1 – 145 | https://doi.org/10.3986/SMS20242709 | CC BY 4.0

To see and to respect: On the relations between humans, supernatural beings and the landscape in Northeast Iceland

Ana Svetel

This article explores selected aspects of relationships between humans, supernatural beings and the landscape in Northeast Iceland. The landscape is understood as a changeable and dynamic dimension, encompassing all the continuously emerging processes of the terrain, vegetation, land, water, gases and atmospheric phenomena. In local perceptions, both humans, with their social practices and meaning-making, and non-humans – in our case especially supernatural beings – are integrated into this dynamic landscape. Belief traditions and interactions with the supernatural have an influence on agricultural and everyday practices, as well as on the social relationships within the community. Moreover, they are always situated in a specific environment. This intertwining of visible and invisible, material and immaterial elements and actors brings forth the question of respect, through which we can think the complex relationality between humans, non-humans and the landscape.
KEYWORDS: landscape, belief traditions, supernatural beings, vernacular beliefs, hidden people, elves, ghosts, Iceland

Prispevek obravnava nekatere vidike razmerij med ljudmi, nadnaravnimi bitji in krajino na severovzhodni Islandiji, pri čemer krajino razume kot izrazito spremeljivo in gibljivo razsežnost, v katero so vključeni vsi nenehno nastajajoči procesi površja, rastja, zemlje in voda, plinov in atmosferskih pojavov. V lokalnih percepcijah pa so v to dinamično krajino vpeti tako ljudje s svojimi praksami in upomenjanji kot tudi neljudje – v našem primeru predvsem nadnaravna bitja. Verovanjske tradicije in stiki z nadnaravnim med drugim vplivajo na agrarne in vsakodnevne prakse prebivalcev, pa tudi na družbene odnose v skupnosti. Obenem so zmeraj uprostorjeni v konkretnih okoljih. V tem prepletu vidnih in nevidnih, snovnih in nesnovnih elementov in akterjev se poraja vprašanje spoštovanja, s pomočjo katerega lahko mislimo kompleksno relacijskost med ljudmi, neljudmi in krajino.
KLJUČNE BESEDE: krajina, verovanjske tradicije, nadnaravna bitja, vernakularna verovanja, skriti ljudje, vilinci, duhovi, Islandija

INTRODUCTION

In Iceland, numerous beliefs are widespread and directly embedded in the landscape and time (see, for example, Gunnell 2001; Gunnell 2004; for a broader Nordic context,

see Gunnell 2009). This became evident in the course of the ethnographic research[1] I conducted in the northeast of the island, in the municipalities of Langanesbyggð and Svalbarðshreppur,[2] between March and August 2019.[3] Although my primary research focus was not on belief traditions *per se* but rather the temporal dimensions of the landscape, especially weather, seasonality, and light and darkness (Svetel 2022), many interlocutors spontaneously brought forth elements of vernacular beliefs (Bowman and Valk 2012) associated with specific (micro)locations that were part of their everyday lives. Thus, I quite unexpectedly gathered personal testimonies and narratives reflecting the relationships between humans, supernatural beings and the landscape. These relationships are the focus of this article.

In this context, I understand the landscape[4] as a distinctly changeable and dynamic dimension, encompassing all continuously emerging processes of terrain, vegetation, land, water, gases and atmospheric phenomena (Ingold 1993), co-created with embodied, experiential, perceptive and "conversational" meanings (Lund and Benediktsson 2010). It is inscribed with language and linguistic practices through narratives, toponyms and mythologies (Basso 1988; Telban 2016). Basso gives the example of the Western Apache to illustrate the point that talking about the landscape also reveals perceptions of one's own ways of appropriating and domesticating spaces.

> For whenever the members of a community speak about their landscape – whenever they name it, or classify it, or evaluate it, or move to tell stories about it – they unthinkingly represent it in ways that are compatible with shared understandings of how, in the fullest sense, they know themselves to occupy it. (Basso 1988: 101)

Similarly, Valk and Sävborg note that "[e]nvironment is not a mere background or surrounding for stories, songs, and other expressive forms; it is sensed and intimately known reality" (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 8). Many anthropologists, ethnologists, geographers and other scholars who study the relationships between humans and the landscape emphasise that these relationships are not predetermined, objective facts. Instead, they are fundamentally co-determined by social and cultural factors, including symbolic, experiential, spiritual, sensory, material and other dimensions (see, for example, Ingold 1993;

[1] The research was carried out within the framework of the Young Researchers Programme of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency and within the ARIS research programme entitled Ethnological research of cultural knowledge, practices and forms of socialities (P6-0187).

[2] The two municipalities merged into one in the summer of 2022.

[3] The ethnographic research involved participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, as well as informal conversations with residents of the municipalities of Langanesbyggð and Svalbarðshreppur, both those living in the two settlements of Þórshöfn (approx. 370 inhabitants) and Bakkafjörður (approx. 60 inhabitants), and with the agrarian population residing on farms scattered across the municipalities, mainly engaged in sheep farming. The methodological background is explained in more detail in the doctoral dissertation (Svetel 2022).

[4] I will use the term landscape, although semantically it often overlaps with the concepts of place and environment (see, for example, Casey 1996; Ingold 2000; Harvey 2011 [2009]; de Certeau 2007 [1990]). This is also evident in certain quotations later in the article.

Hirsch 1995; Relph 1985; Tilley 1994; Tuan 1977; Casey 1996; Wylie 2003; Jóhannesdóttir 2010; Bajič and Svetel 2023). In addressing the construction of places, folklorists highlight the importance of telling and listening to stories (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 8). In this symbolic construction of places, both "grand" stories, such as the Sagas in the case of Iceland, and fragments of family or village memories, anecdotes, local toponymic explanations and other narrative elements play an important role.

Whether in the context of the recorded (mythical) history in the landscape (Hastrup 2008), which Halink (2014) calls the "Icelandic mythscape", or in the case of family narratives about interactions with supernatural beings, it is against the backdrop of such collective, oral or written materials that the process of familiarising the physical surroundings and increasing the landscape's cultural proximity takes place. Valk and Sävborg emphasise that "[t]he landscape, as it becomes storied, turns from a passive surrounding into an active participant in creating the supernatural environment" (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 10). This diverse, spatially embedded folklore tradition is also referred to as place-lore. It is "a concept that refers to a symbiotic relationship between traditional communities and their environment, between tangible reality and the storyworld" (Hiiemäe 2007 [2004] in Valk and Sävborg 2018: 9).

In this article, I will not delve into the Sagas and other canonised Icelandic literature in prose or verse but will instead focus on my ethnographic material related to elves [*álfar*], hidden people [*huldufólk*],[5] the stones where they are believed to dwell [*álfasteinar*], as well as ghosts and interactions with the dead. In folk narratives, elves and hidden people are generally used synonymously. They are supernatural beings similar to humans, mainly engaged in agriculture, attributed with an archaic, pre-industrial lifestyle, and are rarely visible (see, for example, Hafstein 2000: 89; Gunnell 2007). It is important to note, as emphasised by Gunnell (2018), Hafstein (2000), and Heijnen (2005; 2010; 2014), that in Iceland, the supernatural sphere is often revealed to people through dreams. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that narratives about supernatural apparitions are always connected with specific landscapes, spatially embedded in particular locations, so that we can understand them as part of place-lore. In fact, place-lore "highlights a variety of expressive forms that manifest close bonds between humans, places and the environment" (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 9). As we will see, these narratives and beliefs also play a role in spatialising certain memories and illustrating social norms and rules (Gunnell 2018). Experiences of interactions between humans and non-humans, especially the ontological status of the latter, have proven to be highly ambivalent and touch upon numerous methodological and epistemological crossroads (see, for example, Holbraad 2008; Nyce, Talja and Dekker 2015; Lien and Pálsson 2021). I will address the role of such beliefs and narratives in interpreting social norms, rules and prohibitions, as well as ambivalence towards them in the final part of the article.

[5] The related terms are *huldumaður* (a man of the hidden people) and *huldukona* (a woman of the hidden people).

EMPLACED BELIEF TRADITIONS IN NORTHEAST ICELAND

The Icelandic landscape is replete with numerous legends related to (often mythologised) historical events, toponyms and supernatural beings. Knowledge about the landscape is thus inextricably linked with knowledge about the past and traditional beliefs. For instance, Kirsten Hastrup argues that in Iceland the landscape is a "well-known history" (Hastrup 2008: 73). She claims that the topography of the island "may look historically empty, but it certainly feels packed with meaning and memory" (Hastrup 2008: 73). Additionally, this "spatialisation" of the past was part of the romantic project of mythologisation of the Icelandic landscape. An example of the latter is Goðafoss, a waterfall not far from the area of my field research, which has been "incorporated in the larger epic of Icelandic history and literature" (Halink 2014: 214). As Halink (2014: 214) notes, there is no reliable historical evidence to support the widely held belief that in the year 1000, Þorgeir Þorkelsson cast pagan idols into this waterfall,[6] renouncing the old religion and adopting Christianity. Despite the pronounced tendency to historicise and mythologise the Icelandic landscape, many locations of historical events are indeed well-documented, intertwining with oral history and supporting it.

In Svalbarðshreppur, an example is the gorge called Frakkagil or French Gorge and the cliffs known as Þjófaklettar or Thieves' Cliffs. The names supposedly stem from an event when French sailors were caught stealing sheep. Local farmers caught them as they were attempting to transport the sheep onto their ship and hanged them in the gorge as punishment. The gorge and the cliffs are said to have been named after this event.[7] One of the interlocutors mentioned that the farmers laid a long log (presumably driftwood) across the gorge from which to hang the men. According to my interlocutors, the exact date of this event is unknown. Only one woman I spoke to claimed it occurred in 1702.

Like historical events and the mythical past, the landscape is also inscribed with stories related to encounters with hidden people, ghosts or the dead. Topographically, beliefs in hidden people or elves are often associated with specific rocks or large stones where these beings are believed to dwell. However, these rocks or stones are not necessarily remote, far from farms or other residential areas. In addition to rocks and large stones, beliefs are also connected with specific areas where grass should not be mowed, as these places belong to the supernatural beings. Such stories, known as *álagablettir*, are studied by Gunnell (2018). All the accounts related to encounters with supernatural beings that I have collected were always precisely located. Local (micro)toponymic names found across the country, such as *álfasteinn* (elf stone), *álfakirkja* (elf church) or *álfaborg* (elf city), often hint at places laden with the supernatural. As Hafstein (2000) writes, elf stones in Iceland have been mentioned in recent decades in the context of construction projects that planned their demolition. However, the accidents and mishaps that accompanied these projects, and which were attributed to the supernatural, meant that in many cases

[6] Goðafoss can mean either the "waterfall of the *goð* (gods)" or "waterfall of the *goði* (chieftain)", but it is not the only Goðafoss on the island.

[7] I thank Gréta Bergrún Jóhannesdóttir from the University of Akureyri for the explanation.

roads and other infrastructure were redesigned in order to preserve the elf locations. In cases where the elf stones were demolished, numerous subsequent complications, damage and inconveniences were attributed to the elf stones, as highlighted by Hafstein (2000; see also Feder 2022).

For instance, near the road between Þórshöfn and Bakkafjörður, the two main settlements in the area where I conducted research, there is a rock informally referred to as Álfakirkja, meaning elf church, while elf rocks, *álfasteinn*, can be found on many farms. The dwellings of hidden people or the locations where they perform other activities are always precisely situated. Interlocutors are able to pinpoint these locations. The rocks where hidden people are believed to live and the meadows where they are thought to farm are not abstract spaces but unequivocally defined places. Human behaviour stems from this localised knowledge, as people avoid touching or throwing stones in certain places. In some areas they refrain from mowing the grass and these beliefs can influence infrastructure projects such as road construction, etc. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude that understanding the landscape through the lens of traditional beliefs is ubiquitous in Iceland. When I came across information that there was supposed to be an *álfasteinn* on the island of Hrísey[8] and asked interlocutors about it, some knew what I was referring to while others claimed to be hearing about such a thing on their island for the first time.

The spatial dimension of the locations imbued with belief is also evident in the way information about them is preserved. An understanding of the landscape is transmitted through spatial knowledge. The findings of Hrobat Virloget, who researched the emplaced traditions in the Slovenian Karst, can be understood in this context: "However, as long as people will live with their own specific landscape, they will be able to preserve and renovate their "emplaced" traditions, most of them known just to the specific local community" (Hrobat Virloget 2012: 45). Emma,[9] one of the interlocutors who moved to Iceland and married into a farm in Northeast Iceland, recalls how in the first years after her move she went on trips and hikes with the neighbours. During that time, she learned how the landscape is directly connected with beliefs:

> *About the local elf stones … it is not that somebody tells me about it, but when you are going somewhere, to places, … it is usually that they are rather unusual in shapes or they are alone, there are no other stones around, so usually you can tell already this might be an elf stone. Then I start asking about it and then I get feedback from the people. But we also have neighbours who are very eager to … During the winter times, the first couple of years, well not since the children came, but before, we went hiking once a week during the wintertime, and one of our neighbours, he knows a lot of ghost stories and places and he always was managing the hikes and then telling us about different places.*

[8] An island in the Eyjafjörður in Northern Iceland, where I conducted preliminary ethnographic research in February 2019.

[9] All personal names are pseudonyms.

Through her example, we see the common practice of narrating certain stories at locations where encounters between humans and non-humans are believed to have occurred. This presupposes movement through the landscape. Indeed, relationships between people and the environment are often constructed while moving (Ingold 1993; de Certeau 2007 [1990]; Gregorič Bon and Repič 2016). During my fieldwork, the locations of the elf stones were often pointed out to me. Even if we did not visit the exact locations, interlocutors would at least indicate the direction through a window or make an effort to describe the location as accurately as possible. Thus, the emplacement of the stories and memories within a specific landscape played a crucial role in describing and presenting vernacular belief traditions. A similar situation arose during a school field trip when I accompanied some second graders and their teacher to Kópasker, a village about an hour's drive away. On the way, the teacher, sitting in the front seat of a small bus, said to her pupils: "*Do you remember the story about the elf* [referring to a specific elf she had mentioned in class, but I did not note his name]? *Well, he lives here, a little further in this direction,*" pointing towards the interior of the island. One of the students immediately asked if we could go there, but the teacher replied that we could not because there is no road that leads there.

In short, movement through the landscape (see Einarsdóttir and Lund 2024 for walking and Árnason et al. 2015 for driving) evoked numerous examples of stories and other narrations related to spatial interactions, such as memories of specific weather events and multispecies encounters. In the following section, I will present a case study of a farm in Langanesbyggð, where belief in hidden people is particularly intertwined with everyday practices, attitudes towards the landscape and interpersonal relations. This case also illustrates that belief in supernatural beings is not an isolated realm of vernacular spirituality but is embedded in numerous practical, mundane decisions. It also serves as an interpretative framework for certain events, and memories of encounters with hidden people frame the autobiographical narratives of the interlocutors. Let us now examine the interweaving of all these aspects through an ethnographic example.

PERSONS WE SEE AND PERSONS WE DO NOT SEE

Katrín (born in 1943), her daughter-in-law and I were sitting in the living room of their farm, having coffee. In the midst of a conversation about berry picking, Katrín told me that one should never throw a stone carelessly because you never know if you hit someone invisible. By this, she meant the hidden people. Then, continuing on a seemingly unrelated topic, she said that she sees a light from behind the hillside above their farm. When I asked her further questions about the light, she proceeded to recount memories from her childhood. As a child, she attended primary school on one of the neighbouring farms (as was common in rural areas at the time) and she recalled how from time to time she walked home with her sister. Most often, all the pupils and the teacher slept on the farm where the schooling took place and rarely went home. The farms in this area are quite far apart and for most of the pupils the distances were too great to commute daily. Katrín explained that they were often afraid while walking to or from school as it only

operated during the winter months, and they walked through a dark landscape. During those times, she would often see light behind the rocks at the top of the hill that rises up behind their farm. Nowadays, she is convinced that this light helped her, guiding her home and illuminating the landscape.

Then one day Oddi, a boy from a neighbouring farm (now her husband), came to visit with his stepfather and also noticed the light behind the rocks. He asked his stepfather about it, and the stepfather replied that elves lived there, and that the light came from there. Oddi responded that he had seen two of these beings making hay. His stepfather told him that it was their place, their area. Then Katrín suddenly shifts her narrative to the present. "*So we just respect it*" she concludes. "*We don't touch this ground. We never did anything on this ground. We've earned this people's respect, so we respect them, and they respect us*." Later she adds: "*The world would be so much better place if we showed the nature more respect and respect each other more. Both the people that we see and the people we don't see.*"

Her words relate directly to Heijnen (2005: 201), who emphasises that "the distinction between *huldufólk* and humans is essentially rooted in a distinction between invisibility and visibility." Another significant aspect of Katrín's concluding interpretation of her memories is the explicit mention of respect – the term she connects with respect for nature or the environment, interpersonal respect, and also respect between humans and non-humans. In her words, we can recognise respect as a fundamental emic concept, pointing towards coexistence and relationality among various entities, both visible and invisible. This brings us to well-known contemporary ontological discussions (Viveiros de Castro 1988; Kohn 2013; Watts 2013; Grauer 2020).

Respect for the *álfar* or *huldufólk* was emphasised by all the interlocutors who, when asked whether any specific places on their properties were connected with supernatural phenomena, answered in the affirmative. For instance, no one said that, despite knowing where hidden people are believed to live, they disregard this. However, many locals mentioned that there are no such places or that they are unaware of locations associated with beliefs in hidden people on their land. The fieldwork findings I have gathered attest to a close connection between supernatural beings and a sense of respect, which we will revisit in the next section.

Returning to our ethnographic case, Oddi confirmed Katrín's story and added that when he first saw them, he was less than ten years old. He then explained that they were all dressed in black and white clothing and were raking hay. They were somewhat smaller than humans but not really small. Although he could not see them well due to the distance, he noticed that they behaved like humans. His testimony is similar to numerous other records from different parts of Iceland. People usually describe *huldufólk* as somewhat smaller but very human-like beings in appearance and behaviour. The tasks they perform are linked to agricultural activities. Additionally, *huldufólk* are perceived as non-modernised. Hafstein (2000) argues that this belief tradition represents a connection with an (idealised and pre-industrialised) past, portraying *huldufólk* as Icelanders from a hundred or more years ago. He emphasises that these traditional beliefs can be understood in the context of an ambivalent attitude towards modernisation and development, influencing

the disappearance or alteration of traditional practices and ways of life. Moreover, "the contemporary tradition as a whole may be read as an extended metaphor for social changes" (Hafstein 2000: 96).

Katrín and her family leave a certain part of their land undisturbed, but sheep are allowed to graze there. Animals are not considered a problem in many other similar cases where humans are not allowed to interfere with certain territories that belong to the hidden people. For example Bjarni, a farmer who lives a few kilometres from Katrín's farm, showed me a place associated with hidden people where grass is never mowed, but he readily allows horses to graze there. Katrín explained this practice: "*Sheep can go there because sheep are just part of the nature.*" Oddi explained that there is a similar grassy area near the river, close to the border between their farm and the neighbouring farm. "*There is a small field, and it is always grass there and we never cut it because it is the elves' field*." However, Katrín adds: "*Sheep are eating there and sleeping there and it is ok. The elves respect the sheep*." What is especially telling in this context is that they used to mow near that "prohibited" area in the past, but stopped recently, partly because they have enough hay.[10] Their remark about having enough hay reminds us that vernacular beliefs can directly influence agricultural practices – decisions about where to mow and where not to mow are always linked to ensuring sufficient fodder for animals during the winter months.

Figure 1: The hillside above Katrín's farm; Langanesbyggð, 3. 7. 2019, Ana Svetel.

[10] Having bought a neighbouring farm, they now have more meadows to use for hay.

Later, Katrín and her daughter-in-law took me outside to "*show me everything*" related to the location-based aspect of the narratives, as discussed in the previous section. Katrín stretched out her hand towards the slope that rises up above their farm and pointed to one of the rocks: "*My oldest daughter lives in Reykjavík and when she comes here for the visit, she always goes to the elf stone* [Kerling] *and claps on it and says: 'Hi, how are you.' She visits them when she comes.*" We stood in the garden for a while, looking in the direction of Katrín's narrative. "*It is there, on the top,"* she points a bit higher to the rocky edge where, as a girl, she used to see the light. *"You can walk up there […]. And at the top, there is flat area and sheep really like to lie there. Like on a blanket. This is the elf rock and the light used to come from here. I am quite sure they live there. I haven't seen one, but I have seen the light. And they borrowed stuff from me.*"

Her observation that hidden people sometimes come to borrow everyday objects can be placed in the broader context of interactions that Katrín recognises between her family and the *huldufólk* living on their farmland. Such interactions involving *huldufólk* borrowing objects are relatively common in Icelandic traditional beliefs. The interlocutor told me that about three years ago she was crocheting a blanket and lost her crochet hook. "*And I was like, ok, the elves took it. And I was relaxed with that.*" Then, a few days later, her grandson, while cleaning the barn with his grandfather, "*just found it [the lost crochet hook]. There.*" As Katrín said this, she and her daughter-in-law, who was helping translate, burst out laughing. "*And I believe that there was this elf little boy who was send to bring the needle back, but he chose the wrong house, instead of our house he left it in the barn,*" she adds in the midst of laughter. In addition to the precise emplacement of the event, her explanation has an interesting symmetry: her grandson found the lost crochet hook in the wrong place, and a boy of about the same age belonging to the hidden people left it in the wrong place. Her daughter-in-law placed the question of missing everyday objects in a more general context:

> *And it is something that we have all experienced. Like weird stuff, like your scissors or some spoon or something you use, and you are like: "Where is it?" And then it just lies on the floor or on the table in front of you. And you come back, and you are like: "What? Why didn't I see it? What happened?"*

This case and the other narratives about co-habitation with hidden people show that there can be a multitude of different, more or less indirect interactions with supernatural beings. From the light with which Katrín alleviated her fear of walking in the dark landscape as a pupil, to avoiding mowing in certain areas, from joint family visits to Kerling, to a lost crochet hook. The ways of co-habiting with non-humans are thus diverse and nuanced, often connecting different members of the family, or entering into their interpersonal relationships. The supernatural beings are not passive or detached entities that belong to some abstract "other world". In contrast, they are endowed with agency, which extends to "this" world and questions the apparent dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural and other binary categories, such as nature and culture (Descola 2018 [2005]; Ingold 2000).

> In belief narratives, other-than-human persons gain agency and interact with people. […] Belief narratives animate the world by fostering relationships between humans and the non-humans, which are bestowed with personhood and individuality. The supernatural is evoked through imagination and storytelling as a kind of liminal reality, which is never fully comprehensible or complete, but compelling in its powerful presence. (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 18)

"WE DID NOT REFUSE THE EXISTENCE OF HULDUFÓLK AND ELVES, BUT WE DID NOT BELIEVE IN IT"

The example of Katrín and her family could give the misleading impression that belief in hidden people and their influence on everyday practices is uniformly widespread among the inhabitants of Northeast Iceland, constituting an unquestioned "truth" or "mental reality" (Valk 2001 in Mencej 2017: 59–60). However, the situation is in fact much more complex, elusive and vague (Bille 2015), embodying various forms of "cognitive reality" (Mencej 2017: 56). The nuances and implications of the term "belief" are continuously rethought and reconceptualised by folklorists (see Mencej 2017). Although some interlocutors claimed to have had experiences with hidden people or encounters with the dead, many showed much more ambivalence towards such beliefs. During the fieldwork, I witnessed situations where someone would speak about hidden people or interactions with the dead, while relatives without such experiences would predominantly show respect – something we already mentioned in the previous section. In later individual conversations, many expressed uncertainties about such claims, refraining from taking a stance on whether they were "true" or not, and preferring to emphasise their respect for the environment and nature. I never detected mockery or doubt about narratives related to such beliefs. We can see this cognitive approach in a case where an interlocutor told me about her husband supposedly seeing deceased relatives. She concluded the story with the words: "*And he believes in that.*" When I asked her if she believed it herself, she cautiously replied:

> *I don't ...* [thinking] *I think I don't believe in it, but maybe ... I am not like: "Are you just ..." I mean, I respect. Somebody believes in it, and somebody has seen things like that, and I believe that there are people who see things that I can't see, I mean ... I am perfectly, I know it is like that and I am just maybe not sensitive to it. I mean I am dreaming and then I meet people who are dead in my dreams and so on, but not, I didn't see them when I am awake. Yet.*

Some interlocutors who talked about places where hidden people live (or engage in agricultural practices), similarly stated that they themselves had not seen or perceived them, but that someone close to them (a partner, parents, siblings) had seen them or that

they had seen them only once, often many years ago, as a child. Therefore, the semantic dimensions of the term "belief" were revealed to be much more related to the question of respect – be it respect for the environment (or nature in emic conceptions), the landscape, the past, tradition, or respect for the experiences of others – than to the question of whether they ascribe existence to hidden people or not.

If we consider the question of ambivalence in the context of the spatial emplacement of beliefs, it is interesting to note that some interlocutors particularly emphasised that there are no *álfasteinar* on their farm or in their area. Sigrún, who grew up in the now-abandoned village of Skálar, mentioned that she remembers people often talking about hidden people but only on some farms and not in Skálar. When I asked one interlocutor about the hidden people, he responded, "*Not here. Not in Hlið.*"[11] His answer again highlights the distinctly location-based nature of beliefs in hidden people. Similarly, Sigurður initially replied that there were no stories of invisible people or elves on their farm, as his family was never "*into that stuff or dreams or ...*" However, he mentioned a large stone near the house, "*5 or 6 metres long, 4 metres wide, and maybe 2 metres high,*" where they used to play, and they informally called this stone *álfasteinn*. When we returned to this topic, I asked if anyone in his family believed that hidden people lived there. He responded after some thought: "*Maybe not believe ... but they were careful around it. Because if you do something bad to the elf stone ... Even though I did not believe in it, I paid respect to it. But we still played on it.*"

The rich and vibrant traditional beliefs in Iceland have often been oversimplified in the (mostly foreign) media, particularly in the context of Iceland's tourist boom. This can be understood as a form of exoticization of the north or "borealism", as it has been named by Schram (2011). The assertion that almost half of Icelanders believe in elves, as evidenced by headlines in newspaper articles and online posts, is a gross oversimplification of the complex nature of what we call "belief". Broader questions about the ontological status of hidden people in the perception of the environment and what "believing" actually means will not be extensively addressed here (see Mencej 2004; 2017; Severi 2015; Pócs and Vidacs 2020). However, the ambivalence of belief is encapsulated in Sigurður's words: "*We did not refuse the existence of huldufólk and elves, but we did not believe in it.*" Regardless of the nuanced meanings of existence, belief and similar expressions,[12] all my interlocutors were at least familiar with hidden people or elves and with the widespread knowledge of the locations where they are said to live – hence their landscape dimension. Even locals who had no experience of seeing supernatural beings knew where a relative or ancestor had seen them, or knew which rocks they were said to inhabit. For instance, one interlocutor mentioned a location on their property whose (informal) toponym suggests a connection with elves. "*If you would try to cut the hay there, there was always going to be rain, so don't even try to cut the grass there because you cannot dry it,*" he added.

[11] Hlið is the name of the farm.

[12] As I conducted the interviews in English, the undoubtely relevant questions on the semantic nuances of the Icelandic belief-related terminology will not be discussed.

This example shows the close connection between belief practices and agricultural activities, which are both embedded in the landscape and often intersect with specific temporalities. For instance, weather conditions directly influence farming practices and decisions about when to carry them out. Thus, vernacular belief practices do not emerge in a vacuum but are tied to the everyday practices of the community that sustains them. In our case, it is primarily an agrarian community, so many details of beliefs in hidden people are linked to sheep farming.

BELIEFS AND SOCIAL NORMS

Belief in supernatural beings also influences relationships between people, family dynamics and neighbourly relations. Valk and Sävborg emphasise that "[l]egends are not only dramatic and entertaining stories, they are also guidelines for behaviour in critical situations and instructions on how to avoid unwanted contacts with the otherworld" (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 19). The most compelling evidence of this can be found in the story shared by Bjarni. According to his narrative, a woman who lived on a nearby farm was replaced soon after birth. "*She,*" he explains, "*was not the same person as* [at birth] …" Stories about "shifted" or substituted children can also be found in Icelandic narrative traditions, such as in the 19th-century Icelandic Legends collected by Jón Árnason.[13] However, Bjarni was not retelling a folktale, he was explaining about a person he knew, a woman who lived in the second half of the twentieth century. "*When you are not looking at your baby, the elves will come and change* [it]." When I asked how he knew this, he immediately replied that the mother of the replaced child told him that her daughter was replaced by an elf. He then went to find photo albums to show me this "shifted" woman. He spent a long time flipping through the pages of the albums, searching for the mentioned person. When he found her on one of the photographs, he added, "*she was quite different from her siblings. […] Both how she looked and how she behaved.*"[14] His daughter-in-law, who was present during the conversation and helped translate, added:

> *It is just – you can never leave your baby alone when they are so young because then the elf comes. But it is not because you did something wrong, you just always have to look for the baby. When they were little* [points towards her children] *and they were sleeping outside* [in a stroller] *he was always telling me: "You can't leave them alone, the elves will come and there will be the shifter."*

Bjarni's narrative implies that a small child – or in this case a baby – should not be left alone outside. Spatially, it involves a clear demarcation between the home (interior space) and the external environment. The motif of an elf replacing a child (either with

[13] These narrative traditions can be understood within the context of the European legends about changelings.

[14] Therefore, one could also interpret this belief in the context of "explaining" potential "illegitimate" children.

a transformed old person or another child, but in any case, with someone from the supernatural sphere) the moment the mother is not looking at her child can be found in the Icelandic fairy tale "Father of Eighteen in Elfland". It begins with the description of a mother leaving her child unattended at the liminal location of the doorway. It is then revealed that the child was replaced during that time:

> Now, since the woman had her household work to do besides looking after the child, the time came when she had to leave him alone temporarily while she took the milk troughs to a nearby brooklet to wash them. She left the boy in the doorway. But when she returned, shortly afterward, and spoke to the child, he cried and howled in an angry, wretched manner, the like of which she had never heard before. (Icelandic Folk and Fairy Tales 2014: 24)

Bjarni's story of the shifted child, especially in light of his daughter-in-law's comment, reveals a distinctly dichotomous logic between internal and external spaces and the liminality of the locations that are in-between, such as the threshold. It also illuminates the liminality (and vulnerability) of this period for the person involved – the baby or the toddler. In short, this theme touches on in-betweenness, both in terms of time and space. These in-between, liminal spaces and times are often depicted in various traditional beliefs as "windows" for contact with the supernatural (see, for example, Mencej 2008).

In addition to beliefs in hidden people or elves, I also encountered stories about ghosts. For example, Sigurður recalled a story about a ghost named Modi who used to live on their farm. Allegedly people woke him up because they wanted to use him for malicious purposes, but the ghost got out of control. They had to tie him to a rock and bury the rock. Later, archaeologists from the United States of America came for excavations and were warned by the locals to be careful with that particular rock because a ghost was tied to it. However, one of the archaeologists ignored the warning. The locals were convinced that the ghost followed him to America because they heard he later divorced and had a car accident. "*So Modi is not here anymore?*" I asked. "*No, Modi left,*" Sigurður laughed.

Sigrún also mentioned that in Skálar stories were often told about ghosts, mostly "*when it was dark*." There was said to be a ghost named Skálastúfur in the settlement. Sigrún explained the background of the ghost with the following story. Once, the men from Skálar found a corpse or part of a corpse in the bay (for legends related to washed-up bodies, see Gunnell 2005; 2017). As it was not an entire human body, they thought it was the remains of an unknown sea creature, but they later realised it was human remains. They buried the corpse, but not in the cemetery. However, the ghost of the deceased began to follow them. They then dug up the corpse and buried it in another place but to no avail, it continued to follow them. Finally, they buried it in the church and since then there has been peace.[15]

[15] Friðrik G. Olgeirsson recorded a considerably different version of this story. They appeased the ghost by driving a nail from a shipwreck into his grave, as they supposedly discovered that he was a French sailor – thus pacifying him by providing something associated with his life at sea. According to another version, they exhumed the body, cremated it, and scattered the ashes in the sea (Jóhannesdóttir 2009: 15).

> *And this was the story we were telling each other in the winter in the evenings in the dark. And my mother was always telling the kids these stories. My brothers always wanted these stories to be exciting and tried to get the girls scared but it didn't work. They tried to scare us, but it didn't work.*

We can see that stories about ghosts are also emplaced in a particular landscape. The locations where the ghost is said to appear or where they buried him or where he is believed to dwell are not "somewhere" but always "there". On the other hand, the temporal dimensions are much less precise. When I asked my interlocutors when certain events related to ghosts might have occurred, they usually responded that they did not know, that others had told them about it, and some mentioned very vague periods, such as the 18th or 19th century. Experiences with ghosts are also narrated more indirectly than experiences with hidden people. Many interlocutors talked about *huldufólk* as beings that had been seen or at least somehow felt by themselves or by someone close (partner, siblings, parents, etc.). They also stressed that these encounters were not necessarily tied to specific events. During the conversations, there were often no specific stories about hidden people, but instead I was told where they were believed to dwell, and that these areas are not to be disturbed. On the other hand, stories about ghosts were always in the context of stories or legends. However, even though stories about ghosts are usually not time-specific, the storytelling contexts are predominantly linked to the darkest part of the year and the evenings. A spooky undertone and child (co)listeners are recurring patterns. Stories about ghosts or the reasons why someone turned into a ghost often addressed (problematic) interpersonal relationships. For example, Teitur mentioned that a ghost lived on their farm and told a story about him.

> *Many years ago there* [at this farm] *was a man who was not nice to his wife, and she eventually died and she haunted the people living here. They […] had a child and he didn't believe the child to be his and therefore he mistreated his wife until she died. And she haunted this place, and she still lives here. I don't believe in it, it is just a story. This story shows that women didn't have rights and how much power men had.*

It is worth highlighting that the intentional or explanatory aspect of ghost stories was often explicitly emphasised by the speakers themselves. In the example above, Sigrún highlighted that such stories were used to scare girls, and Teitur concluded his story by connecting the ghost on their farm to the subordinate role of women in the past. This reminds us of Jónsdóttir's analysis of the role of supernatural female figures in Icelandic folk narratives and how they served to uphold hegemonic ideas about gender relations (Jónsdóttir 2023; see also Jónsdóttir 2021; Magnúsdóttir 2018). Ghost stories can also address relationships with farmhands and maids. I was told about a farm in Svalbarðshreppur that had been abandoned for a long period of time. The couple that ran the farm were once forced to leave it for some days following an urgent situation. To prevent the maid from escaping, they locked her in the house. A fire broke out and the woman, unable to

escape, suffocated in the flames. Since then, she has remained there as a ghost. This story is probably linked to the testimony of one of the interlocutors, who recounts an incident when he was riding in the area. He decided to stop and rest near the remains of the farm. He dismounted his horse, which was grazing nearby, lay down on the grass and fell asleep. Suddenly, he woke up with the feeling that someone was trying to strangle him.

Another local man shared a similar experience at the same location. He was riding in a group and they decided to take a break there.[16] However, he noticed that one of the horses seemed to be exhausted. When they decided to continue their journey and moved away from the spot, the horse suddenly regained his full strength. Similar to Katrín's case presented in the previous section, this example shows that animals are often important beings within the relationships between humans and supernatural beings (and within the relationships between humans and seasonal landscapes, see Svetel 2023a). They are part of the same "world" as humans and can be affected by the same visible and invisible entities.

In summary, we can see that many of the ghost stories revolved around subordinate social positions, misconduct, or problematic interpersonal relationships. These relationships include gender relations, relationships between masters and servants, the treatment of unknown corpses or the disregard of local prohibitions by foreigners. As we can observe, ghosts begin to appear when various social agreements are violated or rules are not followed. In a sense, we can again identify the question of respect as an underlying dimension. Gunnell points to this prescriptive dimension of folklore, particularly in legends, when he suggests that legends "provide a kind of map of how one should behave in this landscape: what is right, what is wrong, *when* are they right or wrong, and *how* punishment is likely to descend on you if you transgress the largely unwritten moral rules imposed by society" (Gunnell 2018: 27).

In addition to hidden people and ghosts, some interlocutors also mentioned seeing the dead, which is similar in some respects to the encounters with supernatural beings discussed above. For example, Emma told me that her husband had encountered deceased relatives: "*He saw his father when he was dead for two years or something. He saw him in the stable and he saw his grandmother once, she came to him when he was very sick, actually. She came to him.*"

As Emma explained, the deceased father also had a normal conversation with her husband, "*but it was also more or less in the dark. It was in the … underneath where the sheep are, where the faeces are of the sheep, he was working there, digging the faeces. And his dad was there. He saw him but not in daylight. But they talked.*" Although cautiously undecided herself, she says that her husband has seen both the dead and the *huldufólk* on several occasions. Regarding the latter, she mentions that he saw them when he stopped for a break while horse riding:

> *And he was just sitting in a grass and taking a rest and then he saw them. […] When he started looking at them – I think there were two – they disappeared. I think, I was told that this is typical. When you … you are*

[16] Near abandoned farms there is often grassy vegetation suitable for taking a break and letting the horses graze.

> *not supposed to look at them. It is like the stars sometimes, when you are looking directly at the starts, you can't see anything, but when you are looking like more to the right* [for example]*, you see it.*

The contact with his deceased father, as in the previous examples, is spatially precise – her husband was able to specify exactly where he saw him. We can also observe another aspect that is repeated in experiences of encounters with various non-human entities (hidden people, ghosts, the deceased). The question of seeing is at the core of such encounters. As the words of the interlocutor make clear, the way to see supernatural beings is precisely not to look at them. This leads to a kind of paradox of "skilled vision" (Grasseni 2007) or "ways of looking" (Berger 2016 [1972]). To see what is otherwise imperceptible, one must not look at it.

This brings us back to the distinction between visibility and invisibility (Heijnen 2005), which distinguishes humans from the sphere of the supernatural. The question of visibility and invisibility takes on additional meanings when considered in the context of the Icelandic landscape. Hastrup highlights "wide visibility" as "one remarkable feature of the Icelandic landscape" (Hastrup 2008: 60), where distances are consequently difficult to determine. "The consequence is that if the landscape is simply 'seen', it looks empty, and relative size and distance evade any scale" (Hastrup 2010: 195). In a wide, expansive and clearly visible landscape, where one "can see", which many interlocutors emphasised as a highly desirable characteristic of the landscape (Svetel 2023b), one can also perceive the invisible.[17]

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have highlighted some aspects of the relationships between humans, supernatural beings and the landscape that exist in various forms in Northeast Iceland. In this regard, beliefs, stories and legends have, as Gunnell argues, "served as a kind of map":

> On one side, they reminded people of place names and routes, and gave historical depth to these surroundings, populating them with ghosts and other beings of various kinds. On the other, they served as a map of behaviour, underlining moral and social values and offering examples to follow and avoid. Simultaneously, they reminded people of the temporal and physical borders of their existence, questions of life and death, periods of liminality, insiders and outsiders, and continuously, the physical and spiritual division between the cultural and the wild […]. (Gunnell 2005: 70)

[17] However, the issue of what is perceivable (and preferable) in the landscape or "nature" also touches on various other social and political levels in Iceland (Benediktsson 2007; 2008; Olwig 2007; 2008; see also Ögmundardóttir 2011) and does not only refer to phenomenological or mythological dimensions. Oslund, for instance, demonstrates that in Iceland, "[w]ays of viewing nature became part of political and economic disputes in this region" (Oslund 2002: 316).

Although the ethnographic narratives presented in this article are very different from each other and also vary in their social context, they are united by the fact that they deal in some way with the supernatural (Anderson 2003), where the supernatural is not detached from "nature" or the material environment that surrounds us. "Legends are not detached from the environment, they are embedded into a familiar setting, they take place" (Valk and Sävborg 2018: 19). From this notion, we can identify three interconnected concluding points.

Firstly, as illustrated by numerous ethnographic examples, belief in supernatural beings is significantly emplaced – the landscape is inhabited by hidden people, which is evident both in localised memories of encounters with them as well as in landscape elements imbued with the supernatural (elf rocks, enchanted spots, etc.). Both humans and non-humans dwell in the same landscape. Secondly, the relationship between humans and supernatural beings is framed in the context of respect, which emerges as a promising concept for further reflection on the complex relationships between humans and non-humans, between people and places, between the natural and the supernatural, between the visible and the invisible. What kind of relationalities are implied within the respect so often mentioned by my interlocutors could be a starting point for further research. And thirdly, the possibility of seeing or sensing the supernatural is revealed through some sort of indirect, mediated perception. It may involve the indirectness of the gaze itself: for example, one must not look at hidden people for too long or too directly. Moreover, it may also involve indirectness in the experiential sense: for example, contact with the supernatural is narrated as someone else's experience (often formulated in a sentence such as: *I haven't seen them, but someone in my family has*) or the encounter occurred in a dream.

Despite these common emphases, we cannot reduce the diverse vernacular beliefs or encounters with the supernatural into a single perceptual or experiential category. As we have shown, hidden people have a different social role and are understood differently from ghosts, and there is also a distinction between ghost stories and accounts of encounters with deceased relatives. However, what still emerges as a common feature is that all these forms of supernatural encounters and vernacular beliefs are linked to a specific, lived, experienced and material environment. In various forms of place-lore, both humans and non-humans inhabit the same landscape, with which both are in constant interaction. Finally, as Hastrup states: "One cannot see a *huldumaður* without already being present in the space where he appears" (Hastrup 2010: 206).

LIST OF REFERENCES

Anderson, Robert, 2003: Defining the supernatural in Iceland. *Anthropological Forum* 13/2, 125–130. DOI: 10.1080/0066467032000129789

Árnason, Arnar; Hafsteinsson, Sigurjón Baldur; Grétarsdóttir, Tinna; Schram, Kristinn; Kjartansdóttir, Katla, 2015: Speeding towards the future through the past: Landscape, movement and national identity. *Landscape Research* 40/1, 23–38. DOI: 10.1080/01426397.2013.875987

Bajič, Blaž; Svetel, Ana (eds.), 2023: *Sensory Environmental Relationships: Between Memories of the Past and Imaginings of the Future*. Delaware, Malaga: Vernon Press.

Basso, Keith H., 1988: “Speaking with names”: Language and landscape among the Western Apache. *Cultural Anthropology* 3, 99–130. DOI: 10.1525/can.1988.3.2.02a00010

Berger, John, 2016 [1972]: *Načini gledanja*. Ljubljana: Emanat.

Benediktsson, Karl, 2007: “Scenophobia”, Geography and the Aesthetic Politics of Landscape. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 89/3, 203–217. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0467.2007.00249.x

Benediktsson, Karl, 2008: The Good, the Bad and the Scenic. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 90/1, 83–84. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0467.2008.00277.x

Bille, Mikkel, 2015: Hazy worlds: Atmospheric Ontologies in Denmark. *Anthropological Theory* 15/3, 257–274. DOI: 10.1177/1463499614564889

Bowman, Marion; Valk, Ülo (eds.), 2012: *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*. London: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315728643

Casey, Edward, 1996: How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena. In: Feld, Steven; Basso, Keith H. (eds.), *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 13–52.

Certeau, Michel de, 2007 [1990]: *Iznajdba vsakdanjosti*. Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis.

Descola, Philippe, 2018 [2005]: *Onstran narave in kulture*. Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis.

Einarsdóttir, Elva Björg; Lund, Katrín Anna, 2024: Walking-With Landscape. In: Rantala, Outi; Kinnunen, Veera; Höckert, Emily (eds.), *Researching with Proximity: Arctic Encounters*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 105–118. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-39500-0_7

Feder, Sarah L., 2022: “Trolls Had Been Moving Your Tongues:” Language, Landscape, and Folklore in Iceland. In: Niedt, Greg (ed.), *New Directions in Linguistic Geography: Exploring Articulations of Space*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 221–250. DOI: 10.1007/978-981-19-3663-0_9

Grauer, Kacey C., 2020: Active environments: Relational ontologies of landscape at the ancient Maya city of Aventura, Belize. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 20/1, 74–94. DOI: 10.1177/1469605319871362

Grasseni, Cristina, 2007: Introduction. In: Grasseni, Cristina (ed.), *Skilled visions: Between Apprenticeship and Standards*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 1–22. DOI: 10.3167/9781845452100

Gregorič Bon, Nataša; Repič, Jaka (eds.), 2016: *Moving places: Relations, return, and belonging*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn. DOI: 10.3167/9781785332425

Gunnell, Terry, 2001: Grýla, grýlur, “grøleks” and skeklers: medieval disguise traditions in the North Atlantic? *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 2001, 33–54.

Gunnell, Terry, 2004: The coming of the Christmas visitors: Folk legends concerning the attacks on Icelandic farmhouses made by spirits at Christmas. *Northern Studies* 38, 51–75.

Gunnell, Terry, 2005: An invasion of foreign bodies: Legends of washed up corpses in Iceland. In: Marnersdóttir, Malan; Cramer, Jens; Johansen, Anfinnur (eds.), *Eyðvinur: Heiðursrit til Eyðun Andreassen*. Tórshavn: Føroyja Fróðskaparfelag, 70–79.

Gunnell, Terry, 2007: How elvish were the álfar. In: Wawn, Andrew; Johnson, Graham; Walter, John (eds.), *Constructing nations, reconstructing myth: Essays in honour of T. A. Shippey*. Turnhout: Brepols, 111–130.

Gunnell, Terry, 2009: Legends and landscape in the Nordic countries. *Cultural and social history* 6/3, 305–322. DOI: 10.2752/147800409X445932

Gunnell, Terry, 2017: On the border: The liminality of the seashore in Icelandic folk legends. In: Jennings, Andrew; Reeploeg, Silke; Watt, Angela (eds.), *Northern Atlantic islands and the sea: Seascapes and dreamscapes*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 10–31.

Hafstein, Valdimar Tr., 2000: The Elves' point of view: Cultural identity in contemporary Icelandic elf-tradition. *Fabula: Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung* 41/1-2, 87–104. DOI: 10.1515/fabl.2000.41.1-2.87

Halink, Simon, 2014: The Icelandic mythscape: Sagas, landscapes and national identity. *National identities* 16/3, 209–224.

Harvey, David, 2011 [2009]: *Kozmopolitstvo in geografija svobode.* Ljubljana: Sophia.

Hastrup, Kirsten, 2008: Icelandic topography and the sense of identity. In: Jones, Michael; Olwig, Kenneth R. (eds.), *Nordic landscapes: Region and belonging on the northern edge of Europe.* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 53–76.

Hastrup, Kirsten, 2010: Emotional Topographies: The Sense of Place in the Far North. In: Davies, James; Spencer, Dimitrina (eds.), *Emotions in the Field. The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 191–212.

Heijnen, Adriënne, 2005: Dreams, Darkness and Hidden Spheres: Exploring the Anthropology of the Night in Icelandic Society. *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 51, 193–207.

Heijnen, Adriënne, 2010: Relating through Dreams: Names, Genes and Shared Substance. *History and Anthropology* 21/3, 307–319. DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2010.499909

Heijnen, Adriënne, 2014: *The Social Life of Dreams: A Thousand Years of Negotiated Meanings in Iceland*. Berlin: LIT Verlag.

Hirsch, Eric, 1995: Landscape: Between Place and Space. (Introduction). In: Hirsch, Eric; O'Hanlon, Michael (eds.), *The anthropology of landscape. Perspectives on place and space*. Oxford: Calendon Press, 1–30.

Holbraad, Martin, 2008: Definitive Evidence, from Cuban Gods. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14/1: S93–S109. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2008.00495.x

Hrobat Virloget, Katja, 2012: "Emplaced" Tradition. The Continuity of Folk Tradition in the Landscape. *Traditiones* 41/2: 41–52. DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2012410203

Icelandic folk and fairy tales, 2014: Father of Eighteen in Elfland. In: *Icelandic folk and fairy tales*. Reykjavík: Forlagið, 24–25.

Ingold, Tim, 1993: Temporality of landscape. *World Archeology* 25/2, 152–174. DOI: 10.1080/00438243.1993.9980235

Ingold, Tim, 2000: *The perception of the environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill.* London: Routledge.

Jóhannesdóttir, Sif, 2009: *Skálar á Langanesi: Merkar minjar horfinna tíma, Curious remains of times past.* Þórshöfn: Langanesbyggð.

Jóhannesdóttir, Guðbjörg R., 2010: Landscape and aesthetic values: Not only in the eye of the beholder. In: Benediktsson, Karl; Lund, Katrín Anna (eds.), *Conversations with landscape*. Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 109–123.

Jónsdóttir, Dagrún Ósk, 2021: "You have a Man's Spirit in a Woman's Heart": Women that Break Traditional Gender Roles in Icelandic Legends. *Folklore* 132/3, 290–312. DOI: 10.1080/0015587X.2020.1865741

Jónsdóttir, Dagrún Ósk, 2023: "[She] was very eager for men and hated living alone": Supernatural Women who Pose a Threat to Men in Icelandic Legends. *Ethnologia Europaea* 53/1, 1–19. DOI: 10.16995/ee.8495

Kohn, Eduardo, 2013: *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lien, Marianne Elisabeth; Pálsson, Gisli, 2021: Ethnography Beyond the Human: The 'Other-than-Human' in Ethnographic Work. *Ethnos* 86/1, 1–20. DOI: 10.1080/00141844.2019.1628796

Lund, Katrín Anna; Benediktsson, Karl, 2010: Introduction: Starting a Conversation with Landscape. In: Benediktsson, Karl; Lund, Katrín Anna (eds.), *Conversations with landscape*. Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 1–12.

Magnúsdóttir, Júlíana Þóra, 2018: Gender, Legend, and the Icelandic Countryside in the Long Nineteenth Century: Re-Engaging the Archives as a Means of Giving Voice to the Women of the Past. *Folklore* 129(2), 129–147. DOI: 10.1080/0015587X.2018.1439604

Mencej, Mirjam, 2004: "Vem…, pa vendar": verovanje v precepu med etnologom in njegovim sogovornikom. *Etnolog* 14/65: 175–186.

Mencej, Mirjam (ed.), 2008: *Space and time in Europe: East and West, past and present*. Ljubljana: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology.

Mencej, Mirjam, 2017: "Verovanje" v zgodovini folkloristike: konceptualizacija in terminologija. *Traditiones* 46/1-2, 55–68. DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2017460103

Nyce, James N.; Talja, Sanna; Dekker, Sidney, 2015: When Ghosts Can Talk: Informant Reality and Ethnographic Policy. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 9/1, 81–97.

Olwig, Kenneth R., 2007: Norden and the »Substantive Landscape«: A Personal Account. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 89/3, 283–286. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0467.2007.00254.x

Olwig, Kenneth R., 2008: The Cause Célèbre and Scholarly Discourse: A Reply to Karl Benediktsson. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 90/1, 85–87. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0467.2008.00278.x

Oslund, Karen, 2002: Imagining Iceland: Narratives of nature and history in the North Atlantic. *The British Journal for the History of Science* 35/3, 313–334. DOI: 10.1017/S000708740200465X

Ögmundardóttir, Helga, 2011: *Shepherds of Pjorsarver: Traditional Use & Hydropower Development in the Commons of the Icelandic Highland*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.

Pócs, Éva; Vidacs, Bea (eds.), 2020: *Faith, doubt and knowledge in religious thinking*. Budapest: Balassi.

Relph, Edward, 1985: Geographical experiences and being-in-the-world: The phenomenological origins of geography. In: Seamon, David; Mugerauer, Robert (eds.), *Dwelling, Place and Environment*. Dordrecht: Springer, 15–31.

Schram, Kristinn, 2011: Banking on Borealism: Eating, smelling, and performing the North. In: Ísleifsson, Sumarlidi R. (ed.), *Iceland and images of the North*. Québec: Presses de I'Université du Québec, The Reykjavík Akademy, 305–327.

Severi, Carlo, 2015: *The Chimera Principle: An Anthropology of Memory and Imagination*. Chicago: HAU.

Svetel, Ana, 2022: Vreme, čas, svetloba in tema v družbenih razsežnostih islandske krajine. Doctoral dissertation. Ljubljana: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology.

Svetel, Ana, 2023a: Ptičja perspektiva sezonskih krajin severovzhodne Islandije. *Svetovi: Revija za etnologijo, antropologijo in folkloristiko*, 1/2, 118–133. DOI: 10.4312/svetovi.1.2.118-133

Svetel, Ana, 2023b: Za kaj skrbimo, ko skrbimo za krajino?: toponimi, ovce in ruševine na severovzhodni Islandiji. *Traditiones* 52/1, 85–107. DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2023520105

Telban, Borut, 2016: *Kraji in časi v novogvinejski pokrajini.* Ljubljana: Založba ZRC. DOI: 10.3986/9789612548827

Tilley, Christopher, 1994: *A phenomenology of landscape: Places, paths, and monuments*. Oxford: Berg.

Tuan, Yu-Fu, 1977: *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Valk, Ülo; Sävborg, Daniel, 2018: Place-Lore, Liminal Storyworld and Ontology of the Supernatural: An Introduction. In: Valk, Ülo; Sävborg, Daniel (eds.), *Storied and Supernatural Places: Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 7–24. DOI: 10.21435/sff.23

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, 1998: Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4/3, 469–488. DOI: 10.2307/3034157

Watts, Vanessa, 2013: Indigenous place-thought and agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!). *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 2/1, 20–34.

Wylie, John, 2003: Landscape, performance and dwelling: A Glastonbury case study. In: Cloke, Paul (ed.), *Country Visions*. Harlow: Pearson, 136–157.

VIDETI IN SPOŠTOVATI: O ODNOSIH MED LJUDMI, NADNARAVNIMI BITJI IN KRAJINO NA SEVEROVZHODNI ISLANDIJI

Ana Svetel,

◇◇◇

V prispevku obravnavam razmerja med ljudmi, nadnaravnimi bitji in krajino na severovzhodni Islandiji in se ukvarjam z vprašanjem njihove medsebojne prepletenosti. S primeri vernakularnih verovanj v skrite ljudi (*huldufólk*) oziroma vilince (*álfar*), pa tudi s primeri pripovedi o duhovih in o prikazovanju umrlih pokažem, da so tovrstne oblike srečevanj z nadnaravnim nedvoumno uprostorjene – vršijo se v krajini, spomini nanje so lokacijsko določeni, skriti ljudje bivajo v značilnih krajinskih elementih, na primer v skalah. Vseeno pa je, kot razpravljam v drugem delu prispevka, tematiko sodobnega verovanja v nadnaravna bitja nujno kontekstualizirati tudi v luči ambivalentnosti in pomenskih razprtosti termina verovanje. Kljub ambivalentnosti razmerja med ljudmi in nadnaravnimi bitji odstirajo ne zgolj krajinske, temveč tudi družbene in medčloveške odnose, moralne norme, vrednostne horizonte, pa tudi agrarne in vsakodnevne prakse. S tem nakažem, da verovanjskih tradicij ne moremo razumeti kot izoliranih, ločenih od širših družbenih in kulturnih kontekstov. Izhajajoč iz tega lahko razumemo oba osrednja pojma (spoštovanje in posredni pogled), ki ju prepoznavam kot posebno relevantna za razumevanje etnografskih pričevanj. Gre za idejo spoštovanja, ki kaže na domačinsko percepcijo dinamične relacijskosti med ljudmi, neljudmi (vključno z nadnaravnimi bitji) in okoljem; ter za na videz paradoksalno podmeno, da je zaznava nadnaravnih bitij pogosto povezana z odsotnostjo neposrednega uzrtja.

Ana Svetel, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Zavetiška 5, SI–1000 Ljubljana, ana.svetel@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: 0000-0001-7114-3365