je oš lako,
 a ča ću,
 a kad buden nevoljna?
 O Bože muoj!
 Ojoj meni!
 O dite moje, pomoć moja!
 O dite moje, pomoć moja!

O Helga moja!
 A måli Pepi b te jáko práva,
 a måli Pepi b te jáko práva! i
 A ti si bila njegova mati,
 a ti si bila njegova mati.
 O Bože muoj!
 A ti si ga tila
 nako lipo čuvat, kotno mati.
 A Helga moja!
 O Bože muoj,
 Bože muoj!
 Ojoj meni!

Translation
 Helga, my Helga!
 I would need you so!
 Oh my God!
 My Helga!
 Now it's still easy,
 and what will I do,
 if I get ill!
 Oh my god!
 Oh dear!
 Oh my child, my help!
 Oh my child, my help!
 Oh my Helga!
 And little Joseph would need you so,
 and little Joseph would need you so!
 And you were his mother,
 and you were his mother.
 Oh my god!
 And you used to
 watch after him so well, like a mother.
 My Helga!
 Oh my god,
 My god!
 Oh dear!

Example 1 'Javkanje za kćerom' ('Lament for a Daughter'), excerpt.
 Recorded by Károly Gaál, Stinjaki/Stinatz 1964, PhA-ÖAdW, PhA B 9692.
 Translation by the author.

The lamenter not only references caregiving responsibilities through the content of the lament; the very act of lamenting for her daughter is a caregiving task. In Burgenland Croatian villages, the closest female relatives—e.g. mothers, daughters, sisters, also grandmothers, aunts, and cousins—were expected to lament at funerals (see Gaál 1987; Marošević 2004). Caregiving belongs to the female domain, encompassing care for the deceased as well as taking over the care in place of other family members. Ritual funeral laments are an emblematic case of what Tullia Magrini calls the ‘work of pain’, mourning labour that is inherently gendered, ‘a behaviour mostly appropriate to the female world’ (1998: 4). In this way, women articulate their own and their families’ emotional pain publicly in a socially normed way, which helps construct an image of femininity that is associated with the expression of psychological suffering, underscoring the association of femininity and emotions, especially the emotions experienced during suffering (see Magrini 1998; 2003). This attribution of mourning competence to women radically others male strategies of processing grief, which I address in the final section of this chapter.

Even though this gendered assignment reveals harsh gender inequalities, Magrini stresses positive notions of women’s ‘work of pain’ that do not necessarily reflect the community’s evaluation (e.g., the low value ascribed to emotional suffering). Magrini (1998: 4) emphasises that the ‘work of pain’ is indeed hard work; it is essential to “‘face to face” communities’ because it is effective for the whole group, especially the bereaved, including male relatives for whom women take over the ‘work of pain’ as well.

In seeking explanations for the gendered allocation of lament, much ethnographic research establishes a linkage between birth and death, locating both within the female body. Various ethnographers reason that the ability to reproduce gives women access to the sphere of death (Caraveli-Chavez 1980; Seremetakis 1990; Magrini 1998). This reading connects the beginning and the end of life as analogous phenomena, linking a woman’s ability to give life to her ability to also deal with the end of life (see Heller 2012). Such theoretical standpoints draw an image of biology as destiny, of the female body as preconditioned for pain and suffering. Anna Caraveli-Chavez, for example, states that women’s capacity for reproduction gives them ‘first-hand access to the realm of the dead’ because women become ‘more vulnerable to pain and loss than men’. She argues in concrete terms: ‘As a mother, a woman has taken the first step in the hierarchy of [the] “understanding of pain”, an understanding which is the privileged territory of women’ (1980: 146). Nadia Seremetakis points out the material symbolism of ‘birthing’ and ‘wounding’, and how the female body ‘provides the emotional and conceptual dimensions of pain with physical coordinates’ (1990: 502).

My point is that these explanatory models, thoughtfully based on the biological differences between men and women, disguise the social construction of gender imaginaries and explain social behaviour as biologically determined. A gender performative understanding of laments, in contrast, considers the act of lamenting to be a driving force in creating and maintaining binary gender differences as well as gendered differences in dealing with grief. Accordingly, from a cross-cultural perspective, the existence of male lament traditions indicates how mourning rituals’ genderedness depends

on their very cultural situatedness (for the Albanian men's lament *gjamë*, for example, see Ahmedaja 2008; Kondi 2012). Moreover, following the logic of linking cis-female birthing to death care radically denies men, as well as transgender people, intersex people, queer people, non-binary and non-normative genders, and childless women, the ability and necessary opportunity to engage in expressive mourning—thereby devaluing while also feminising the emotional expression of loss, pain, and suffering.

Again, linking lament competence to birthing exemplarily displays how cultural expressive acts create the impression of gender's constancy and factuality, and how gender preconditions ideas of cultural expressiveness. Accordingly, emic viewpoints narrate motherhood as a component of mourning competence—especially when mothers mourn their children deaths, as another passage from the previous lament example shows. The passage displays an emic experience, indicating both lived reality and socially shared understandings of how expertise in pain comes into being.

Voga nigdor ne zna
 ča je ovo za teško,
 Buag moj!
 A ovo samo one matere znaju,
 a ke je ulovilo,
 ke su si dicu zgubile,
 i vako tužno

Translation

This no one knows,
 what hardship this is,
 Oh my god!
 Only those mothers know,
 who were caught by that,
 who lost children,
 so sad.

Example 2 'Javkanje za kćerom' ('Lament for a Daughter'), excerpt.
 Recorded by Károly Gaál, Stinjaki/Stinatz 1964, PhA-ÖAdW, PhA B 9692.
 Translation by the author.

Next to language, sound is a prime arena of laments' gender performative efficacy. Various sonic parameters link lamenting to emotion and psychological suffering, thus establishing a soundscape of pain that is connected to the female body. In contrast to rhythmically-fixed funeral music, the free rhythmical disposition of lament suggests emotional intuition; the sound's open time structure performatively provides femininity with affect, emotionality, and naturality. The same applies to the creation of melodic shape. The improvisatory stringing together of pitch is of a volatile improvisational character that differs from regular, fixed Burgenland Croatian musical forms, categorising laments outside the concept of 'music', as the community members whom I interviewed

during my fieldwork stressed (see also Sorce Keller 2013). Melodic improvisation influenced by the lamenter's grief produces an instability of vocal pitch. Elizabeth Tolbert speaks of 'pitch areas' in lamenting that contrasts male connoted musical forms, like epic singing (see Tolbert 1990a: 50). The sonic performativity of an unstable pitch, of sliding between 'pitch areas' with a woman's voice, is not inconsequential—it links femininity to the realm of psychological instability and crisis.

The most powerful performative sound elements are the non-verbal paralinguistic vocal expressions in laments, such as sobbing, sighing, and crying. These elements create a sound that is strongly associated with emotionality, suffering, and psychological crisis—in particular, crying and cries, both of which are integral parts of lamenting. Crying and cries influence voices by causing tension in the vocal chords and necessitating audible vocalised breathing sounds. These sounds inhabit affective qualities that are directly associated with psychological crisis and anxiety, up to the pinnacles of hysteria and a state of being out of control.

The voice is central to laments' sounds, and we typically understand voice as a direct sonic signaliser of gender. 'In our common sense, we believe the "voice is the body"', as Suzanne Cusick puts it (1999: 29). Cusick not only reminds us that voices (specifically, what counts as a 'natural' voice) are culturally constructed, she also stresses that gendered perceptions of voices depend on the performing bodies' cultural intelligibility. Her conception of gender performativity in vocal music emphasises that singing voices leave the body, that is, they 'perform the borders of the body' and thereby rely on notions of the 'interiority' of voices, which points to what Butler coined as the illusion of an interior truth of gender (Cusick 1999: 29–30). The vocal sounds of lamenting signify this idea of an 'essentiality' of femininity, which is made intelligible sonically through ritual mediation.

I would like to close this chapter with an example that clearly demonstrates what it means to live outside the heteronormative logic of matrimony and reproduction for older generations in Croatian villages in Burgenland. To not marry and have children is to violate social norms and threaten the legal and religious organisation of gender and sexuality. Accordingly, failure to conform to these norms and values leads to exclusion. The following example of an elderly unmarried woman lamenting her mother and her loneliness shows how 'being with someone' is not just a pleasant status, but also a normative directive that causes despair for those who do not want to or cannot follow it. Loneliness in this lament is not merely an emotional state; it reflects the social conception of being unmarried. Other relationship or friendship possibilities are obviously not equally valued. During my fieldwork, the woman described unmarried life as a failure, which, as reflected in the following excerpt, illustrates the internalisation of heteronormative gender demands.

Mati moja,
 zač ste me ostavili?
 Vsi si varkoga imaju
 a somo ja ne.

Uvik ste tili reč:
 Jâne odi domuom dilat.
 A sad su ja doašla, a vi ste me ustavili.
 O mati moja!
 Vsi si varkoga imaju,
 a somo ja ne.
 O, zâjć ste me ostavili?
 Ja vas bila najjâče právala,
 a sad nikoga nimun,
 komu bi ča povidala.
 O Mati moja!
 Kamo ču tit pojť,
 ka bude moje tuge imala?

Translation

Oh my mother,
 why did you leave me?
 They all have someone
 and only I do not.
 You always used to say:
 Anna, come home to work.
 And now I came, and you left me.
 Oh my mother!
 They all have someone,
 and just I do not.
 Oh, why did you leave me?
 I needed you most,
 and now I don't have anyone,
 who I can tell something to.
 O my mother!
 Where am I to go,
 when my sorrows should occur?

Example 3 'Javkanje za materom i od samoće' ('Lament for a Mother and of Loneliness'),
 excerpt. Recorded by Marko Kölbl in Stinatz/Stinjaki, Austria, 2011.
 Translation by the author.

O ma-ti mo-ja !

Zájčsteme o - sta - vi - li ?

Vsi si var-ko-ga i - ma - ju
a so-mo já ne.

U-vik ste ti-li reć

Já - ne, o - di domom di-lat

A sad su ja doasla , a vi ste me u-sta-vi - li

O ma - ti mo-ja !

Vsi si var-ko-ga i - ma - ju a so-mo já ne.

O zájč ste me o - sta - vi - li ?

Ja vas bi - la naj-já-će pra-va-la
a sad ni-ko-ga ni - mun

ko-mu bi ća po-vi-da - la

O Ma-ti mo-ja !

Kamo ću tit pojt

ka bude⁹ moje tuge i-ma-la ?

Figure 2 'Javkanje za materom i od samoće' ('Lament for a Mother and of Loneliness'), excerpt. Transcription by the author.⁶⁾

4. Gendered Mourning

Mourning behaviour among Burgenland Croats is gendered, alongside specific duties in mourning and funeral rituals. Notably, in Burgenland Croatian villages, as well as in other rural parts of Austria and Europe, women have precisely defined duties in funeral rituals, whereas men are loosely bound to a small number of optional tasks (see also

Danforth 1982). Whilst Burgenland-Croatian men should perform stoic duties, like carrying the coffin or speaking official words of gratitude at the end of a funeral, female-specific tasks comprise ritual family-bound activities. An important activity assigned to older women is the ‘task of washing and dressing the bodies of the dead’ (see Scheper-Hughes 2004: 189); however, with death increasingly taking place in hospitals, specialists have taken over this task, evidencing what Birgit Heller calls the professionalisation and medicalisation of death (Heller 2012). Nonetheless, performing rituals related to the mortuary of the corpse is still a central field of activity for women.

After the death of her husband, a woman is expected to assume a completely new social position: her mourning must continue until the end of her life. Although younger generations of Burgenland Croats have freed themselves from these regulations, this momentous obligatory change has shaped the lives of generations of elderly widows. Up until today, although the practice is declining, widows in black clothing and headscarves comprise an important visual component in Burgenland Croatian village life, visually establishing mourning and death in public. Based on his fieldwork in Stinjaki/Stinatz in the 1960s, Hungarian-Austrian ethnologist Karoly Gaál states that a widow departs from the greater village community to live in a close women-only community, leading a life situated between the church and the cemetery (1987: xx). To this very day, regular visits to the cemetery are a prime duty of widows, who idolise the dead (and death) through distinctively elaborate grave tending. The condition of a grave is a subject of public discourse at the cemetery, providing visual evidence of devoted mourning.

Whereas the cemetery constitutes a space for mourning women, mourning men resort to the tavern. Village taverns are a sort of antipode to family life, and they comprise the site of a major male mourning strategy, namely the consumption of alcohol, which is in itself highly gendered among older Burgenland Croatian generations. Susan Auerbach makes similar observations in rural Greece, stating that ‘Men party and women lament’, presumably representing ‘their opposite natures’ (1987: 26).

In Burgenland and elsewhere, expectations about male mourning behaviour include men’s control over their emotions, or more precisely, their emotional expression. ‘Boys don’t cry’, a common notion of how men (do not) cope with their grief, reiterates that crying men are the exception, while crying women are the rule. Whilst emotional rationality in male mourning necessitates distraction and suppression, female mourning strategies imply social activity and social contact, according to Erich Lehner, drawing on stereotypical tendencies (2013). This strict gender division in mourning produces shared values and powerful normative codes that govern how men should and should not mourn (see Melching 2013).

In tracing these stereotypes, I aim to uncover the tacit norms of gendered mourning, in part to elucidate their transgressions. Community members classify lamenting men as rare exceptions; however, stories about lamenting men do exist—it is not impossible. Children, including boys, used to assist women in public lamenting (see Figure 1), albeit not in the role of singing elaborate lyrics and melodies, but rather in producing a sort of crying soundscape. While it is not surprising that men who used to lament as children resort to lamenting as a form of dealing with psychological distress as adults, community

members during field interviews stressed the abnormality of lamenting men. Lamenting men may face social scepticism because their display of emotional suffering contradicts the cultural conditions of their gender. However, the punitive mechanisms that are activated when gendered behaviour patterns are violated are reduced in severity due to the exceptional context of death and psychological crisis. Although the 'exception' of lamenting men occurs fairly frequently, men remain outside the gendered concept of laments. During my fieldwork, many community members would first negate male laments before becoming aware of such incidents; they also characterised lamenting men as clearly violating norms. The possibility of transgressing the gendered constraints of lamenting connects with gender performative understandings of undoing gender, thus revealing the subversive potential of ritual activity to disturb normative structures (Butler 2004).

5. Concluding Remarks

Laments reveal their gender performative efficacy in manifold ways: through performers, performance, sound, and content. What, then, do the qualities of lament that have been discussed in this chapter mean for the lived realities of Burgenland Croats? Older Burgenland Croatian women who have expertise in lamenting primarily characterise it as emotional expression, as a way to channel grief and communicate with the dead. Though gender dynamics are an essential part of the emic discourse on laments, the ritual's subversive qualities remain subject to academic interpretation. However, these academic interpretations within the field of ethnographic women's studies are revealing in that they portray lament as an empowering sphere of female agency that defies prevailing gender regulations (Tolbert 1990a; Seremetakis 1991; Magrini 1998). Elizabeth Tolbert argues that the corporeality of lament, the bodily representation of death and mourning, imbues the lamenter with a power that defies male influence (1990a: 54). For Nadia Seremetakis, ritually entering the space of death signifies the 'breaking of those gender constraints that characterize the world of the living' (1991: 74).

I want to expand these interpretations with a queer-feminist reading of lament as a symbolic act of inequality, oppression, and exploitation. As a ritual based on gender difference, lament places women in a culturally and religiously predefined position, that is, in separate spheres of 'female expressivity' that symbolise gender segregation and restriction. While recognising laments' subversive potential the social power women gain during lamenting, the ritual's marginal position as a cultural act is evident. Laments reside at the intersection of private and public, at the point of death, and thus they have impure, irrational connotations. As a public expression of psychological crisis, laments carry shame, amounting to the already existing religious vilification of female sexuality. Women's social obligation to lament, to do emotional labour for entire communities, shows signs of emotional exploitation—a form of generative reproduction that is normalised as the obvious labour of women, thus contributing to the maintenance of hegemonic gender hierarchies.

This reading of laments should not suggest that I am unduly fascinated with the genre of lament; on the contrary, the reading challenges the romanticisation of laments' traditionality, expressivity, and gendered exceptionality. It gives space to emic representations of lament, apart from positive emic attributions such as being psychologically helpful and facilitating communication. As the Burgenland Croatian women emphasised during my fieldwork, ritual funeral lament holds troublesome gender-related implications. Due to the pressure to publicly exhibit emotional suffering, performance stress can arise; for instance, if a woman felt incapable of lamenting at the required moment and therefore did not lament adequately or did not lament at all, it would not be unusual for her to suffer defamation within the community, precisely because of non-conformance to a mourning norm and a gender norm.

Among Burgenland Croats, discourses on the contemporary importance of lament oscillate between relief and nostalgia, specifically regarding the vanishing public practice. Metaphorically speaking, villagers mourn the 'death of lament' and the benefits of lamenting, while simultaneously imagining themselves in a modern world that is hostile to archaic expressions like lament. Relating these discourses to gender transformation, the decline of the public ritual may also gain a gendered meaning.

For young Burgenland Croatian women, refraining from public lamenting not only implies a rejection of traditional mourning norms, it can also signify a critical attitude towards normative gender assignments. Young women are invested in diverse forms of global pop culture, and they are situated in inconclusive off- and online localities, making them less susceptible to normative ideas of femininity. I do not, however, equate the decline of public lamenting with gender equality, since there are other cultural arenas for the maintenance of gender difference, specifically music and dance, that are alive and popular. In fact, the decline of lament intensified with Burgenland Croats' need to react to discrimination. It was the ethnic minority's socio-political reality rather than aspirational gender politics that called for 'modernity' and pushed the decline of lament, specifically in villages with a vivid lament practice, like Stinjaki/Stinatz.

Nevertheless, the trend of declining lament traditions around the world bears gendered meaning. The shame attached to the expressive articulation of emotion symbolically represents a certain shaming of emotionality and care, that is, of characteristics that are largely represented, historically and cross-culturally, as female. The abundance of female-specific cultural expressions signifies a devaluation of representations of femininity. As movie stars hiding their tears behind dark sunglasses become a pop culture representation of global mourning norms, we recognise that it is the expressivity, emotionality, and loudness of lament that poses the problem—a problem that entails gendered dimensions. Today's prevalence of rational, inexpressive, and silent forms of mourning corresponds to traditionally male-connoted mourning behaviour, reflecting the general tendency to silence grief in an increasingly globalised way of coping with death.

Notes

- 1) As the Austrian Association for Gender Studies puts it, ‘The notion of the gender imaginary encompasses the totality of imaginations, conceptions, affects, images, meanings, symbols, and constructions about and of gender that circulate in a society under specific historical and political circumstances’ (Hipfl and Pechriggl 2014).
- 2) The UNESCO World Atlas of Languages in Danger rates Burgenland Croatian as ‘definitely endangered’ (<http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/en/atlasmap/language-id-1350.html>).
- 3) These characteristics resemble laments in Croatia, specifically in North-West and Central Croatia.
- 4) Today’s social anthropological understanding of death builds on the early twentieth century works of French structuralists Robert Hertz and Arnold van Gennep. The intermediate phase, the time located between actual death and burial, constitutes the period in which most death rituals take place (Hertz 2010). The intermediate phase is also the main timeframe for lament, which, like most death rituals, is a ritual of separation, transition, and incorporation alike (see van Gennep 2010).
- 5) Judith Butler points out that feminist cultural anthropology and kinship studies ‘have shown how cultures reproduce the bonds of kinship itself’ (1988: 254). She further suggests ‘[...] that contemporary gender identities are so many marks or “traces” of residual kinship’ (Butler 1988: 254f.).
- 6) In this transcription, I try to visually represent the paralinguistic and paramusical elements of the lament. The small dots represent crying sounds, the caesuras signify taking breaths, and the upward arrows indicate a slight increase in tonality.

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