

PALGRAVE HISTORICAL STUDIES IN WITCHCRAFT AND MAGIC

Styrian Witches in
European Perspective
Ethnographic Fieldwork

Mirjam Mencej



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Styrian Witches in European Perspective

Ethnographic Fieldwork

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For my family—Jiří, Mirt, Zala and Alina

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Introduction

In summer 2000 I first arrived, together with a group of students, in a secluded rural region of eastern Slovenia to conduct field research. As part of a joint project between the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Ljubljana and a regional institution, our aim was to record folklore that could serve the institution's mission to promote the local heritage. What I hoped for were etiological legends about various features of the landscape and other legends related to particular places in the region, yet knowing that these tend to be rarer than the so-called “belief legends”, I also instructed my students to inquire about narratives on the dead, witchcraft, and the supernatural in general—just in case. However, when the groups met in the evening to share the results after the first day of fieldwork, as well as in the following evenings, one thing became clear: *the* topic in the region was witchcraft.¹ Narratives on witchcraft were abundant and clearly predominated—one could say that witchcraft was the dominant tradition (cf. Honko 1962: 127–128) in the region.

After such a surprising and unexpected encounter with witchcraft, we further focused our research mainly on the topic that seemed so important to the local population. Throughout the following couple of years, that is, in 2000 and 2001, I continued the research in the region with many groups of students,² and later on, in the period from 2013 to 2015, by myself. Altogether we conducted almost 170 extensive interviews involving 237

interlocutors. The interviews we conducted were semistructured—we let our interlocutors speak freely but asked additional questions in order to get a more precise picture of witchcraft during the interviews; these lasted approximately from one to one and a half hours, with “good” informants often even up to three hours. The people we interviewed came from about 55 villages and settlements in a region about 300 km² wide,³ mostly from the remote hinterland, that is, the hilly parts of the region. Most of them were elderly; of those about whom information on age was recorded,⁴ five persons, or 2.1 per cent, were born from 1900–1910; 27 persons, or 11.4 per cent, between 1911 and 1920; 76 persons, or 32 per cent, were born in the period between 1921 and 1930; 51 persons, or 21.5 per cent, in the period between 1931 and 1940; 24 informants, or 10.1 per cent, in the period between 1941 and 1950; 11 persons, or 4.6 per cent, between 1951 and 1960, three persons or 1.3 per cent were born between 1961 and 1970; one person, or 0.4 per cent, between 1971 and 1980; and four persons, or 1.7 per cent, between 1981 and 1990. Altogether then, most of our interlocutors were from 50 to 80 years old; the age of people that formed the most numerous group was 70 to 80, followed by those who were 60 to 70 years old at the time of our main field research in 2000–2001. While there was approximately the same number of those who were either 80 to 90 or 50 to 60 years old, there were very few who were either older or younger. In addition, women clearly predominated: they constituted 66.7 per cent (158) of our interlocutors, whereas only 33.3 per cent (79) of them were men.

*

Certainly, the narratives about witchcraft did not just crop up out of nowhere at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Documents from the early modern witchcraft trials testify that witchcraft has a long history in the region. Witch trials demanded their lot in the more or less Catholic Slovenia. Slovenian Styria (nowadays northeastern Slovenia, once the southern part of the Habsburgian county of Styria) was the very province where most of the trials against witchcraft took place: 319 persons or 64.4 per cent of all the victims of witch trials in Slovenia came from here. Moreover, in Slovenian Styria, there were several courts where witchcraft trials took place in the early modern period, two of them in the territory of our research (cf. *tratnik Volasko and Košir* 1995: 166).

While the earliest sorcery trial in the territory of modern-day Slovenia took place in 1427, and sporadic trials took place from the beginning to

the middle of sixteenth century, especially in the Habsburgian county of Styria, “typical” witchcraft trials mostly started in the middle of the sixteenth century. The first trial that involved diabolism took place in 1546 in Maribor, a town in the northern part of Slovenian Styria, in which several women were accused of raising storms and hail, or else preventing the rain, cooking dishes of toads, snakes, and lizards, poisoning people, destroying crops and vineyards, flying with the aid of an ointment, causing milk not to sour, gathering and consorting with the devil, causing themselves to become invisible by scratching Christ’s eyes from his image, forcing thieves to bring back the stolen goods and money, and so on (Pajek 1884: 18–23; Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 191; Košir 2001: 147; 2006a: 1052; 2006b). The first larger wave of witch trials in modern-day Slovenia took place at the end of the sixteenth century (1579–1586 in Styria) and was followed by a longer period of calm before the beginning of the second wave, which reached its peak between 1660 and 1700, in Styria mainly in 1660–1670. Due to the increasing scepticism of the Inner Austrian government towards witch trials after 1700, the persecution of witches slowly ceased in the eighteenth century, and the last witch trials took place in Metlika and Gornja Radgona, small towns in southeastern and northeastern Slovenia, respectively, in 1745–1746. Witch trials in Slovenia, therefore, lasted for approximately 250 years and involved at least 500 documented defendants, but many testimonials are unpreserved and a more realistic estimate is around 1000 victims of witch trials (Grafenauer 1961: 56; Košir 2001: 147).⁵

While there are a number of reasons for making accusations of witchcraft, which should be studied more thoroughly and along various parameters, according to Slovenian witchcraft historian Matevž Košir, one of the factors that influenced why they were so abundant in Styria could be that it was, and is, a wine-growing region (cf. Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 161–163). Additional reasons for the outbreak of witch trials in Styria, especially in the second part of the seventeenth century, which have been noted by other authors, were various misfortunes that affected the territory: floods in 1675–1684, poor harvests in 1649, 1660–1661, and 1690, grasshoppers that destroyed the crops, and plague epidemics (Radovanovič 1997: 46). While judges accused witches primarily of consorting with the devil at witches’ sabbaths, usually at the crossroads or at witches’ mountains, the majority of the accusations “from below” blamed them for causing hail and frost and raising storms. Not only were witches denounced to the court for causing storms and hail, in Styria in

1635, 1637 and 1675 six people were also lynched for that reason by furious peasants (Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 161; Košir 2006a: 1053). Accusations of witches causing illness, paralysis or death and stealing milk occasionally also crop up in the witch trial testimonials (Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 162, 192, 202, 204, 213, 222, 233), as do accusations of harm done to domestic animals, whereas accusations of poisoning, performing love magic, stealing hosts, and transformation into animals are rare (Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 161–163). In general, accusations of witches causing storms and hail clearly prevailed in witchcraft accusations throughout the witch trials in Styria.

The trials in Styria often seem to involve healers, soothsayers, scryers, and thief detectors, yet it is not always quite clear what the accused actually did and what they were forced to admit under torture. Such were the trials taking place in Maribor in 1578 against a man who allegedly predicted the future by crystal gazing and selling talismans, and in 1581 against a man who allegedly possessed a crystal and seemed to have worked as a healer. A trial was held in Gornja Radgona in 1650 against a woman who was able to expose thieves by gazing into a crystal glass, and in 1653 there was a trial against a female soothsayer who could retrieve lost or stolen objects. In 1660, a trial was held in Ljutomer against a woman who was said to be able to retrieve stolen things by magic, performed magic for luck, and gave weather advice; in 1675, against a healer; and in 1685, against a woman accused of healing as well as bewitching. In 1673, a trial was held in Sveta Trojica in Haloze against a charmer who under torture admitted to having healed with incantations. In 1677, a woman was accused in Ormož of bewitching illnesses and several suspicious objects were indeed found in her home—yet she denied that the objects were hers until she admitted under torture that she needed them to heal eye diseases. In 1677, in Zgornje Celje, a woman was accused of being a soothsayer, herbalist, and charmer, and in 1683, in the vicinity of Celje, another woman was accused of not only bewitching thieves by pricking a needle into impressions of their foot but also of paralysing people (Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 192–195, 200, 202, 209–216). In 1672 in Podčetrtek, a peasant named Jakob Križan was accused of saying incantations forward and backward, preventing and inducing conception, and curing various illnesses. To be successful in his procedures, he allegedly had to renounce “God, the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, angels, all saints, black mother earth, leaves and grass, sand in the water and sea” (Byloff 1929: 37–39; 1934: 109; Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 206–207; Radovanovič 1997: 47–48). In 1685 in

Laško, Ursula Turnuschiza⁶ from Sevnica (Liechtenwald) was accused of sooth-saying by scrying, i.e. gazing into a crystal ball (Valentinitsch 1987: 369; Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 216; Radovanovič 1997: 8). In Bizeljsko, a trial against a beggar named Jakob Krašovec, which started in 1689, also seems to point to a person who performed as a cunning man but had a somewhat ambiguous status: the community considered him a witch and feared him, and he was believed to have killed several people by magic. He was accused of having performed love magic, magic preventing a conception, and was accused of practicing magic with wax figures (pricking them with thorns in order to cause the victim to die due to a pierced heart). He denied the allegations but admitted to giving various persons a wax figure, a small purse, and some cotton fibres against conception and that he visited “a witch” who had given him a wax figure. Under torture he also admitted that he had renounced God, and that five years earlier a devil in a green jacket and red cap, called Hanzel, who he met at the crossroad on Pentecost, promised to help him in witchcraft in exchange for having his soul for two years. In addition, he denounced four women of being involved in witchcraft. The first denounced woman, Španzika, was supposed to be able to cause fever and summon sparrows to eat wheat, thus causing damage to the crops. She denied all of the allegations, admitting only to reciting the following incantation against an illness directed at the hearth: “In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, you evil apple order to God and to our dear Lady that you vanish from this Christian body and fly away from it so that it will be fresh and healthy. With this you give the illness up as lost” (Košir 1991: 31). The second woman Krašovec blamed for stealing milk from other people’s cows, as her two cows were giving more milk than all the other cows in the community put together. The third he accused of telling fortunes and making predictions about stolen items, dancing with witches, and talking to ghosts, and the fourth of cheating on her husband (Košir 1991, Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 219–221). Alleged magic specialists generally received much milder sentences than those accused of performing bewitchment, who were as a rule sentenced to death (Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 161).⁷

Comparison of the types of deeds ascribed to witches in the period of witch trials in the region, that is, from the sixteenth to eighteenth century (not taking into account those of magic specialists), with the deeds ascribed to witches that we recorded during the fieldwork at the beginning of the twenty-first century, shows that some of these, like accusations of causing illness, paralysis, magically stealing milk, preventing milk from going

sour, poisoning, and even causing hail, pertain to witches in both periods, although there are differences in their frequency and significance. Yet, what was going on with witchcraft in Styria and in Slovenia in general between these periods, that is, after the decline of witch trials in approximately the mid-eighteenth up until the end of the twentieth century, remains more or less a mystery. The main source of information on witchcraft in this period is narratives that folklorists have been collecting since the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Josip Pajek published a book of legends from northern Styria, which he partly recorded in the field, received from other collectors, or reprinted from various newspapers and even witch trial testimonials amongst which there are several dealing with witchcraft. These encompass internationally known legend types as well as motifs, narratives, and practices that we recorded in our region about a century later, such as the migratory legends *The Witch Bridle Legend*, *Following the Witch*, and *The Witch that was Hurt*; a narrative about a witch passing on the power of witchcraft to her eldest daughter; legends about witches' practice of spreading dew over their neighbours' fields before sunset on the Pentecost and on the first Sundays after the new moon in order to get their cows' milk; a legend about a person who, after having followed his wife to a witches' sabbath, finds himself at the top of an oak tree; and a legend about the identification of witches by a prayer performed during the midnight mass while kneeling on a special stool that one has to start making on St. Lucy's day, or alternatively on St. Barbara's day, and complete on Christmas (cf. Pajek 1884: 3, 5, 18–29). While several legends on witchcraft were recorded in the wider province of Styria during the twentieth century,⁹ the particular region of our research has mostly escaped the interest of folklorists. Apart from three legends on witchcraft which were recorded and published in a polished literary form in the 1950s (a legend about a witch dragging sheets on Pentecost on her neighbour's field in order to steal their crops' success; a legend about a witch milking neighbours' cows using a rope made from three hairs taken from the tail of the neighbour's cow; and a variant of the migratory legend *Following the Witch*—cf. Lekše and Terčak 1956: 140–141), and brief references to witchcraft legends being part of local folklore mentioned in two articles from the 1980s (Kuret 1983: 12; 1984: 158–159), no collection or discussion of witchcraft legends in the region has been published until recently. No folklorist, until very recently, has conducted extensive research on folklore, let alone witchcraft, in the region discussed in this book.

Several publications of folklore recorded in other Slovenian regions in the nineteenth and twentieth century also included legends about witchcraft; unfortunately, however, they are all more or less completely devoid of information about their social context. With the narrators' identities usually concealed, and the context not mentioned, pieces of texts published in isolation from their embeddedness in everyday reality, as "relicts from the past", contributed to the romanticisation of the "old beliefs". Folklore started to be considered a heritage, written down as a testimony about the past, legends turned into fiction, and "reliable witnesses of the supernatural (...) into anonymous representatives of the old folk" (Valk 2015: 150–158). Even those rare references to context that occasionally did crop up reveal more about the folklorists' attitude towards witchcraft, as a rule informed by their enlightened, "rational" worldview (cf. Valk 2015: 149), than offering a reliable glimpse into the social dimension of witchcraft in their time. One of the first Slovenian collectors of prose narratives, Gašper Križnik, who recorded folklore in north-central Slovenia in the second half of the nineteenth century, thus introduced his report on what he had heard said about witchcraft by stating that "[b]ewitchments are seldom, and there are few people that believe in witchcraft. And those that are blamed for [being witches], don't know how to bewitch" (ISN SaZU Archive, XI.9). Nevertheless, his own data clearly reflects the fact that more people must have narrated about their personal experiences with bewitchment than he was ready to admit, and that witchcraft as an explanation of misfortune was not as distinguished from people's social reality as he might have wanted it to be:

"About witches they say that they cause people misfortune, that they milk cows; do something to make people crippled or otherwise ill; that they make hail in the air, and that the priests who most insist that there are no witches are in alliance with them. Witches often lead people astray from the path to the forest. If lights gather somewhere in the night, they say that these are witches. It is clear that people don't believe in them anymore." (Križnik 1875: 146)

Such a devaluation of witchcraft to lore that has outlived its usefulness, growing outside the bounds of accepted views and incompatible with the modern rational mode of reasoning, was part of the enlightenment process of discrediting and displacing previous modes of thought and behaviour. Labelling them primitive and superstitious, which has been the practice

of those in positions of intellectual, political, and economic power, was a means of weakening their potential opposition to the scientific way of knowing (Motz 1998: 341–344).

Another profession that occasionally tackled witchcraft was newspaper reporters, who from time to time reported about fortune-tellers, performing as unwitchers, who were taken to court for fraud. In 1897, for instance, a certain Kantina Peetner, “the wife of a Gypsy buffoon”, was reported to have been caught by the police for having persuaded several women that they had been targets of bewitchment and consequently performed rituals to unwitch them (*Slovenski narod*, 10 August 1897, vol. 30, no. 180). In Maribor, the capital of Slovenian Styria, a newspaper article from 1934 reported on a dissatisfied client denouncing a fortune-teller who promised to provide her with a magic book which was supposed to help her against misfortune with the livestock, yet in exchange for money and food she only received a breviary (*Nova doba*, 30 January 1935, vol. 11, no. 5).

The attempt of “enlightened” newspaper reporters to distance themselves from the “naiveté” and “superstitions” of “backward people” is usually obvious in their writings. They often accompanied their reports from the court proceedings with mocking remarks and an overall pejorative attitude, or even revulsion, towards the credulity of the people (cf. also Davies 1998: 148; de Blécourt 2004: 89)—as clearly reflected in the following comment in a Styrian newspaper: “Oh, this stupidity! Uneducated people still believe in witchcraft and superstitions!” (*Štajerc*, 1912, vol. 13, no. 6; cf. also *Štajerc*, 1911, vol. 12, no. 6). Some even reprimanded the clergy for not participating in enlightening the uneducated people more actively: “How our good folk are limited! (...) how much Gypsies lure out from the people’s pockets in this or other way, yet the reverend clergy has no time to educate people that there is no witchcraft; instead it even strengthens their faith” (*Slovenski narod*, 16 October 1907, vol. 40, no. 240).

In general, this derisive attitude towards people believing in witchcraft continued throughout the twentieth century. After the Second World War, under the newly established socialist regime, their “backwardness” became problematic in the light of its incompatibility with the communist ideals about the future transformation of society, and was considered an obstacle to progress. As in other socialist countries, any sort of religiosity was, in accordance with the Marxist view, understood as the opiate of the people, and scientific knowledge became a

measure of establishing the hegemony of Communist doctrine (cf. Valk 2011: 855). The following is a very interesting report on an actual witchcraft dispute that occurred in a certain village in the Dolenjska region in the southeastern part of Slovenia, at the beginning of the 1950s, which ended up in court due to the slander suit brought by the accused against the accuser, and in which the allegations of witchcraft strongly resemble those that we came across in our region about 50 years later:

The “witches” stood behind accidents and evil in Radulja. If one were to write a story that would at least in people’s imagination seem likely, one should probably put it like this: “It was 350 or even more years ago, when the witches in this or that village were bewitching livestock, riding on brooms at night and doing all sorts of pranks, arousing fear in peaceful believers ...” However, since we have to write some words about a similar event which happened in the twentieth century, in the period of the socialist transformation of the economy and people – several hundred years after the burning of the last witch, we have to start differently. A young housewife at number 18 in Radulja near Šmarjeta (where else?) noticed that her hens were hatching very few eggs between Advent and Easter. (But whose hens are hatching well in this period?). She had also other problems in her household which she and her husband couldn’t explain until the young lady uttered her suspicions. You know what, that woman there, she must be a “witch”, the one from number 55. She is behind all the troubles, she is even too ashamed to go to the church. That assumption was confirmed by a coincidence when she one morning found corn scattered around her house. None from the family scattered it, so the suspicion immediately fell on the “witch” neighbour who must have bewitched hens to hatch even less eggs. With great efforts and huge fear in her eyes, the housewife picked corn and threw it into the oven. This was supposed to destroy the magic power of the witch, as the village people believed that only fire could “neutralize” the malicious intent of the witch. (On one occasion, in the same village, women found an egg in the stubble while harvesting. The master immediately brought a pile of brushwood and burned it upon the egg, and—lo and behold, right at that moment, that witch came by—the same one who placed the egg there with evil intent – as the burning of his bewitching object allegedly caused her severe pain. This happened in Radulja this year, as well.) Under the influence of a strong belief (!) in witchcraft, the “impaired” housewife from number 18 snapped in the face of the housewife from number 55 that she was a “witch”, because she caused her harm everywhere. She expressed this belief at an earlier occasion to her mother-in-law, complaining that she had no luck in this house, as everything was bewitched by this witch who does not even attend mass, because she is so ashamed. The alleged “witch”, in reality Marija Pelko from number 55, sued Marija Pelko

from number 18. Both their husbands were drawn into this witchcraft dispute; although they were both activists from the Liberation War. The witch affair was first discussed at the municipal People's Committee in Šmarjeta, and then at two more hearings in court. As the case involved a lawyer and several witnesses were questioned, the witchcraft incurred several thousand in costs. Marija Pelko from number 18 was sentenced to 200 dinars probation fine and her husband 500 dinars, because he slandered the husband of Marija Pelko from number 55. In addition, both had to pay all the judicial expenses and 200 dinars lump sum court fees.

The scornful conclusion of the article clearly emphasises the attitude of the newspaper reporter towards “backward” people who still believe in the reality of witchcraft:

We wonder if Pelko Marija and her husband from number 18 will also believe that this sentence was given to them as a result of witchcraft. When will these obscure medieval views in Radulja and the surroundings lose their power? When will people cease to believe such utter stupidities that cause fierce hatred among them and present a serious obstacle to progress, reflecting at the same time the incredible backwardness of these village people? (Dolenjski list, 11 December 1953, vol. 4, no. 49)

Another approach taken by the “enlightened” authors was adopting a patronising and romanticising attitude toward the holders of such “credulous beliefs”, emphasising their attachment to the past and to the elder population who “still” stick to superstitions, which, of course, are incompatible with the worldview of the younger, more advanced, progressive generation. Such an attitude is clearly expressed in the following article from another Styrian newspaper:

The winter nights are long and cold, and people like to sit near the stove. In the village, they take care of the livestock early and shortly after the first dusk crowd into a warm room to shell beans and husk corn and chat. Of course, now they have radio receivers almost everywhere and lively tunes are heard in the village on Thursdays. In Obsotelje, they listen to the Šmarje radio station, which has lately had a weak signal and was hard to find. Especially the educational programme on Wednesday afternoons had a poor sound. Even without the radio they talk about global, local and village politics. Our old men like peace and have their say, often hard, sharp and quite sarcastic. Some strong sips in a warm living-room at winter evenings stimulate their tongues and it is really interesting to listen to them. I did so, and I hope they won't be cross if I steal some of the

words they uttered by the stove. “It was bloody true”, said old Pepe convincingly as he cleared his throat. “My late grandfather— may he rest in peace!—told me that witches existed. No, it was not in Brijov kot, but at Trobeješki graben. There they were sitting on young willow twigs and roasting. Yes, it’s true, my grandfather said so! Old Neža saw it with her own eyes, but she wouldn’t say it before she was lying on her deathbed. And, you know, my grandfather really wasn’t prone to lies! He even knew some of these witches. You see, some were from the families that you would find hard to believe. No wonder that they had everything!” Ančka and Franček, happy and young, smiled as if they wouldn’t believe what their uncle said. “Yeah, they knew how to make counterfeit money!” the uncle sighed. “Uncle, why don’t you go and find them, so they could make us a lot of money! You know, then you wouldn’t need to curse so much when you get a bill for the county tax and fees!” The uncle first looked at them in anger, but then he muttered: “Why, you young people are like doubting Thomas! You are already completely corrupt! But you know, witches do not show up for just anyone, and that’s that!” And everybody burst into merry laughter. (Celjski tednik: glasilo SZDL, 19 January 1962, vol. 15, no. 3)

The legends published in folklore collections and various journals, sensational cases that entered the daily newspapers through the courts, and the “enlightened” attitude reflected in the newspaper articles as well as in occasional folklorists’ commentaries, however, certainly don’t reflect the attitude of many other people towards witchcraft and the whole picture of the role that witchcraft played in the life of population after the decline of the witch trials. Due to a complete lack of information on the social context of witchcraft narratives or related practices, and the fact that field research on witchcraft paid no attention to its social context, it is unfortunately impossible to estimate to what extent and in what way witchcraft informed people’s everyday lives from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. While certainly not equally present everywhere in Slovenia, and in some parts perhaps not present at all, narratives published in fairly recent regional folklore collections occasionally reveal that (at least in some places) witchcraft has continued to provide a means to understand misfortune and to cope with it well into the twentieth and even twenty-first century. However, thorough field research should be done before any firm conclusions about its role and significance for the population can be made.

At any rate, the research on witchcraft that my students and I conducted in the villages of a rural region of eastern Slovenia at the beginning of the twenty-first century proved that even if witchcraft was obviously in

decline as a social institution, and was for the most part preserved only in the form of narratives, many narrators still expressed a strong conviction in the power of witchcraft: some pointed to bewitchment practices as still being performed, some referred to women that still had a reputation of being witches, and several narratives even clearly reflected the social dimension of the allegations. Thirty-seven interlocutors out of 237 narrated about witchcraft accusations that referred to specific persons from their community and that affected their social relationships; of these, 22 talked about their own personal witchcraft disputes and 15 about those that happened to their close neighbours or family members. Although most of the narrators referred to past events, at least to some people witchcraft as a social institution, even at the time of our research, continued to offer a meaningful interpretation of everyday reality and provided them with effective means to cope with its perils.

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In many respects, this book is conditioned by the methodology used in the fieldwork. Sporadic visits to the region, one or two interviews at the most conducted with the same interlocutor,¹⁰ i.e. research that was not based on prolonged participant observation in a chosen community, did not allow us to closely follow the development of the “life-stories” of witchcraft suspicions and accusations within the social milieu in which they emerged. Moreover, the sporadic visits to the region with students prevented a deep immersion in witchcraft discourse like that of Jeanne Favret-Saada during her research of witchcraft in northwestern France (1980), when she consciously decided to allow herself to be “caught”, i.e. affected by the effects of particular words or ritual acts, and during which period she personally experienced “the real effects of the particular network of human communication that is witchcraft” (Favret-Saada 2012: 440). While she initially oscillated between “participating” (whereby her fieldwork would become a personal activity) and “observing” (keeping herself at a distance), she soon realised that in the latter case she would have nothing to observe. As long as she did not become entangled in witchcraft discourse, assuming either a role of a victim or that of an unwitcher, people would not even speak with her on witchcraft, as “spoken words are power, and not knowledge or information” (Favret-Saada 1980: 9). The only choice left for her was, therefore, to become involved, making participation an “instrument of knowledge”. Instead of struggling against the state of being affected, she accepted it as an act of communication: “In

such instances,” she writes, “if I am able to forget that I am in the field, that I have my stockpile of questions to ask..., if I am able to tell myself that communication (ethnographic or not, that is no longer the problem) is taking place there and then, in this unbearable and incomprehensible fashion, then I can connect to a particular form of human experience—the state of being bewitched—because I am affected by it. When two people are affected, things pass between them that are inaccessible to the ethnographer; people speak of things that ethnographers do not address; or they hold their tongues, but this too is a form of communication” (Favret-Saada 2012: 442).

However, is such deep immersion in the discourse the only option available to the serious witchcraft researcher? Gregor Dobler’s ethnographic experience in the same region about 30 years later (in 1998 and 2003) was quite different from that of Favret-Saada: even though his interlocutors were concerned about witchcraft, they were not all that reluctant to speak about it, and while they acknowledged the dangers of witchcraft, they did not seem to perceive the words spoken about it as dangerous, as Favret-Saada had described them. Moreover, Dobler pointed to some weak points of the methodological choices Favret-Saada had made—he argues that by separating witchcraft from its context, its embeddedness in everyday life, she extended her involvement into witchcraft alone, leaving aside the mundane everyday life of which witchcraft was a part: “Once we step outside the narrowly defined field,” Dobler argues, “we can again inscribe witchcraft into its social context, and words might lose their menace”. Finally, he believes that “[o]nly a combination of both, the specialist perspective and the one anchored in everyday life, can really grasp what witchcraft is about” (Dobler 2015).

If, therefore, immersion into witchcraft as only one, fairly restricted aspect of people’s experience, although a sincere and in many aspects fascinating approach, turns out to be too limited in its scope to be able to grasp the whole reality of witchcraft, is participant observation therefore the only method that enables the understanding of witchcraft in its entirety and imparts a narrowly focused perspective with a more realistic everyday counterpart? Without a doubt, staying with people for a longer period, living and working together, and—when the right context emerges—discussing witchcraft with them, is the best ethnographic method to get to know witchcraft as part of people’s everyday reality. Yet, when magic practices are never performed openly (if at all!), one can hardly hope to become a participant observer in their performance. The only field from

which the researcher can grasp the practices and the reality of witchcraft as such, is words. Staying with people for a longer period of time and becoming involved in their everyday lives would indeed facilitate the discussion on witchcraft and stimulate the right context to exchange words more easily than during short-term visits. Moreover, it would allow a researcher to witness many situations of social exchange, such as private discussions, gossip among neighbours, and various forms of shared work that may stimulate people to share their thoughts, opinions, personal experiences, and stories about witchcraft that we may have missed.

However, while a long-term stay in the community may enable the researcher to better grasp the social dimension of witchcraft, it could, on the other hand, just as well become an obstacle to the research. Where witchcraft is a vital social institution, the status of the family within the local network that one chooses to stay with inevitably affects the relationship of other members of the community vis-à-vis the researcher, and the information received is most probably strongly informed by this attitude. As the main fear of many of our interlocutors was that the information they shared with us would be repeated to other members of the same community, a prolonged involvement in people's lives could even increase their fear and consequently their reluctance to talk to the researcher who, temporarily at least, had become a member of the community, acquainted with the intricacies of the relationships within it. Furthermore, a researcher interested in the social role of witchcraft would probably get more information on witchcraft disputes from the friends of the family he or she was staying with than from other members of the community (cf. Dobler 2015). The information on witchcraft disputes, especially that involving the host family, would thus very likely emphasise only one side of the story—the one supporting the perspective of the host family and the network of the families linked with it. The competing interpretation by the opposite family, or a network of families, on the other hand, would very likely never even reach the “inculturated” researcher. If it did, however, it would most likely be cleansed and adapted in accordance with the assumption about the side the researcher is taking in the dispute, conditioned by the position of the family they are staying with in the dispute. Both options would thus necessarily render any conclusion about the effects of witchcraft accusations on the social relationships within the community biased, not necessarily reflecting the whole picture. Choosing to conduct research in another community, i.e., not in that of one's temporary residence—like Favret-Saada, who only conducted her research in villages

more than ten kilometres away from her residence (1980: 20)—on the other hand, does not help the researcher understand the social role of witchcraft in a particular community any more than our sporadic visits allowed us to understand it.

Participant observation and a more intense involvement in the witchcraft process may still be a better choice for a researcher doing field research in an area where witchcraft as a social institution plays a vital role in people's everyday reality, especially when one is interested in particular aspects of witchcraft such as the evolution of witchcraft disputes, the negotiation of their competing interpretations, the formation and transformation of bewitchment narratives, witchcraft accusations in relation to social relationships, power and social hierarchy, etc. However, where for most of the inhabitants witchcraft no longer has any vital social power to explain misfortunes and regulating social relationships, even though many people (still) believe in its power, and some may even (still) secretly perform magic practices, and others may still be reputed as witches—as was the case in our region—sporadic visits and interviews conducted with a relatively large amount of interlocutors seem to be at least no worse a choice of ethnographic method than any other in the attempt to understand witchcraft in its entirety, and the various roles it fulfilled in the everyday life of the population. The concern that narratives about witchcraft would be misunderstood and their meanings remain hidden to a researcher who did not stay in the region long enough can to a high degree be tempered by conducting a large amount of interviews. Analysis and comparison of the narratives of many interlocutors on the same topic allows the researcher to grasp the hidden connotations of the actions described (or their absence), and to get to understand messages underlying particular uses of the words, whereupon the picture of the social reality of witchcraft, even without the researcher being part of it, starts taking its contours.

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When we started to research witchcraft in the field, my particular interest lay in *stories* about witches and their comparison with witchcraft legends from other places and other times. In this, I was relying on the work of folklorists who have, over the last two centuries, recorded witchcraft narratives in various parts of Europe, published them in collections of legends, and classified them according to types and motifs (cf. for instance Christiansen 1958: ML types no. 3030–3080, and also 3000–3025; af Klintberg 2010; Thompson Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; ATU). These legends, however, were, as in

Slovenia, usually published devoid of their social context, mostly presented as polished stories (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 153, 160), revealing nothing of the social reality in which they were embedded. In fact, the social context of the narratives has long remained outside the scope of folklorists' attention, and the focus of folklore studies of witchcraft was basically on the representations of the witch, rather than on the perspective of their "victims", i.e. people who believed in witchcraft. As Favret-Saada laments, questions about the unwitchers who had played a crucial role in resolving tensions triggered by witchcraft were not even included in the questionnaires which were supposed to serve as aids for field researchers (1980: 227–233).

Many of the questions that I initially prepared my students to ask in the field were thus actually based on folklore notions about witches: what do witches look like? How does one recognise them? Where and when do they meet? How could one overpower them? ... Such questions obviously referred to stereotypical folkloric witches and had nothing or only partially to do with people who were considered witches by their neighbours or the community as a whole. While we sometimes indeed received stereotypical answers that pertained to the badly put questions, for instance:

F¹¹: What do witches look like? What did people say?

I: They had a big nose, and a broom¹² between their legs, and they lifted up and went ... (56),

... many other interlocutors, on the other hand, soon showed us that a witch was not some quasi-mythological or supernatural being of folklore but a flesh-and-blood human being, usually from the same community:

F: What did the witches look like?

I: I beg your pardon?

F: How do they ...?

I: Nothing, normal people.

F: Really?

I: Normal people.

F: Could you recognise them?

I: They were normal people. (93)

F: How could you distinguish witches from other people, was there a way to recognise them?

I: Well, it was not that ..., they were here, they were peasant women, it is only that they knew,¹³ they knew to do this. (2)

As witchcraft in our region turned out to be strongly intertwined with people's everyday life in the community, it soon became obvious that the social context could clearly not be neglected. In this regard, the narrow folkloristic approach, focusing solely on texts, did not suffice and had to be supplemented by an anthropological perspective. Anthropological research on witchcraft, for a long time mostly conducted outside Europe, in contrast to (narrower) folkloristic research, primarily addressed questions regarding the social dimension of witchcraft, and directed the investigation into the social relations between the witch, her¹⁴ victim and the unwitcher, explored the social functions that witchcraft fulfilled in the community and society as a whole, and focused not so much on the (notions about the) witch as such, but on *people who believe in witchcraft* (cf. Henningsen 1989: 106).

While I soon learned to include additional questions that referred to the social dimension of witchcraft accusations, some questions that should have been posed during the fieldwork were still missed. One thing that we clearly did not pay enough attention to during our initial fieldwork was the unwitchers, and my own subsequent field research focused particularly on these specialists, especially the members of the fortune-telling family that played the most important role in providing the unwitching services to the inhabitants of the region in case they were assumed to have been bewitched. Another issue that we also often failed to touch during the interviews was an inquiry into potentially ongoing witchcraft disputes—the fact that we did not ask about them as often as we should have obviously reflects our initial conviction that witchcraft was still a thing of the past, and of folklore, rather than contemporaneity and everyday life. Thus, if our interlocutors did not bring the topic up by themselves, the ongoing witchcraft disputes may have remained hidden from us, and we may have missed many opportunities to penetrate the witchcraft discourse as deeply as we could have. Yet in spite of many missed and clearly nonsensical questions that we asked during the field research (some that the students asked without my instructions and some that they asked according to my poor instructions, which were a result of my poor knowledge of anthropological research done on witchcraft at the time of the fieldwork, as the topic had caught me quite by surprise), many interlocutors nevertheless did speak openly about witchcraft allegations, affecting their social relationships, and we were able

to obtain some information on the topic even when questions were not being asked. In addition, information on various aspects of the social dimension of witchcraft that slipped our attention during the interviews could be somewhat retraced later on, through a thorough analysis of the interviews.

While the social dimension of witchcraft may have indeed been better addressed by anthropology than within folklore studies,¹⁵ anthropological studies, on the other hand, often lack sensibility for narratives that do not necessarily reflect social tensions and do not, at least at first glance, involve the social relationships in the community. Aspects of folklore that folklorists have long learned to comprehend, for instance the relevance of genre in the critical examination of narratives, the recognition of the types of (migratory) legends, the importance of individuals as participants in the conduits and their repertoires, the understanding of actions as ostensive practices, performative and discursive aspects of narration, and so on, have been tackled in anthropological witchcraft research only by notable exceptions (cf. for instance de Blécourt 1999). Thus while acknowledging the social dimension of witchcraft and the role of the unwitchers is absolutely crucial for the understanding of the role that witchcraft as a social institution fulfilled in traditional communities, the anthropological approach should, in my opinion, be supplemented by the folkloristic perspective in order to be able to account for the complexity of witchcraft in a particular region.

Indeed, to present local witchcraft in its entirety was precisely what I aimed at in this book, and to achieve that, I have used a folkloristic as well as an anthropological approach to the analysis and interpretation of the data. While such a combination may have prevented the in-depth research into each particular aspect of witchcraft tackled in the book, and their comparative perspectives, a comprehensive presentation of witchcraft in the region under research would be impossible if I focused solely on its particular aspects. The structure of the book therefore basically reflects the discussion of various aspects of witchcraft in our region. After the second chapter, in which I discuss not only the various factors contributing to the decline of rural witchcraft in Europe but also the ways it was preserved and transformed after the period of the witch trials, as well as typical contexts in which researchers have come across living witchcraft in twentieth and twenty-first century Europe, the third chapter focuses on the specifics of the region in which the field research was conducted. It describes the region's geographic

and socioeconomic characteristics and development and their influence on the changing significance of the role that witchcraft as a social institution has played for the inhabitants. In addition, it discusses the specific circumstances of the communication of witchcraft narratives within their social context. Witchcraft is also discussed from a narratological perspective: various discourses on witchcraft, people's personal attitudes towards witchcraft as well as possible strategies to hide it, and the heterogeneity of witchcraft repertoires of various narrators. The gender denotation of victims and witches in witchcraft narratives is also addressed. Finally, witchcraft in our region is presented a multilayered whole, composed of various levels and various categories of witches, and the argument is put forward that in order to fully understand its complexity one has to be aware of and pay attention to their specifics and differences. Chapter four discusses witchcraft as part of the social fabric, strongly related to misfortune and involved in social relationships among the members of the community, especially neighbours. Typical origins and circumstances of witchcraft accusations stemming from strained relationships, typical targets of bewitchment and typical modes of bewitchment are presented. In addition, the question of the reality of the ascribed deeds of bewitchment, psychological mechanisms that may help bewitchment and unwitchment to work, as well as circumstances in which bewitchment narratives can be mobilised for various reasons and with various intentions are discussed. The fifth chapter presents various countermeasures that were part of the common knowledge that people could draw upon to counteract bewitchment, and the sixth chapter discusses various specialists to whom people could turn in the case of their misfortune being ascribed to bewitchment, in particular unwitchers—their characteristics, the structure of their procedures and the role they played in the rural communities in our region. In the seventh chapter various reasons for people's gaining the reputation of being a witch throughout the entire community, their characteristic traits, the attitude of other people towards them as well as their role in the community are examined. The final section of the book discusses night-time visions of witches and experiences ascribed to night witches, closely related to European legends about supernatural beings and more or less separate from the social reality of witchcraft.

Without an intense involvement in witchcraft discourse and a prolonged period of participant observation, I hope nonetheless, to have managed to penetrate the witchcraft discourse in the region from various perspectives so as to be able to present a reliable and multifaceted picture

of how witchcraft—be it in terms of social institution or mere stories—was perceived and lived by the inhabitants. To allow the reader to form a picture of how witchcraft was discussed in the region by themselves, I have decided to present the discussions of witchcraft as much as possible through the eyes of our interlocutors and allow the narrators to speak for themselves. In this way the reader can participate in our conversations and witness our interactions, together with all the misunderstandings and poor questions asked during the conversations—and thus share our experience.

NOTES

1. Due to the delicate nature of the topic the exact location of the region is not given. The place names have been omitted and personal names replaced with pseudonyms.
2. The students conducted interviews in groups of usually two to three, while I joined a different group each day. Altogether there were 48 students involved in the field research: Urška Bajec, Alenka Bartulović, Matena Bassin, Ksenija Batič, Nuša Berce, Benjamin Bezek, Tanja Bizjan, Živa Bobek, Matic Bukovac, Helena Dembsky, Jana Drašler, Ana Frlič, Maja Globočnik, Michela Gregoretti, Vera Jačimović, Marija Jemec, Luna Jurančič Šribar, Urša Koprivec, Laura Bianca Kramer, Anja Kušar, Petra Misja, Neža Mrevlje, Miha Mulh, Špela Naglič, Ana Novak, Jasmina Papić, Tjaša Pavšič, Jasna Pečelin, David Pfeifer, Anuša Pisanec, Sara Pistotnik, Adela Ramovš, Tina Rehar, Nina Rolc, Tanja Skale, Lidija Sova, Tanja Stanič, Kristina Stibilj, Miha Šinkovec, Urša Umek, Tanja Verboten, Iza Verdel, Katja Vidovič, Tina Volarič, Petra Zagoda, Petra Zgaga, Saša Zupanc and Katarina Župevc.
3. In fact, the region we researched was wider, as we also conducted research in the towns at its outskirts, but for the present research it was the interviews recorded in the hinterland villages that mattered.
4. There is no information about the age of 35 interlocutors.
5. Women defendants clearly predominated: of those whose gender is known there was 68.6 per cent of female and 12.5 per cent of male victims; according to another source, women accounted even for 85 per cent of all the accused (Grafenauer 1961; Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 188; Radovanovič 1997: 51; Košir 2001: 147–151, 2006a).
6. Valentinitš writes the surname as Tarnuschiza, whereas Radovanovič spells it as Taraušič.

7. While Civil or Roman law distinguished between the practice of white and black magic—the second was punishable by death, while the first was not—at the end of the fifteenth century this distinction became somewhat fuzzy: according to demonologists, all supernatural powers not sanctioned by the Church were defined as demonic. However, in spite of demonological ideas introduced in the early modern age which have probably found some support in peasant experience (Larner 1984: 37–38; Petzoldt 1999: 5), the distinction between “black” and “white” witches by and large continued to exist in early modern Europe. Unwitchers were not as a rule suspected of harmful magic, and in witch trials cunning folk constituted but a small proportion of those accused. Not all of these people were prosecuted because of their profession, and when they were, the courts usually treated them less harshly than those engaged in harmful witchcraft (cf. Macfarlane 1970: 127–128; Thomas 1971: 292–293, 316; de Blécourt 1994: 289–296; Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 127; Tangherlini 2000: 284–286; Briggs 2002: 3).
8. Some information on witchcraft in Carniola can be found in the encyclopaedic history *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola (Die Ehredes Hertzogthums Crain)*, written by Janez Vajkard Valvasor (Johann Weichard Valvasor) and published in 1689.
9. Cf. for instance several books of legends recorded in the Styria region in the folklore series *Glasovi* (ed. Marija Stanonik).
10. The only person I visited repeatedly (on five occasions) throughout the years was the grandson of the famous unwitcher Ivan H. (see below).
11. The letter F in the transcriptions indicates the folklorist (students or me) and the letter I the informant. The numbers at the end of quotation indicate the informant (see List of Narrators). The transcriptions of the interviews are done verbatim. I have omitted the parts of the texts in which the authors discuss topics that are not relevant for the reader, explaining local words and expressions, exact locations, etc. Numerous archaisms and aspects of the local dialect which are evident in the Slovenian transcriptions have been rendered in modern or standard English in translation. All of the tape recordings and transcriptions are stored in the Archives of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana.
12. Witches flying on broomsticks, while one of the most common and persistent motifs in European folklore and early modern witch

trials, was very seldom mentioned in our region, and usually as a stereotypical reference. Davies assumes that the use of a broomstick as a vehicle was probably related to its use as a hobbyhorse by children (1999b: 187–188). On witches' flight on broomsticks see also Lecouteux 2003: 85.

13. "To know" refers to the knowledge of witchcraft (see below).
14. While not exclusively identified as witches, women prevailed in accusations of witchcraft in our region. I shall, therefore, use the female gender when writing about witches in general or when the gender of the witch was not explicitly specified.
15. I do not mean to imply that there is a firm boundary between the two disciplines; their interests have indeed in many ways become intertwined at least since the 1970s. By referring to the "folkloristic" perspective I simply refer to the main focus that has been put on the texts in folklore studies of witchcraft (whereas their social context was mostly disregarded) and on the image of the witch (and not on the victim and unwitcher and their interaction).

Contemporary European Witchcraft

Witchcraft in twentieth and twenty-first century Europe appears in many guises. Witches have become a commodity: they flood the movies, television and the internet, and feature in children's books and cookbooks, novels, journals, and board games; practitioners of "pagan witchcraft" perform their rituals; women dress up as witches for Halloween parties; witches have become a trademark of radical feminism and figure as the embodiment of women who do not succumb to the demands imposed on them by patriarchal society but fully realise their spiritual and magical potentials; and witches' traditional places have become a lure for tourists and the adherents of new spiritual movements (cf. Larner 1984: 81–83; Harmening 1991; Köhler-Zülch 1993, 1995; Paul 1993: 104–105; de Blécourt 1999: 150; Hutton 1999). All this witchcraft, however, is usually reduced to several features which comply with the needs of modern urban society and the demands of contemporary consumerist ideology, and has nothing to do with traditional witchcraft, which was typically set in more or less small-scale, close-knit, face-to-face agricultural communities, and which for centuries¹ served as an explanation of misfortune, interpreting the source of personal misfortunes a consequence of others' malevolent agency (Pócs 1999: 11–12; Levack 2006: 137–140). While particular individuals in modern Western societies might believe in the reality of witches, and convictions about the efficacy of witchcraft may be shared within certain circles, the generally accepted opinion in modern urbanised

societies does yet not usually hold the effects of witchcraft to be possible, and such opinion is not granted general societal support. When their views leak outside these circles, their adherents may become a laughing-stock of other members of the society.

In some places in Europe, however, as well as in some places elsewhere in the world, witchcraft is (still) present as a part of people's social reality. As Jenkins (2007: 210) puts it, "local interpersonal jealousies, feuds and conflicts of interest, and the psychodynamics of blame, guilt, resentment and projection that nurture them, have doubtless altered little over the centuries. Thus witchcraft beliefs did not necessarily become suddenly obsolete: they may still *work* (whatever that means in intimate and neighbourly contexts)." While Anglo-Saxon social anthropologists mostly assumed that European rural witchcraft disappeared after the end of witch trials (cf. Favret-Saada 1989: 40, 2012: 439–440), i.e. by approximately the mid-eighteenth century, when witchcraft was formally decriminalised, it seems that the marginalisation of witchcraft occurred much less smoothly and straightforwardly than has been assumed in the past. As Gijswijt-Hofstra showed in her research on European witchcraft after the witch trials (1999), witchcraft in the nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe continued to belong to the cultural repertoires of explanation of misfortune. Accusations of witchcraft did not cease with the repeal of the laws authorizing the witchcraft trials. Not having the support of the judicial authorities, people still found ways to vent their anger at people in their own communities suspected of having committed the "crime" of witchcraft: they could take justice into their own hands by insulting, ostracising, beating, and even lynching the "culprits". Such actions had already appeared in the period of the witch trials as an alternative to formal prosecution, but they probably became more common when legal prosecutions declined (Levack 1999: 84), and cases of violent action, without the participation of judicial authorities, resulting in the alleged witches being severely injured, beaten, burned, or fatally wounded, were occasionally reported in Europe in the nineteenth and even the twentieth century (Schiffmann 1987: 150–152, 159; Favret-Saada 1989: 40; Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 115, 183–184; de Blécourt 1999: 159, 2004; de Blécourt and Davies 2004b: 2–4; Mitchell 2004; Levack 2006: 289–292). Charges against alleged witches continued to be brought and were occasionally reported in newspapers in the twentieth century (Schiffmann 1987; Davies 1998; de Blécourt 1999: 158–160, 176–183; de Blécourt and Davies 2004b: 10). On the other hand, counter-prosecutions of

people who made false allegations of witchcraft, verbally assaulted, maliciously persecuted, or even lynched the alleged witches also often took the form of slander suits (Henningesen 1989; Levack 1999: 83). It would, therefore, be wrong to talk about a decline of witchcraft in Europe after the period of the witch trials without showing the ways and manners in which it continued to thrive: as Gijswijt-Hofstra observes, the question of the decline of witchcraft should necessarily find its counterpart in the question of its continuity (1999: 99).

REASONS FOR THE DECLINE OF WITCHCRAFT

Research so far has, nevertheless, focused much more on the reasons for the decline of witchcraft in Europe than on the modes of its continuation, adaptation, and transformation. The factors that are usually held to have triggered the decline of witchcraft are changing economic and social circumstances (industrialisation, urbanisation, and better communication channels), improved education and literacy and attempts by authorities to suppress “superstitious beliefs”, improved health systems and access to medical facilities, rationalisation of infrastructure, and road building and tourism (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 212; Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 150; de Blécourt and Davies 2004b: 2, 9). Improved public health initiatives, scientific medicine, and farming techniques helped render life less uncertain and less dangerous—as Jenkins states, “[m]odern medicine offers effective and dependable treatments for a wide spectrum of ailments, and this has at least some bearing on the decline of witchcraft beliefs in the twentieth century” (2007: 210–11). The decline of the neighbourhood and the associated rise of national and bureaucratic power structures as dominant forces in people’s lives, in addition to changes in the cultural and psychological sphere, have also been given as primary reasons for the decline of witchcraft. While social tensions in traditional close-knit communities tended to eventually evolve into witchcraft accusations, people in contemporary industrial societies are able to resolve conflicts by moving and finding new groups to associate with when conflicts cannot be resolved otherwise (Briggs 2002: 1–3; cf. Bleek 1976: 530).

Owen Davies finds the main reasons for the decline of the relevance of witchcraft in English society by the First World War, and its disappearance by the 1940s, in the profound changes in the economic and social structure that English society underwent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: “Close-knit communities whose existence had been based on

local economics in which barter was as strong a currency as cash, where oral traditions and local beliefs had been maintained through anchor families who had stayed put for generations, and where everyone had a stake in agriculture or livestock rearing, disintegrated under the impact of urbanisation and mechanisation, and on expanding national and international markets. As a result of such broad changes, and many other related developments, the scope for witchcraft accusations was reduced. At the same time, the growth of agricultural insurance, personal banking, and an embryonic welfare state lessened the financial impact of ill-health and livestock deaths. When there was no longer a need to explain misfortunes in terms of witchcraft, people no longer gained reputations as witches, and cunning folk effectively went out of business” (Davies 2003: 188). The change in the social milieu due to depopulation, increased contact with the metropolitan centres, especially via mass media, and the emergence of a sense of relative deprivation were the factors that according to Jenkins marked “the beginning of the end for fairies and witches” among the Irish peasantry (1991: 306). In Italy, national unification and the establishment of an official national language, the building of a transportation network, the development of compulsory education based on national norms, and the diffusion of mass media have, according to Magliocco, contributed to the breakdown of regional isolation and the growth of an Italian national identity, which, in addition to globalisation, the unification of the European market, and social changes in the late twentieth century, such as post-war urbanisation and immigration which reduced the population in villages, legal reforms of landholding systems, additional jobs outside agriculture, mass tourism, the internet et cetera, led to the rupture of the traditional rural folkways that were the cradle of vernacular magic. Better conditions and new opportunities have lightened the sense of the precariousness of human life and brought the notions about the power of the evil eye and witchcraft into decline—even though they have found new expressions in New-Age spirituality, mostly in urban settings (Magliocco 2004: 169).

THE CONTINUATION OF WITCHCRAFT

In spite of various factors that contributed to the decline of traditional witchcraft after the end of the witch trials in the eighteenth century, several studies show that not only in the nineteenth but also in the twentieth century, witchcraft still lingered on in some places in Europe, not only in the form of entertaining legends but also as a matter of personal belief and as a

social institution explaining misfortune, informing personal experiences and cultural practices, and regulating personal relationships in the community. In Finland, traditional forms of magic and sorcery continued to be suspected and practised in the countryside as late as in the 1950s (Stark 2004: 69, 2007: 7). Twenty per cent of the population of a southern Danish island admitted to believing in witchcraft in the 1960s (Henningesen 1989: 104). In the Netherlands, witchcraft was firmly embedded in the local culture in many places and formed an integral part of people's experience at the beginning of the twentieth century, in some areas even at least until 1940 (de Blécourt 2004: 90–91, 100–101). Personal experience witchcraft narratives were recorded in the beginning of the 1960s in England (Purkiss 1996: 110). In Flemish-speaking Belgium, narratives indicating that witchcraft accusations were a factor in the social reality of the population were recorded in the 1960s (cf. de Blécourt 2013: 363–365). Sebald's research in the 1970s showed that witchcraft was alive in Franconia in central Germany at least until the 1920s or 1930s, and even in the 1950s (1980, 1984). Inge Schöck's field research proved that in 1968–1974, it was very much a part of the daily life of the population in southwestern Germany (1978), and Cornelia Paul interviewed women from her own village in Swabia, Germany, who narrated about their personal experiences with witchcraft at the end of the 1980s, more precisely in 1989 (Paul 1993). In a questionnaire from 1986 covering the Allensbach region in Germany, when people were asked whether they believed that there were people who were able to bewitch, 13 per cent answered “yes, certainly”, and 21 per cent “perhaps” (Schöck 1987: 294, in Paul 1993: 106). Jeanne Favret-Saada came across a vivid rural witchcraft-based social system in Mayenne, northwestern France, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s (1980, 1989, 2012); later on, this has been showed to continue in France in Haute-Bretagne, Anjou, and Languedoc (Pinies 1983; Bloch-Raymond and Fraysse 1987; Gaboriau 1987; Camus 1988, in Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 118). On the basis of newspaper articles, most of which were printed between 1956 and 1984, and her own fieldwork in 1984–1985 in two Polish regions, Aldona Christina Schiffmann showed that witchcraft accusations in Poland were still alive in the second part of the twentieth century, even in the 1980s (1987). Narratives and practices related to witchcraft existed in the Portuguese region of Alto Minho at the time of de Pina-Cabral's fieldwork in 1978–1980 (1986). In Italy, twentieth-century ethnographic records are rife with cases of manipulative or aggressive magic, and illnesses were attributed to magic causes as late as the 1980s (Magliocco 2004: 166).

But while this research does not tell us anything about the general scope of witchcraft in the countries in question, the time periods when they were conducted also do not mark an end point, i.e. do not mean that people stopped practicing magic and believing in the reality of witchcraft afterwards. On the contrary, according to field research that has been done very recently, for instance, among ethnic Hungarians in Romania (Pócs 2004; Hesz 2007), among the Slavic Orthodox population of the Poreche region in Macedonia in 1999–2000 (Mencej 2009), and again in Mayenne, France, in 1998 and 2003 (Dobler 2015), traditional rural witchcraft has been proved to have survived in some places in Europe even into the beginning of the twenty-first century.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF WITCHCRAFT

Undoubtedly, the ways that witchcraft is talked about have changed over the centuries, and since the end of the witch trials witchcraft in Europe has been subjected to adaptations and transformations regarding its content, accusers, adherents, contexts, and practices. The contexts of traditional rural witchcraft in contemporaneity—the legal frameworks, political cultures and institutions, and media—within which it can be pursued, are significantly different from those in the early modern context. Since the Age of Enlightenment, the number of adherents of witchcraft has decreased drastically: witchcraft has largely ceased to serve as a device for ascribing misfortunes to others' malice in educated circles (de Blécourt 1999: 151; Freytag 2004: 31). Notions and customs that fell under the rubric of “superstition” started to be regarded as inferior, and their proponents were silenced and marginalised (Motz 1998). Still, Robin Briggs argues that, “[i]f we in the industrialised world mostly take witchcraft less seriously than our ancestors did, this arguably owes more to social changes than to any massive spread of Enlightenment values” (2002: 1). On the other hand, traditional witchcraft in Europe occasionally even gained new adherents. According to Pintchovius, the influx of single women into village communities in Germany after the Second World War contributed to the rise of witchcraft accusations in the 1950s (1991: 81, in de Blécourt 1999: 214). Davies writes that dissatisfaction and disillusionment with modern society in France led to the idealisation of the traditional “peasant” lifestyle. While “peasants” had economically ceased to exist by the 1960s, some people who were brought up in rural communities continued to see themselves as *paysans* even though they no longer worked the

land or even lived in the countryside, constituting a distinct social and potent cultural group which maintained the long-established values of traditional society, including notions about witchcraft (Davies 2004: 123ff).

Although twentieth-century traditional rural witchcraft in Europe in many aspects bears close comparisons to early modern and nineteenth-century witchcraft (Jenkins 2007: 210), some of the misfortunes formerly attributed to witches yet no longer appear in the twentieth century. Some types of harm traditionally ascribed to witchcraft seem to have been slowly dropped from the witchcraft repertoire, or their meaning at least diminished, for instance, weather-related magic, the connection of witchcraft to thunderstorms and crop failures, and love magic. Accusations directed at cottage industries such as baking, brewing, butter and cheese-making, are in some places clearly in demise (de Blécourt 1999: 151, 215; Davies 2004: 127). Yet, as Davies points out, witchcraft is an adaptable explanation for misfortune: while some misfortunes explained in terms of witchcraft disappeared, new ones emerged (2004: 127–128).

Traditional witchcraft, therefore, did not disappear after the period of the witch trials—while some notions and practices related to it indeed declined, others continued, and while members of some social classes no longer accepted witchcraft as an explanation of misfortune, it was occasionally reinforced by new adherents. Gijswijt-Hofstra thus recommends that witchcraft research should try to answer the questions about “(...) when, why, where, for whom, and in what respects thinking and acting in terms of witchcraft did or did not lose its significance. To what extent, both in the course of time and in various European regions or countries, was there a reduction in the domain and the frequency of bewitchments? Who continued to be involved in bewitchments, and who dropped out?” (1999: 99).

Unfortunately, there has not been enough research done in this field so far to allow for any generalised conclusions about the continuity of European witchcraft after the period of witch trials. Thorough research of witchcraft has been conducted in only a few countries, such as France, Hungary (and among Hungarians in Romania), the Netherlands, Germany, and England (de Blécourt 1999: 145; Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 98, 118). Although several papers and a few monographs based on the field research of witchcraft have been published, and despite recent attempts at stimulating research of European witchcraft after the decline of the witch trials (cf. Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999; de Blécourt 1999; de Blécourt and Davies 2004a), the study of witchcraft in Europe, especially of contemporary

rural witchcraft, is still in its infancy (cf. de Blécourt and Davies 2004b: 1). Nevertheless, one thing appears clear: the research conducted so far testifies to the continued existence of witchcraft, at least in some rural places, well into twentieth and even twenty-first century Europe.

CONTEXTS OF WITCHCRAFT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Long after the decline of the witch trials, the triumph of the Enlightenment and the dominance of rational discourse, witchcraft as social reality, as a part of people's everyday experience, helping to explain misfortunes that befell them, thus even nowadays persists in certain parts of Europe, and among certain members of contemporary society. There are communities where traditional notions about witchcraft and related practices have endured and are still embraced, without their adherents necessarily needing to fear being mocked, and where witchcraft still fulfils functions in the everyday life of the community. Research that proved the continued existence of traditional witchcraft in nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century Europe has usually been conducted in more or less isolated, traditional, close-knit rural communities, where those factors that were recognised as contributing to the decline of witchcraft elsewhere were experienced to a limited extent or not at all, and had very little influence on the everyday life of the population.

When Laura Stark writes about the continuous existence of witchcraft, and especially of the role that unwitchers played in the Finnish countryside, as reflected in the narratives recorded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she finds the specific socioeconomic conditions which shaped everyday experience in the Finnish countryside—such as rural life characterised by poverty, triggering competitive relations between neighbours, endless toil and high personal risk, hunger, even mass starvation in times of famine, common diseases and lack of access to health care, and few formal social institutions to protect people—crucial for its continuation: while individuals nowadays are protected by laws, it was up to early modern individuals to protect their own personal boundaries, and protective magic provided a sense of security and personal space (Stark 2007: 11). In the Drenthe province of the Netherlands, witchcraft accusations occurred exclusively in “the poor, peat-digging areas with higher birth rates than elsewhere in the province” (de Blécourt 1999: 214). Magliocco, writing about Italian “vernacular magic” in the twentieth century, similarly claims that it is rooted in a world-view that developed in agricultural communi-

ties in which living conditions were harsh and precarious, where there was a lack of access to basic health care and people often lived under feudal conditions as virtual serfs to powerful landowners, and where life in small-scale communities involved intense social relations which often became strained, leading to quarrels, feuds, and mutual suspicions between neighbours (2004: 156). When Jenkins discusses notions about witchcraft and fairies among the Irish peasantry, which were still alive until a few decades before his paper was published at the beginning of the 1990s, he refers to small-scale agriculturalists, organised on a family basis and usually relying on mixed farming, whose first aim was to provide a livelihood for the family, as being participants in the tradition (1991: 303ff). At the time of her research (1969–1972), almost half of the population of the northwestern French region investigated by Favret-Saada lived on small family farms which were dispersed across the countryside or grouped by twos and threes in tiny hamlets, and where land was often rented from the minor nobility. Farmers practiced mixed farming and livestock breeding, and lived mostly isolated during the week (Favret-Saada 1989: 41–42). Henningsen writes that witchcraft, as a matter of belief, was almost extinct in twentieth-century Denmark, except for in a few remote places (1982). Alto Minho, the hilly region in Portugal, where de Pina-Cabral conducted his research, was not really isolated, but the farms were very small, with a mixed-farming system, no modern agricultural methods, and no complex machinery (1986). The Hungarian village in Romania recently researched by Ágnes Hesz lies in a mountain valley at a relatively high elevation which has always been poor in natural resources, and the possibility to improve one's economic situation has become especially limited since the jobs in the nearby cities have become scarce (2007: 29). Sebald's fieldwork too was done in a secluded rural province of central Germany. According to his description of the area, the countryside was rugged, without a railroad or major highway, and had long been bypassed by progress in technology, science, and medicine. The inhabitants used simple farm technology, with the first tractors introduced only in the 1950s. The farms were 10–13 acres on average and not specialised; farmers had to survive on self-sufficient homesteads. Self-sufficiency on such a small scale perpetuated poverty, sometimes causing not only hunger but also a high degree of social isolation, as there was little need or opportunity to interact with similar farmers or traders (Sebald 1980, 1984). Aldona Christina Schiffmann's two areas of fieldwork in Poland were both characterized by poor roads; the first one a mountainous region where many migrations have taken

place after the Second World War, the second famous for its forests and looked upon as undeveloped and poor (1987: 147). Field research that proved the continued existence of witchcraft in the twentieth and twenty-first century thus seems to have been carried out in similar geographic, economic, and social circumstances, and de Blécourt concludes that “[a] more general marginality appears from the pattern revealed by witchcraft’s uneven geographical distribution” (1999: 214).

More or less isolated, close-knit traditional rural communities, in which people tended to stay in the same village or region from birth to death and usually did not move outside the region for longer periods, where people lived in precarious and often harsh living conditions, mostly depending on themselves for survival, where strained relationships among members of the community were more often the rule than a mere possibility, appears to be the typical specific socioeconomic context in which the continuity of traditional witchcraft has been most often encountered, and where witchcraft continued to provide a means for an explanation of misfortunes and shaped social reality. Hans Sebald, writing on twentieth-century witchcraft in German Franconia, actually understood the delay in the introduction of modern technology, science, and medicine to the region as the reason for a “delay in empirical understanding of accidents, diseases and death”: “Medieval beliefs have therefore had a chance to flourish longer than in surrounding areas” (1980: 173–174; cf. also 1984: 125–126). This, however, is a highly problematic statement. Judith Devlin claimed that the view that the “apparently medieval outlook” which seems incompatible with modernity and is viewed as “archaic mentality” can be understandable to a modern person only if seen as implying entirely different modes of thinking and feeling is not convincing, as there is no evidence for significant changes in human nature in the last four centuries. Moreover, she claims that the roots of modern culture are to be found in the past: “(...) the superstitious mind appears to me incompatible neither with the reasonable pragmatism of modernity nor with its more disturbing features (...)” (Devlin 1987: xii). Jeanne Favret-Saada had no doubts that farmers from Mayenne, believing in the power of witchcraft, were able to understand causal relations just as well as educated people and argued that the “logical” and “prelogical” mentality were not attached to two distinct categories of humans but were two set positions of opinion that can be occupied by one or another at different occasions (1980: 5, 230). Even though the “rationalist” designation of traditional knowledge as “ignorance” and “superstition” has weakened its potential opposition to the scientific way

of knowing associated with intellectual, political, and economic power, people would not have continued to believe in the reality of witchcraft were their belief merely based on “foolish misunderstanding and ignorance”, as assumed since the Age of Enlightenment (cf. Henningsen 1982: 131; Motz 1998: 344). De Blécourt rightly argues against a “vulgar rationalistic approach” which considers witchcraft to be an “obsolete, old-fashioned way of thinking” by pointing to its “presupposed narcissistic hegemony” (1999: 212–213). Witchcraft has its own logic, no less rational than other ways of thinking, and seems to provide “another kind of rationality” (de Blécourt 2004: 89–90), a way of knowing that can be set alongside the positivist and rational explanations, covering domains that are not satisfactorily explained in their frames, and internally consistent within its local contexts (cf. Paul 1993: 116; Motz 1998: 344).

NOTE

1. Although witchcraft in preindustrial European and contemporary non-European societies according to some researchers may have enough in common to be accounted for as the same phenomenon as contemporary traditional rural witchcraft in Europe (cf. Larner 1984: 80; Behringer 2007: 12–13), in these pages I shall mostly limit myself to contemporary rural witchcraft in Europe.

Witchcraft in the Region under Research

GEOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

In terms of its geographic and socioeconomic circumstances and conditions, the region where the main field research was conducted in 2000–2001 and to a lesser extent again in 2013–2015 very much resembles other regions in Europe in which researchers came across living witchcraft in the twentieth and twenty-first century. It is a hilly, remote, mostly rural, and difficult to reach region which in Slovenia is a synonym for underdevelopment, isolation, seclusion, and backwardness (Sok 2003: 35; Žagar 1984: 71).¹ While there are some clustered settlements and small towns located in the valleys along the rivers, the majority of the small hamlets, villages, isolated farms and extended settlements are located on the ridges and in the valleys among the rolling hills (Žagar 1964; ORP 2006: 50). The economic and social situation in the region has changed little over the past hundred years: unemployment, scarce industry or none at all, poor infrastructure, a low educational level, emigration, and a predominantly elderly population have been and still remain the characteristic of this area.

In most parts, the number of the population has been continuously declining over the last hundred years, although agrarian overpopulation still persisted after the Second World War. Those who did not inherit the land often had to move abroad, especially if they came from the hills or the remote areas. During the period of industrialisation in the rest of

Slovenia, the region lost even those crafts and administrative functions that used to motivate people to remain in the area and were supplying the farming economy. The loss of the population has also been the result of a lack of jobs and poor living conditions, with poor infrastructure and difficult farming conditions (Polšak 2003; Kunst 2012: 13). Young people in particular moved out, so those who remained were mostly elderly (Kremenšek 1984: 164–166). Strong emigration was typical of the period from 1910–1931 and also after the Second World War: from 1945–1953 upto 22 per cent of the population moved away, in some places as high as 50 per cent. The largest decrease in the population occurred between 1953 and 1971, but it continued again in the period of transition from 1991–2001² (Natek 1984: 193; Polšak 2003: 81–82, 2006).

At the time of our research in 2000–2001, about a quarter of the population still lived exclusively off farming, whereas in the 1960s up to 77 per cent of the population made their living off farming (Žagar 1964: 45). The rural layer of the population could be divided into different classes depending on the size of the farms,³ the average size of the farms being around 4 ha, with most of the farms being only about 2 ha big (Sok 2003: 35; ORP 2006: 42). The inhabitants were mainly involved in subsistence agriculture, particularly fruit and wine growing, and stockbreeding, especially cows, pigs, and hens. The farmsteads were selfsupplying, the fields insufficient, and the yields small (cf. Kremenšek 1984: 160–162; Polšak 2003: 83; ORP 2006: 42). In the past, a diversified and self-supplying economy was needed because of the uncertain sale of market surpluses—if the crops failed, there was nothing to sell, but even if the crops were good, selling them still posed a challenge (Sore 1984a: 123, 128). As a rule, farming was thus intended solely for self-sufficiency, except in case of animal husbandry, which sometimes provided a modest market surplus (Žagar 1964: 45; Kremenšek 1984: 167).

The key reason that the area was left on the margins of socioeconomic development lies in the fact that it was quite remote and difficult to access, which was largely a result of poor traffic connections—even today, there are only two somewhat larger roads running through the area. Although the first bus line connecting major towns in this area was opened in 1935, the bus ran only twice a day until the 1970s (cf. Sok 2003: 47). Difficult access and poor transport also made it difficult for people to benefit from medical care. There were almost no health centres, and transport was a major problem for the local residents as the horse-cart took too much time (Pertl 1984: 618). Although trained veterinarians and doctors have

been available in the region since the mid-nineteenth century (Pertl 1984: 606–609), they were still extremely scarce. The First World War made the already poor level of medical care even worse, as many doctors were mobilised, so their already low numbers decreased even further. During the Second World War, health service was almost inexistent, whereas in the years that followed it was based on private practice and thus almost unavailable to poor peasants. Although public health centres were being introduced after 1950 (Pertl 1984: 611), the number of doctors remained low and limited to larger settlements in the valley. In addition, farmers were only included into the general health insurance system by the law adopted in 1962⁴ (Toth 2003: 446); even then it seems that it took them some time before they actually became aware that they too had access to free medical services.⁵ Before that, a doctor was too big an expense for most people to afford, and veterinary services had never been free of charge. A doctor who used to work in the region in the early 1970s described his experience:

This area is still undeveloped, with no industry, and facing vast migration of young people. The population is largely rural, the majority being elderly people (...). The rural settlers typically visit a doctor 'when time allows them to', that is, when there is no work in the field, generally in autumn (...). The problems of this area are due to distance from major centres and hospitals and its general underdevelopment. In recent times, there have been efforts to build a road network and set up industrial plants. (Pertl 1984: 617)

Apart from urban settlers and few rich farmsteads, most households in the hinterland were poor, even extremely poor at least until the 1970s. In the early 1970s more than half of the houses originated from the time of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and the same number of houses had no water supply or electricity (Kremenšek 1984: 167; Sore 1984b: 61). In 1970, a journalist visiting the region described the situation he witnessed in the wider area as follows:

All around the hills (...) we would encounter the same view: uneven houses, black kitchens.⁶ Neglected elderly people, poor hygiene, hunger, resignation, hope in God's providence (...). A man in his fifties (...) is exhausted, burned out, sickly, unless he was born with particularly tough genes. (...) they say that more and more elderly people come to seek social support. (...) Still, nobody knows exactly how many of those with no support whatsoever would most urgently need it. (...) But the solution is not just social support.

An even bigger challenge is how to help hundreds of debilitated elderly people living alone in remote villages, in isolated houses, who are even too weak to wash, clean and buy food in the valley. Can we really imagine how these people live? (...) We have to make a decision whether to leave this and many other (...) villages to their destiny and see what happens, or start to help them at last. To begin with, we have to alleviate their misery and educate people. Is it really impossible to help, at least by helping them sell their produce—at guaranteed and solid prices? Some fruit and livestock? Some declaratory resolutions have been proposed, but nothing has been done so far. When it comes to buyout, the peasant still draws the shorter end [of the stick]. Experts are still avoiding [the region]. The roads are steadily getting worse. Children (...) still have no access to high schools and colleges. Now we also know that, year after year, old men and women (...) find it more difficult to live. And they find it harder to die. (Kozinc 1970)

Nevertheless, the 1970s brought at least some improvements to the life of the population. After this article came out, Slovenians started sending massive material and financial support to the (wider) area of which the region was a part, and the socialist government officials initiated a humanitarian campaign to help elderly people there (cf. Merljak Zdovc 2010: 98–99). The next event which brought a lasting change into these people's lives was the devastating earthquake that struck the area in 1974. After the earthquake, the inhabitants of the region were granted extremely favourable loans for the reconstruction of houses and commercial buildings at a low interest rate, and socialist youth work brigades, consisting of young people from all over Yugoslavia, came to help to restore its infrastructure—social housings, schools, and health centres were thus (re)built, and the infrastructure improved (Sore 1984b: 61; S. K., L. Z., personal communication).

Gradually, the measures to promote the development of the underdeveloped region started to affect the lifestyle of a significant part of the population. Industry started to develop at least on a minor scale—several companies opened factories in the area and some non-agricultural activities such as tourism started to develop on the outskirts of the region. The farming population was still predominant, but some inhabitants, who were engaged in non-agricultural activities in addition to farming, started commuting to work, and some even started to live entirely from non-agricultural activities (Kremenšek 1984: 167; Polšak 2003: 82; Sok 2003: 47). Transport connections improved, the roads in particular, the railways a little less, and further road construction facilitated the purchase of agricultural machinery; although the peasants had already obtained their first

tractors at the end of the 1960s, at the time they were still extremely rare (Fras 1984: 580). In the 1970s, many more households were connected to the water supply and the sewage system, yet even nowadays only a relatively small part of the population—44.5 per cent of the Slovenian average—is connected to the public sewage system (ORP 2006: 19). The period between 1971 and 1981 was also the only period when emigration, after the opening of new business centres, ceased (Natek 1984: 193).

Regardless of these encouraging changes in the 1970s, the per capita income at the end of the 1970s was still only half of the Slovenian average (Sore 1984c: 186). Even today, the figures for this area differ considerably from the Slovenian average: the GDP is 66.4 per cent of the Slovenian average, and the number of jobs is significantly lower than elsewhere. Registered unemployment is 134.3 per cent of the Slovenian average, while the aging index exceeds the average (ORP 2006: 18–19; Kunst 2012: 12–13, 21). According to data from 2002, 35 per cent of the population has primary education, 50 per cent completed secondary school, and only 7 per cent finished college or university level. About 7 per cent of the population did not finish elementary school, and 1 per cent has no education at all (Kunst 2012: 17, 20). As industrial plants collapsed during the transition process of the 1990s (ORP 2006: 36), public transportation again became less frequent and prevented the further mobility of the people and the workforce (ORP 2006: 69). Due to job losses and increasingly difficult market conditions, the economic situation once again deteriorated. Agriculture, which in the past was already inhibited by fragmented property in the valley areas and by the small size of farms in the hills, the unfavourable demographic and educational situation, and the extensive and traditional polycultural production, still remains the main source of livelihood (Polšak 2003, 2006). The exodus thus continues: young and educated people in particular again tend to move to more developed areas with better living and working conditions (ORP 2006: 41).

This was pretty much the situation that we faced when we first came to the region: most of our interlocutors were old, many, although not everybody, rather poor and living in harsh conditions, mostly surviving by cultivating small pieces of land and on some very low pension or social support. Such was the socioeconomic setting in which witchcraft in the time of our fieldwork in 2000–2001 and even in 2013–2015 still to some extent functioned not only in “stories from the past”, but was a matter of personal belief and, partly at least, a social institution, affecting and regulating social relationships between neighbours.

THE TIME CONTEXT

Although at the time of our fieldwork, some of our interlocutors expressed a firm conviction in the reality of witchcraft, referred to their neighbours as witches and narrated about bewitchments that happened fairly recently, others placed witchcraft in the past, in the time of their parents or even grandparents. When time frames were explicitly given, people often placed witchcraft in the period between the two world wars, and some specifically stated that the Second World War was the turning point, the time when people ceased to believe in witchcraft.

I2: *My father used to tell me such things, you know. In the past, more things were going on. (11)*

I1: *Up there where we lived, where we had a vineyard, there was a woman in the vicinity. That one really knew, who knows what ... (...) She was a real one! She was a real one! And my grandmother said that she had in her house ... well, the house is still there, a very tiny one, up there where I lived, covered with straw, really like that, who knows how old it is! And she had bound the ropes in her house to the beams and milked. And she brought this to the wedding. She had plenty of cheese, of everything, and she brought this to the wedding, as one was supposed to bring. And when women got food ready for the wedding and put everything on the tables and rolled out pastry in order to put [white cheese] on it, everything has gone missing from all her pots. And that was true.*

F: *When did this happen?*

I1: *That was in the time of old Yugoslavia.⁷ I still knew that woman. When I started to go to school she was still alive. (25)*

I: *Christ, yes, I tell you, you don't know about all this. This used to be the case. Before. Now it is different. Now they [witches] have no power anymore [laughter], they don't know. They don't know, indeed.*

F: *How come they don't know? Did they forget?*

I: *Yes, it came that far. That season passed, and that fat they used to have, too. During the war, when the army set everything to fire, it burned. This lard and everything. I know down there where I lived, our neighbours (...) they had all sorts of fat, plenty of fat. And then the Germans came and they thought they were partisans and they gave them everything so they burned their house down. And everything went to hell, that fat and everything. It burned and they could do nothing any more. (60)*

Indeed, the famous fortune-teller Jan H., who people in the region frequently visited in case of misfortune due to bewitchment from the beginning of the 1930s until the Second World War, often figures in the narratives—which would confirm the narrators' statements about the time period in which they placed witchcraft. However, his wife Angela H., who took over the family's profession after his death, features in their narratives almost as often as her husband. As she only started to practice unwitching at the end of the Second World War and continued to do so until the end of the 1970s, the Second World War is clearly not yet the time when accusations of witchcraft completely died out.

It seems that the main change in the importance of the role that witchcraft played in the life of most of the population actually occurred in the 1970s: this seems to be the time when the number of people who found an explanation for their misfortunes in witchcraft and for whom witchcraft played a role in defining the relationships with their neighbours decreased, and the period when the unwitchers started to lose their customers. While Angela H., the last in the line of the most influential fortune-telling family providing services to the inhabitants of the region, was still regularly receiving customers who turned to her for help when struck by bewitchment in the 1960s, the frequency of their visits, according to her grandson Ivan H., diminished significantly in the 1970s and had altogether stopped by the end of the 1970s. As we have seen above, the 1970s was precisely the period when the region experienced improvements in economic development, and the conditions of life became somewhat less harsh: electricity and water supply became available to more households than before, many houses were rebuilt, medical care became for free even to farmers, who constituted the majority of the population, and several factories and tourism facilities, established at the periphery of the region, offered job opportunities. This, consequently, improved the standard of living of at least part of the population and, due to the daily migrations, triggered the improvement of the roads and traffic facilities. Better roads, on the other hand, also allowed for the use of tractors, which improved land cultivation. In addition, this was the time when television started to make its way into the rural households in the region.⁸

All these changes consequently triggered the loosening of the bonds within the close village communities (cf. Sok 2003: 39–40) and caused changes in the social life of the communities. The key setting for the

communication and evaluation of the witchcraft narratives in the area had been always the shared work, particularly in the autumn and winter evenings when people gathered together in one or another house to husk corn, shell beans and pluck feathers, but also during crop and wine harvests, pig-slaughtering and other domestic activities related to the rural economy that brought villagers together (cf. also Devlin 1987: 198; Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1991: 13–14). Due to the changes that happened in this period, in particular daily migrations and improvements in agricultural machinery, the evenings of shared work more or less ended in the 1970s (Sok 2003: 116). The basic context within which the communication of the witchcraft narratives was being carried out and which supported the maintenance of the witchcraft discourse and the persistence of witchcraft as a social institution, as our narrators sometimes explicitly stated themselves, has thus more or less vanished.

This was before, I still remember that, people used to pluck feathers, hens' feathers, they needed them for pillows. And they shelled beans and stripped husks and they met there, in the village, this was not like nowadays, when one passes by another and hardly lifts a hand. During such occasions such things came up, people were bored, and the work lasted for a long time, you know, this was such a quite work, you were not allowed even to blow and you had to be quite that the feathers wouldn't be blown away, so they were telling each other these stories [about witchcraft] and sometimes a girl didn't dare going home by herself, you know [laughter]... You know, such were the stories. (24)

F: *When did people talk about witches?*

I: *That was when we were stripping husks, and when there was pig-slaughtering, and so, when people came together. And when they were digging in the vineyards those who had good memory would talk about it. (40)*

Before, like thirty or thirty-five years ago⁹... thirty-five perhaps, when we went husking corn here or there, for instance... all we spoke about was witches. Nothing else. (120)

F: *When did people tell such stories [about witchcraft], was there any special occasion for that?*

I: *Yes, when we husked corn and such things. When many people gathered together and they were telling something. (85)*

- I1: *People really used to believe in witches.*
- I2: *But you know, girls, the very fact that there is no social life any more, is mainly to be blamed for the fact that people forgot about witchcraft. We used to pluck feathers and husk corn together ... It was like a party ... Nowadays people have no time, they do everything with machines, there is no social life, no such telling as it used to be. (67)*

All the economic and social changes that occurred in the 1970s thus obviously not only triggered an improvement in the standard of living and changes in the communities' social life, but also led to a decrease of the role that witchcraft played in the daily life of the population. Once the main setting for the communication of witchcraft narratives was no longer there, the witchcraft discourse inevitably started losing its adherents and communal support. Those who were thinking within its framework were no longer in a position to assess public opinion and could no longer rely on getting support for their witchcraft accusations and actions within the village community as a whole. This must have ultimately led to the withdrawal of their beliefs and actions within the family units and restricted circles of those who still communicated among themselves and on whose support they could rely. The meaning that witchcraft had in the life of the inhabitants thus inevitably diminished and, consequently, the role of unwitchers in resolving social tensions triggered by witchcraft accusations decreased as well. The improvement in the economic situation also seems to have lessened the number of itinerant fortunetellers who, walking from house to house and as a rule declaring misfortune to be the result of bewitchment and advising or performing unwitching rituals, had to some extent at least contributed to the persistence of witchcraft as an explanation for misfortune in the area:

Then here there were something like fortune-tellers (...) They used to go from house to house, these women, and they were also making faggots, so that they could survive, that they got something to eat. You know, before it wasn't like it is nowadays. Poor people were not as secure as they are now. Now, there is social security so there are fewer witches than when the poverty was higher. What else could the poor woman do, I beg your pardon? Well, people used to be more pious, the life was harsher, and there was not that much food. Now there is plenty, if you walk down the road Now you get everything while before, if you asked for a piece of bread, you had a hard time getting it, such was the poverty! And because everybody was so poor, I think people thought that there were witches, and there were fortune-tellers and I don't know what else! (152)

Nevertheless, while witchcraft as a generally accepted and more or less overtly supported social institution lost its value in the 1970s due to the economic and social changes, it did not die out completely. While people may not have had the opportunity to speak about it as openly and as often as they used to and could not always expect to be granted public support if they spoke and acted openly from within the witchcraft discourse, their personal belief in its power may have nevertheless continued, albeit restricted in its expression. In 2000, for instance, we were told about a woman who “keeps” coming to borrow something from their neighbours whenever there is a new moon—an act that in the framework of witchcraft discourse was understood as done with the aim to steal their neighbours’ “luck”. The fact that the narrators still held the woman as a witch was also the reason that they did not want to reveal her name during the interview:

I heard tell that the young one [the daughter of the woman that was believed to be a witch] also became a witch. He [the neighbour] said that when there is a new moon, the first day of the new moon, she always comes to borrow something, to get something – and that you shouldn't give [anything to] her. She usually comes to get something that they already have at home, they know that she has it at home, and yet she comes to borrow it. Last year she came to get eggs for brooding and when her eggs hatched, theirs [the neighbours' hens] had no chickens that year. (141)

Objects found buried on one's property, in the region typically understood as bewitching objects, placed there intentionally in order to cause misfortune, were also still occasionally found and interpreted as such at the time of our fieldwork:

I just heard this couple of days ago, that woman would know to tell more about it, the woman that found eggs on the grave. She knows a lot about this. I have just heard this. She found eggs on the grave this or the last year.¹⁰ We were at her place when she told us that. (163)

II: When we were building a byre, my father found bones buried in the ground and my mother said that witches did this.

F: Have you ever found eggs too?

II: Oh, yes, yes, we are still finding them! (127)

At the time of our fieldwork in 2000–2001, many women also still had the reputation of being a witch throughout their entire villages, as confirmed in the following narrative:

In the village R. there was a woman called Irena, and when someone passed by her house they couldn't continue [to walk], it was as if a huge mountain appeared on the road. And she [the neighbour] couldn't and couldn't go on. And then she went to her [Irena's] house and asked her to help her as she [the neighbour] couldn't go on. And she [Irena] said: Right, I will help you. And she went to the road and she [the neighbour] was able to continue walking. I believe she is still alive and she very much likes to harm people, but now, how does she manage ... (5)

Moreover, during my fieldwork in the region in the autumn of 2014, I was told about a typical witchcraft dispute that was still going on at the time when my conversation with the interlocutor took place—a broken windbreak, a stillborn calf, and a number of other minor misfortunes were ascribed to the agency of a woman who my interlocutor believed to be a witch and who supposedly had such a reputation throughout the community. The narrator in the following interview not only narrated about the history of the strained relationship with her neighbour which culminated in her accusing her neighbour of bewitchment, but also reveals many other typical specifics and elements of local witchcraft discourse that I shall discuss later on: typical circumstances that triggered tensions and fear of bewitchment (a mother's forbidding a son's marriage), typical behaviour after the neighbour was identified as a witch (silence, declined gift), typical target of bewitchment (livestock), as well as a problematic transgression of boundaries:

- I: Up here we have a neighbour, she broke our windbreak two years ago. (...)*
F: Does she cause you problems?
I: She's got problems. We brought charges to the court. But she said that she didn't know what it was about, she pretended to be totally ignorant. She had been treated psychiatrically. And then there were the main trial proceedings and the lawyer said: You know what, you will have to pay all the costs, you have already paid quite a lot, 370 euros. I don't have a large pension, I only have a peasants' pension. (...) My daughter found a lawyer and we called police when she broke that, but she pretended that nothing happened.
F: But how could you be sure that it was her?
I: I saw her. I know her, I was outside, but she didn't see me.
F: And why did she do that?
I: She would want to manage the house here, to have my son, while my son ... I said: What would she do with my son? She had a husband who was the same age as my son and she totally ruled over him.
F: Did he die?

- I: *The first one died and the second one she divorced.*
- F: *But did your son want to marry her?*
- I: *No. [shaking head]*
- F: *Was she angry because of that?*
- I: *Yes. And then my daughter, she's got two sons, and her son had Communion and she arranged that we would have lunch here. And she [the neighbour] brought a hen for me to prepare for the occasion. But I told her: You know, I don't need to take care of anything else but baking bread! Now it is peace, but I wonder how long it will last.*
- F: *You didn't want to take a hen from her?*
- I: *No, because my daughter was supposed to bring everything with her, all I needed to do was bake bread. It has been a while since. People used to call such neighbours that did harm "malicious people".*
- F: *Wouldn't they say there was witchcraft involved?*
- I: *Yes, this too, they said it's witchcraft, they said everything.*
- F: *Do you think that she wanted to do harm to you?*
- I: *Well, when she is crazy... how can I know?*
- F: *Did she ever bury something?*
- I: *I think she just did something. In the morning the cow was perfectly fine, whereas in the afternoon she brought forth a stillborn calf, it hadn't been eight months yet. This happened a week ago.*
- F: *How do you think she did it?*
- I: *When she is a witch ...*
- F: *You think that she is a witch? But how could she do that?*
- I: *I did nothing wrong. I was down in the clover, I can't walk quickly. She there: Good morning, how are you doing? But I was quiet. A policeman told me to better be quiet. I won't talk, it is better to be quiet. (...)*
- F: *Why do you think she is a witch?*
- I: *Many people say so.*
- F: *Still nowadays?*
- I: *She does harm to many people.*
- F: *Does she have bad relationships with others too?*
- I: *Yes, indeed.*
- F: *And why is she cross with others?*
- I: *She has a field there and nobody is allowed to put a foot on it. And then in the winter a snow plough damaged her fence and she started to scream that her neighbour did this to her.*
- F: *But how do you think she could harm the cow to bring forth a stillborn calf?*

- I: *She gave it something to eat. She is devilish! I will not exchange a word with her. Her mother was evil too, but not as much as she is.*
- F: *Did people also say that about her mother, that she was a witch?*
- I: *No, only for this one. Just recently one came who said that she bewitched him so that he had no luck in the byre.*
- F: *But how could she do that?*
- I: *I don't know, she knows a lot.*
- F: *Did they see her?*
- I: *No, they only suspected her, nobody saw her. (166)*

PERSONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD WITCHCRAFT

Although many of our interlocutors obviously expressed a firm belief in the reality of witchcraft, referred to their neighbours as witches and some even narrated about bewitchments that happened fairly recently, others, as we have seen, placed witchcraft to the past, to the time of their parents or grandparents. Yet, even if at first glance the first (still) believed in the reality of witchcraft while the latter did not, the narrators' statements about their personal belief did not always necessarily reveal their true attitude toward the narrated content. When I discuss "belief", I refer to it as a personal attitude of the narrator toward the proposition, rather than the proposition, the cognitive entity itself, that is, not as "the object of belief" but rather "the subject's investment in a proposition", a modality of the assertion and not its content (cf. de Certeau 1988: 178; cf. also Motz 1998: 349; Valk 2012: 351).¹¹ As Kaarina Koski observed, "[i]f belief is defined as an active and conscious reliance on a certain ontological and, consequently, normative option, attitudes towards the belief content¹² in these narratives would rather be characterised as a varying degree to which these are being taken seriously or not" (2008: 47; cf. Bennett 1999: 193). Indeed, when narrators explicitly expressed their attitudes to witchcraft, they fluctuated in the range from total admission of their belief in the reality of witches:

I2: *I know of two—three cases [of witchcraft]¹³ here of which I know that they are true, you know. (11)*

And then there was this neighbour ... she was an old woman, [she had] lard everywhere. (...) I know very well [that she was the witch]. (60)

Well, up there ... there lived such old women; they said that they were all witches. Indeed, indeed, they certainly were witches. Of course they were, that's for sure! (60)

... to explicit statements of disbelief and their making fun of those who believe:

- F: *Did people here talk about witches?*
 I: *They did, yes.*
 F: *What did they say?*
 I: *This is all nonsense!*
 F: *But I am interested in hearing what they said.*
 I: *All possible things, but nothing of this was true!* (82)

... but they also expressed the whole range of attitudes between these two opposites:

- II: *Well, they said that there were witches, it is true that they knew, you know. This is correct, this could be [true].* (25)

Well, these were old people who talked about [witchcraft] and it might have even been true, [and] not that they were only talking about it. (24)

In their narratives the narrators sometimes oscillated between believing and searching for alternative explanations, hesitated and could not decide about whether they would believe in the reality of witchcraft or not:

There was this one from Croatia that came to help us with the work and we found an egg buried in the ground. And she said to me: Ah, there are malicious people¹⁴ here too?! I said: Why? [She:] Because I found an egg inside. Now a hen really couldn't bury it. I never heard such a thing that a hen would bury it. She could carry it away, but to bury it someone should come with a hoe or something. Or perhaps ..., I don't know. Could it be true that they could ...? I don't know. I didn't see anyone. And then I was hoeing one day and I also hit something with a hoe. I didn't know what it was inside. But it smelt so terribly, it was also an egg, a rotten egg. I hit right into it. But one day I saw a hen hatching an egg right in front of me. Not all hens are alike. Some just hatch anywhere. There where she felt pressed she just let the egg loose. And I was thinking to myself: See, one could say that someone has just placed it there. But I saw the hen doing it. But true, she didn't cover it, this she didn't do. She just moved it a bit here and there with her beak, I was observing her, but then she left. And she left the egg there accidentally. Before too when they were hoeing the

vineyards – nowadays we don't do this anymore – they were finding eggs. That woman, who was malicious, she deliberately placed them to prevent prosperity. In vineyards and so. These were such ..., now, if it was true or not ...? (33)

I2: Yes, they said that if you found an egg [placed on your property], that your hens wouldn't lay anymore, that this was done.¹⁵ That was heard. (...)

But a magpie could also take it out and bring [it].

I1: They said so, yes, but you could never be hundred per cent sure (95)

F: What about eggs, did people bury them too?

I: Yes, they buried them too. Even in our field!

F: Really?

I: Yes, when we were hoeing the corn, we found ...

F: And what do you think this could be?

I: Well, I don't know what that would be, if ...

F: But how do you think this egg was put ...?

I: Well, I don't know, it could have been some animal or something, I don't know. These were found inside, sometimes.

F: Buried?

I: Yes.

F: So you think that an animal came and buried them?

I: Well, I don't know, perhaps a fox or something like that ... (3)

Some of the most widely narrated experiences with witchcraft in the area tell of night witches who disoriented people in the night, who then could not find their way, got stuck in shrubbery, walked in circles all night long and similar. Within the witchcraft discourse such an experience was typically considered to be the work of witches who were said to “carry” people astray. Those who did not believe in witchcraft, on the other hand, usually proclaimed drunkenness to be the cause of the experience of getting lost. The narrator below, however, offers both explanations: she refers to the witchcraft interpretation of the experience, yet at the same time she also introduces an alternative option, a rational interpretation—without specifying which of the two she is more inclined towards. The adverb “probably” and the sentence “But I don’t know whether ...” at first glance point to the narrator’s indecision, yet they could also imply an attempt at hiding her true belief in order not to be considered superstitious:

I: Well, before, in the past, in the time of the old Yugoslavia, before the Second World War, you know, there was always somebody seeing a witch. But I don't know whether ...

- F: *What did they say about them?*
 I: *They confused them so that they didn't know where to go, that she confused them. But they probably got drunk [smiles] and didn't know how to come back home. They used to talk about witches, I don't know. (86)*

Oscillation between belief and disbelief in the proposition and uncertainty about what to believe may be sincere and a common state of mind of most interlocutors, as Éva Pócs and Ágnes Hesz concluded on the basis of their own field research among the Hungarian population in the Romanian countryside.¹⁶ Such a simultaneous expression of doubt and belief (cf. also Correll 2005: 8; Lindahl 2005: 176) thus does not necessarily imply the decaying of traditional notions, but may have been common in the past too. However, the question of what the narrator really believes is a delicate topic. As Linda Dégh pointed out, relationship, personality features and momentary dispositions make any disclosure of belief, disbelief, or hesitation on the part of the narrator improvised and insincere, and therefore useless for research (1996: 39; cf. also Pócs 2012: 279). Moreover, there are probably very few areas of field research so delicate and bringing to light so many dilemmas as the topic of witchcraft. On the one hand, there is a question of the attitude of the narrators themselves towards their own belief—they may be absolutely convinced in the reality of witchcraft, or its unreality, or else they may hesitate, doubt, and question what they believe, or should believe, as we have seen above. On the other hand, there is the matter of their willingness to disclose their attitude to the researcher: while some narrators were willing to openly admit their attitude, the attitudes of others could sometimes be only tentatively assumed, and occasionally their positive belief in witchcraft only accidentally cropped up in the conversation, in spite of their explicit denial. While those who did not believe in the reality of witchcraft generally felt no need to hide their disbelief, the narrators who believed in the reality of witchcraft had many reasons to conceal their true attitude. Due to the various strategies to conceal their belief that our interlocutors, for various reasons, might have employed when narrating about witchcraft with us, it is not always possible to ascertain the true attitude they held toward the propositions articulated in their narratives, i.e. to be certain about whether the interlocutors in fact did not believe in the reality of witchcraft, or whether they were sincerely in doubt about what to believe when they claimed to be—or perhaps, simply did not want us to know about what they truly believed (cf. Ellis 2003: 6). The following interview, for instance, clearly

expresses the narrator's positive belief in witchcraft which she obviously tries to hide by explicitly claiming the opposite:

- F: *Can witches do harm to people ...?*
 I2: *No, I wouldn't know about that ... that they...(...) Well, some were of that kind, it's true. What do I know ...? We didn't believe that in our house, see? Daddy said that to their face, you're a witch, aren't you? After all, they say, they said, if you said that, I mean, that you said it to their face, then they didn't have power over you, see?(71)*

Indeed, there are a number of reasons why an individual might choose to conceal one's belief from the researcher. One possible reason may be the researcher's attitude toward witchcraft or at least the interlocutor's estimation of what their attitude might be. If the narrator thought that it differed from theirs, one possible strategy was to keep their belief to themselves. During her fieldwork in Swabia, Cornelia Paul, for instance, was uncertain whether the attempt of her interlocutor to distance herself from witchcraft was not a result of her awareness that the researcher herself did not believe in the reality of witchcraft. In fact, she got the impression that they prefer to talk about witchcraft only among those who are expected to believe in it (1993: 107–108). That witchcraft is not necessarily discussed with everybody is indicated by the following interview too:

- I1: *They say that witches gather together... this one used to see them [indicates his father-in-law, laughs].*
 F: *Witches? What did you see?*
 I1: *He said that he saw the lights at night, when they were jumping here and there.*
 I2: [=the father-in-law]: *This is not for the public.*
 F: *Why not?*
 I2: *We were kids, I don't know ... (27)*

Indeed, in response to the question of whether they had heard about witches, our interlocutors frequently at first categorically stated that they did not, that in the region there were not any and that, at any rate, they did not believe in them. Yet, just a little later in the conversation, it turned out not just that they obviously believed in the reality of witches, but that they, moreover, even had personal experiences with them and that, occasionally, owing to the misfortune inflicted upon them, they took special pains to consult the unwitchers whose task was to eliminate the harmful

effects of their bewitchment and identify the witch, or else that they themselves performed magic practices in order to annihilate bewitchment and prevent further bewitchments. Numerous conversations we had with the locals revealed that their explicit initial denial of personal belief did not always correspond with the expression of belief that was revealed a bit later in the conversation. In the following interview, for instance, the narrator at the beginning keeps asserting that he does not believe in witchcraft, and mocking those who do, and yet, after a while, suddenly admits that “witches led astray” him too:

- F: *Did people here talk about witches?*
 I: *Yes, they did.*
 F: *And what did they say?*
 I: *This is all nonsense!*
 F: *But I wonder what they said.*
 I: *To the devil! All this was not true.*
 F: *Right, but what did you hear?*
 I: *[They talked about] witchcraft, how they [witches] used to bewitch, you know, and all such rubbish. (...) I don't believe in anything of it.*
 F: *Right. What else did they say about witches, do you remember anything?*
 I: *Oh, witches were those old women who were so pious that they went to the church every day, popyery whores, they were witches, they said. They said that there was Stanka, she knew to bewitch, devilish woman! She was old, and smoked a pipe, like a man. She would do everything, how could I know. Maybe some believed that but I didn't believe a word. No one could persuade me, certainly not. I see what I see and even that I have to look to see if it is true! [laughter]*
 F: *What about lights, did anybody talk about lights?*
 I: *Only what I saw on the TV, nothing else. I don't believe anything, this is all just nonsense. Old people believed everything. They were a hundred per cent sure that it was true, but it wasn't. They would also place pigs, their bristles, and everything. If you stepped on it, you would die and so on.*
 F: *Who would do that?*
 I: *That devilish witch, you know! This is all rubbish. [Anyone] who believes it is a huge fool! But they used to believe that in the past. As I said – idiots! Stupid folk!*
 F: *What about that witches can make someone lose their way?*
 I: *I heard that too. They even did that to me!*
 F: *What happened?*
 I: *I went home from my job, and I had a light, a carbide lamp, right? I was a miner, right? And suddenly I missed my way. I found myself in the*

thorns. And couldn't get out of it, oh my, no way. So I lay down, I lay down. What else could I do? And I heard the dog, and my father-in-law, Lojze, so I called him and he came down there and walked me back home. Is this possible? (82)

Similarly, in the following interview, the narrator explicitly claims not to believe in witches, yet at the end of the interview admits that there was “one such woman”:

II: I don't know, I never believed in witches, I never believed when someone said that they saw this or that, or that this or that happened to them ...

F: What did they say? Do you remember what they told you?

II: Well that they missed the path, or went astray into the bushes and couldn't come out, and that witches bewitched [them].

F: Did they know the right way and yet got lost?

II: Yes, and to my husband [it also happened]. He then sat down and toward the morning, when it was almost the day already and there was some snow, and they were walking together on the path and suddenly it was missing and they found themselves in the bush. And they were from the village, they knew every tree and everything, and yet they couldn't get out of the bush. And they waited there and had some matches with them to light their way but wherever they lighted—all bush! And when dawn broke they were suddenly back on the path and so they continued to walk. The next day they both went to look where they got lost and it was not more than two metres from the path and there was no bush there. How could this be, I don't know, how this could be...

F: And what did they say what could it be?

II: Well, nothing, they said that it was as if [they had been] bewitched.

F: And who would [do the] bewitching?

II: They did not know, as there was no, there were no such women here ... Well, there was one, that one was indeed. (41)

This pattern of first explicitly stating disbelief and subsequently implicitly or explicitly disclosing a positive belief in witchcraft has been observed by many field researchers of witchcraft. Marissa Rey-Henningsen noticed that people in Galicia, Spain, frequently responded to the question of whether they believed in witches by saying: “I don't believe in witches but they exist” (1994: 200). When an innkeeper from Aubérac was asked whether he believed in witches, he offered a similar response: “No, but in all honesty, I would have to say that strange things happen which one has

to believe because one has seen them” (Devlin 1987: 6). Cornelia Paul, doing fieldwork in Swabia, similarly noticed that her interlocutor time and time again during the interview on witchcraft repeated that she didn’t “believe in it”; however, when talking about a particular bewitchment, she would remark: “These are simply facts!” (*Das sind einfach Tatsachen!*) (1993: 107). A discussion with a Hungarian woman from Romania on the suicide of her co-villager followed a similar pattern: “So, I, I always [said], because I don’t really believe in fortune-tellers, and this *fermeka* [a type of bewitchment], because I, I don’t believe in it, but I, I say that [whispering] she had to be bewitched by *fermeka*. It was not her [intention to kill herself]” (Hesz 2015).

How can we then explain this discrepancy between the initial response at the beginning of the conversation and the attitude subsequently revealed during the conversation which threw a completely different light on the explicit initial statement about the narrator’s belief? Favret-Saada holds that the initial denial of belief in witchcraft (“I’ve never heard about any witches,” “I’ve never believed in witches”) was primarily intended to make it possible for those who believed in the reality of witchcraft to communicate with those “who have not been caught”. The initial denial can thus be understood as an attempt at reconciliation of the narrator’s true belief with what they thought they were expected to believe, an attempt to reconcile their witchcraft discourse with the rational discourse of the researcher. In her opinion, this is the reason that all reports about witches begin with a statement with which the narrators actually place themselves in the external situation of sceptical listeners with respect to their true attitude towards witchcraft. In order for their discourse not to be received as nonsense, they thus begin their story by distancing themselves from it: they themselves had never believed in witches and had never been superstitious—until someone else (which is always particularly emphasised!) made a diagnosis that a disease was the consequence of a witch’s attack, which came as a complete shock to the unbelieving sceptic (Favret-Saada 1980: 42–43, 51–52). The introduction of a “rational” explanation of an act or an event otherwise typically ascribed to witchcraft thus does not necessarily express the narrator’s true attitude, but can also be understood as a way for the narrators to protect themselves from being considered credulous and superstitious in the eyes of the researcher (cf. Correll 2005: 8).

Just as placing witchcraft in the past (see above) may have served to avoid discussing the narrator’s own current involvement in witchcraft, referring to others’ introduction of a witchcraft interpretation of their

misfortune (cf. Favret-Saada 1980: 44; Paul 1993: 112), and to others' belief, another common pattern that typically appeared in the beginning of narrations on witchcraft, could likewise be applied as a means to hide one's own belief behind that of others in order for the narrator not to become compromised in the eyes of the researcher whose attitude to witchcraft was assumed to differ from theirs (cf. de Blécourt 2004: 93; Henningsen 1989: 104). Some narrators, while ascribing the witchcraft interpretation to other people, or to the past, at the same time also clearly reveal their own conviction of its reality:

F: And do you know why did they buried eggs?

I: So that turkey hens would not prosper. An egg is a sort of envy. If you had a good crop in the field, if you had nice crop, they would bury eggs so that your crop would not be successful. We found many of those, as our fields are below the road. But who buried them, I can't tell, I saw nobody, but this had to be some witchcraft, someone was envious, so that the crop wouldn't thrive. And such things. This is what my mother used to tell me. (50)

There are various other reasons why the narrators could choose not to disclose their attitude toward witchcraft to the researcher, apart from that of expecting the researcher not to share their attitude. The experience of being accused of witchcraft can lead to one's denial of belief in witchcraft—the accused parties may, by altogether denying its reality, aim to save their reputation in the community, while those who wish to assure them of their support, or simply to avoid getting in conflicts with them, may likewise decide to express disbelief, at least when in their company (cf. Hesz 2015). People's willingness to reveal their own belief in witchcraft may also be conditioned by the individual's involvement in witchcraft discourse. In his research in the Kwahu area of Ghana, Wolf Bleek noticed that those who declined to talk about witchcraft most strongly believed in it and were probably most involved in it—they did not want to talk about it because they found the issue too embarrassing and shameful (1976: 528). Jeanne Favret-Saada noted that those who “were caught” were not allowed to talk about witchcraft with anyone except their unwitchers. She also assumed that her interlocutors always mentioned deceased villagers as ideal informants who would be happy to answer questions about witchcraft because they believed that witches could no longer do them any harm (1980: 64). Indeed, several interviews in our region might at first glance confirm that people may have been occasionally afraid of talking

about witches and disclosing them in fear of their bewitchment—yet it seems more likely that this was merely an excuse for not disclosing their identity due to the fear that we could let the suspected parties know about their accusations, as the second interview clearly reveal:

- I: *Oh, witches, it is better that I don't say anything, I was miserable myself twice!*
 F: *Do tell!*
 I: *Not here, [it happened] when I went to the job. [uneasy laugh]*
 F: *What happened?*
 I: *[uneasy laugh] Just as long as the witches won't hear me ... [uneasy laugh] (2)*

[The narrator talked about the witch who allegedly bewitched her neighbours.]

- F: *Is she still alive? Where does she live?*
 I2: *Well, we won't tell ...*
 I3: *It would be a bit funny if you went to her, wouldn't it? [uneasy laugh]*
 I2: *You know what she can do to you?*
 I3: *She did not do anything to us personally.*
 I2: *She can make your boyfriend leave you or something like that. [laugh]*
 I3: *Yes, it is better to avoid her. (142)*

To prevent further inquiry about the accused person, the interlocutor, in her fear that the information about their accusation of bewitchment would be passed along to the neighbours, proclaimed her witch to be already dead, even though at the beginning of the interview she made it clear that she was still very much alive:

- I: *I knew a witch ...*
 F: *Is she dead already?*
 I: *Not yet, she is a bit younger than me.*
 F: *How old?*
 I: *Well, I don't know ... I won't tell. But she liked to be evil. Her mother was evil too. She beat one fellow so hard that she nearly killed him.*
 F: *Why?*
 I: *Because he did not [want to] drive [her].*
 F: *Where does she live?*
 I: *Up there [showing]. And then she called the doctor and said: I hit him so hard that he fell down. Then she called the hospital, pretending to be his*

wife inquiring about her husband's health, but it was her. Then she paid a visit to a witch [i.e. the unwitcher] and she [the unwitcher] told her she should go to the graveyard, to the grave, and that she should make crosses with the larch branches in each hand. (...)

F: *What was her name?*

I: *Slavica, Slavica.*

F: *And her surname?*

I: *I won't tell.*

F: *Do tell, please.*

I: *I won't tell everything. She died already. (51)*

The possible employment of any of these strategies to conceal the narrator's true attitude towards witchcraft thus prevents any reliable conclusion about the narrator's true personal belief in the reality of witchcraft. In her discussion of belief, Linda Dégh maintains that an individual's belief, rather than directly inquired about, can usually be better discerned from the spontaneous performance, without asking questions which are impossible to answer (1996: 39). The exclamations, comments, and also the narrative style of the interlocutor, that is, the texture of the narrative—tone, stress, pitch, as well as laughter, scorn, gestures and other expressions of emotion which accompany the narrative—could thus perhaps help us to better disclose the personal attitude of the narrator toward the proposition expressed in their narrative. The evaluation of these, however, is to a large extent subjective. Moreover, intonation, countenance, and demeanour during the narration, which could be (mistakenly) understood as a confirmation of narrators' positive belief, could just as well be the factors of the "rhetoric of truth",¹⁷ a generic characteristic of the narration of a legend (cf. Oring 2008: 138–140). While a legend according to Oring's definition is a "narrative performance that invokes a rhetoric of truth",¹⁸ narratives that "meshed seamlessly with the ideology, sentiments, and morality of a group, such that they needed no rhetorical support" should, according to him, "not be considered legends, no matter how fabulous or absurd an outsider might find their contents to be" (2008: 159). Yet, while narratives that in the community where they are told spontaneously may not be embellished by rhetorical devices which would indicate that the proposition they articulate is more or less commonly accepted and, therefore, evokes no need in the audience to question or discuss it, and consequently does

not encourage the narrators to substantiate their interpretation by using additional narrative devices, the artificial context in which we, coming from outside the community and presumably not sharing our interlocutors' beliefs, conducted the interviews, may have stimulated the use of rhetorical devices. Thus even if the narratives in the community in which they circulated, according to Oring's definition, may not have fallen into the category of legends when narrated in their everyday context, they may have turned into one the moment they were communicated to outsiders.

In addition, a narrative could also move from one category to another during an exchange between the members of the same cultural group. If the audience shared the same attitude to a proposition as the narrator, that is, if they thought and talked from within the same discourse as the narrator, the narrator may not need to add any additional rhetorical elements—even though one might assume that these were occasionally nevertheless applied to additionally confirm the veracity of the proposition. If, on the contrary, a narrative is told to a member of the group that is sceptical towards the narrated proposition, or even openly dismissive to the message the narrative is communicating, and/or thinks from within another discourse than the narrator, special rhetorical devices may be consciously or unconsciously employed by the narrator in the “performance of truth” in order to substantiate their interpretation.

It is, therefore, impossible to give any firm conclusion regarding a particular narrator's attitude toward witchcraft. At best, one can discuss various *expressions* of the narrators' attitudes toward witchcraft; *indicators* that point to the inconsistencies between the narrators' explicit statements about their personal attitude and that which was being told, and which reveal a different attitude of the narrator toward the proposition than the one claimed; and elements that point to the employment of various possible *strategies* in order to conceal one's true personal belief. Still, talking about witchcraft by those who believed in it was yet far from being deemed secretive and dangerous, and even deadly, as Favret-Saada claimed it to be in France (1980). Paul, doing fieldwork research in Germany (1993: 109), and Dobler (2015), doing fieldwork in the same area as Favret-Saada approximately 30 years later, similarly noticed that people may have feared witchcraft but were not particularly secretive about it. Indeed, while some narrators who chose not to reveal their positive belief regarding witchcraft when talking to us may have openly discussed it within their family, or within the circles of people sharing the same view, many of our

interlocutors discussed witchcraft with us without hesitation, felt no need to hide their personal belief in its reality and did not feel it necessary to apply any of the strategies discussed above to conceal their true attitude.

DISCOURSES

While during our fieldwork we often heard narrations about practices and behaviour related to witchcraft, we never witnessed any—the narratives in which these practices and behaviour were interpreted in terms of witchcraft were the only available source of information about witchcraft in the region, and thus the only means for the researcher to be able to grasp the underlying experience and understand the narrators' underlying propositions. On the other hand, they were also an essential means for people to structure, interpret and share their experiences: while they may have witnessed and performed countermeasures against witchcraft and participated in the identification procedures, or even performed bewitchments themselves, the narratives were still a prerequisite for the proper understanding within the framework of witchcraft discourse, for the upholding and maintaining of witchcraft as a social institution, and also the primary means of providing people with strategies about how to respond to witchcraft assaults (cf. Stark 2004: 86; Eilola 2006: 33). Through these narratives, the inhabitants of the region became socialised in terms of a particular discursive construction of the world, which informed their experiences and helped them make sense of them (cf. Rapport and Overing 2007: 137–138, 142).

Indeed, several scholars of traditional witchcraft understood witchcraft as a particular sort of discourse used by the narrators, and even claimed that cases of bewitchment were not only expressed, but manifested especially or solely in narratives, thus emphasising the importance of language to witchcraft. Jeanne Favret-Saada wrote how she had first planned to research witchcraft practices but soon realised that all she came across was language, and that the only empirical facts she was able to record were words: “[...] an attack of witchcraft can be summed up as follows: a set of words spoken in a crisis situation by someone who will later be designated as a witch are afterwards interpreted as having taken effect on the body and belongings of the person spoken to, who will on that ground say he is bewitched” (1980: 9). Consequently, she concentrated not on practices but solely on narratives: the facts of witchcraft cases are a speech process, she claimed, and a witch a person referred to by people who utter the discourse on witchcraft

and who only figure in it as the subject of a statement (1980: 24–25). While Favret-Saada reduced witchcraft solely to narratives, de Blécourt broadened the understanding of witchcraft discourse to also include concepts and actions. In 1990 and again recently (2013: 363, 369) he argued that the label “witch” only makes sense within a particular system, “not so much a ‘belief system’, but something that can best be termed a ‘discourse’, as it is primarily through language that it can be accessed”, and defined a discourse as “a coherent system of concepts, stories, and actions”.¹⁹ Stuart Clark too emphasised the importance of language in the reality of witchcraft. He discussed the question of how language authorises “belief” and argued that in order to make sense of “witchcraft beliefs” one needs to begin with language. Clark understood language not as a direct reflection of an objective reality outside itself, but rather as something that constitutes it:²⁰ it is language, that is the linguistic circumstances, that enable the utterances and actions associated with witchcraft beliefs to convey meanings that should become the object of attention, and not its relationship to the extra-linguistic world, i.e. the question of whether or not it corresponds with an objective reality. What is real about the world to the users of a language, he claims, is “a matter of what sorts of reality-apportioning statements their language successfully allows them to make” (1997: 6, cf. 3–10, 2001: 1–9).

In applying the term “discourse” I understand it in its broadest anthropological sense, as “socially situated language-use” (Cameron 2001: 7), “speech in habitual situations of social exchange”, implying intrinsic ties between speech and behaviour, and the embeddedness of speech-making in routine social relations and behaviours (cf. Rapport and Overing 2007: 134; cf. also Valk 2011: 850).²¹ When people think, talk, and act from within witchcraft discourse, they therefore rely on concepts, exchange stories, and perform actions that convey specific meanings and carry specific messages that can only be properly understood from within this discourse. Witchcraft discourse, however, was not the only possible discourse the people in our region could employ when narrating about witchcraft. Several discourses coexisted and were available to people in order to build a functional model for their lives and, moreover, there were various ways of combining them (cf. Wolf-Knuts 2002: 149). Apart from talking from within witchcraft discourse, people could choose to talk about witchcraft from within a “rational”²² (scientific) discourse, supported and propagated by the educational system, and by various media, especially radio and television, which are nowadays available to most of the population in the area.

Moreover, this discourse was often endorsed by the representatives of the Church, even though clergy could also draw upon another discourse within which witchcraft can be explained—the “Christian” one. Lately, New-Age discourse is also starting to affect the ways in which witchcraft is being conceptualised and talked about, even though for now only to a fairly limited extent. Let us now look at some of the specifics of all these discourses and see how they differ from each other.

Witchcraft Discourse

Objects like eggs or bones buried in the ground do not have any particular meaning in and of themselves—they can lie in one’s field or under thresholds or in the byres and pigsties for various reasons other than bewitchment. When a neighbour borrows something on the new moon, one would usually not even notice the correspondence with the moon phase. There are many causes for calves to be stillborn. People get angry and threaten others, or else stop talking to them, for various reasons and with various intentions. All these objects, acts, words, and behaviour in general, however, acquire a particular connotation when one is thinking, talking, and acting from within the witchcraft discourse. For people thinking, talking, or acting from outside of witchcraft discourse, they would bear very different connotations, or they would have no particular meaning at all.

The specifics of witchcraft discourse in our region can be observed already at the level of language: several idioms typically uttered within the discourse conveyed meanings that are completely different from the connotations they had were they uttered from without the discourse, and could only be understood in this particular sense within it. When people thought they were bewitched, the typical expression was “This was done” (cf. inf. 95, p. 49)—an idiom connoting an act of malevolent agency of a witch. To say that “something was done” invariably pointed to an accusation of bewitchment carried out intentionally by somebody who wished them ill.

Then they also knew how to bury eggs. Rotten eggs. For instance, when somebody was building a house, someone else would place eggs on the beams. Such rotten, ill eggs. This couldn’t be laid by a hen or a bird (...) and that was done there to cause damage in the house. An enemy does that. Or, for instance, I just recalled, if you want to do harm to someone, and you can’t do it otherwise, you bury rotten eggs in their field, and the field will not yield any crops ... (5)

That girl, well she was hugging my grandson, it happened seven years ago. (...) The next day he was sick I'm feeling sick. [mimicking him] Then his knees started to ache, and his fingers. He said: Grandmother, I am sick, my fingers are sore. So he went down to see the fortune-teller. And she said: What is hurting you? This was done. It was done. (29)

“To know” was another typical idiom which only within the discourse referred to a very specific sort of knowledge and needed no additional clarification—it always pointed to the knowledge of witchcraft (cf. inf. 2, p. 16). Outside it, it could refer to any sort of knowledge, and would usually need an additional object clarifying the transitive verb: one knows *something*. Similarly, to say about somebody that “they know” referred exclusively to the persons who were considered to have magical knowledge: either a witch or an unwitcher.

- F: *Is there anybody here who is still believed to be able to bewitch?*
 II: *That someone would know? That is how people used to say: that someone knows. Not here, no, not any more. (53)*
- II: *Up there, close to where we had a vineyard, there was one such [woman]. That one really knew. (25)*
- II: *And then, my brother's wife, she allegedly knew, she very much knew and she still knows. (4)*
- II: *Well, and here they said, all the neighbours they said that one [indicating]: This one knew.*
 F: *Is she still alive?*
 II: *No.*
 F: *What was her name? Can you tell us, since she is already dead?*
 II: *Well, there are her offspring ... (...)*
 F: *What did she do to people so that they suspected that she was a witch?*
 II: *Well, I don't know ... my cousin said that when she was passing by their house, the pigs started to howl as if they were being slaughtered. The moment she passed, they stopped.*
 F: *Really?*

- I1: *But this cannot be. And something dies, something would die ... whether pigs, or hens, or something else. (27)*
- I1: *And they also said that here, across the river, up in the forest there was a man who could predict the future from cards, but they said that ...*
- I2: *... that he knew what he was doing.*
- I1: *That he knew many things. (25)*

Within the discourse, certain *behaviour* also acquired very specific connotations. Not to respond to somebody, not to look someone in the eye and not to give or accept a gift or a loan from someone communicated a very clear message to the addressee that they were considered witches in the eyes of the person behaving this way. The refusal to talk to the neighbour in the narrative above (cf. inf. 166, p. 46) was therefore not simply a behaviour explained by a wish to avoid a dispute with a belligerent person, allegedly suggested by a policeman,²³ as stated by the interlocutor, but a common and generally acknowledged behavioural strategy of people who acted within the witchcraft discourse in order to prevent the witch from gaining or retaining power over them.

- I: *That woman also came once at night to me, as I had salt. And she came to borrow something from me that night. Yes. But I knew that one is not allowed to exchange a word with such a woman, when she comes at night. Yes.*
- F: *And she came right at the moment when you burned that egg?*
- I: *Yes, and she also came for other things, she also came for pigs.*
- F: *And did you talk to her?*
- I: *No, one was not allowed to talk, we knew that, right, you shouldn't talk.*
- F: *What happened then?*
- I: *Well, she came to borrow salt, at nine in the evening, in winter ... I resisted, but my wife almost made a mistake, she didn't know, she [the wife] told her she didn't have salt. And then she left, it hurt her a bit, yes. [laughs] Yes, such a woman suffers, they say. (2)*

Praising, dragging sheets over another person's wheat on certain days in the annual cycle (usually Pentecost), and borrowing something on particular days, burying objects on a neighbour's property and so on were

actions that were understood as bewitchments only within the witchcraft discourse. Outside it, they would be either meaningless or would, at best, trigger questions as regards their aim and meaning. They could even be ascribed various interpretations but never that of being an act of bewitchment—this interpretation would only be made by people thinking from within the witchcraft discourse, as the narrator in the following dialogue also explicitly stated:

- I: *A piece of bacon too could be found buried in the field.*
 F: *And what did this mean?*
 I: *Well, as long as people believed in witches, [that meant] that someone wanted to bewitch the field so that it wouldn't be fertile. (58)*

The following narrative gives an impression of the confusion in the conversation between one person talking from within the witchcraft discourse and another talking from outside of it. While the neighbour talking from within the discourse understood the toad in front of her house as an attempt at bewitchment (“Somebody did this to me!”), i.e., as the witch sending an animal or transforming herself into one in order to cause her harm, the narrator understood the toad as nothing more than what it was—an animal.²⁴ In her first sentence, before relating the narrative on her personal experience, the narrator thus even found it necessary to specifically explain the interpretation of the toad within the discourse.

If a toad approaches the house, [they say] that somebody bewitched it. Well, there where I used to own an inn, there was a neighbour who was always a bit ... well, she believed in witches ... She saw a toad in the vicinity of her house and came to ask me: Did you do this to me? I said: What? Did what? [The neighbour:] The toad. So I said: But what is this? A toad, right?[She:] Yes, and it is approaching me. [imitating her] I said: Yes, and?[The neighbour:] Are you not afraid?[imitating her] I said: No, why?[The neighbour:] Somebody did this to me! (5)

While a discourse can be understood as “an authoritarian and coherent web of ideas and statements, prescribing a normative worldview, and upholding certain social norms and values” (Valk 2011: 850), discursive exchange is not fixed: it is mediated by the creative individual improvisation of its conventions. Although it provides a means of expression, it does not necessarily determine what is meant by it—different personal meanings can be imparted to discourses by individuals, and it is their

personalisation of discursive structures that keeps them alive (cf. Rapport and Overing 2007: 141–142). One could, for instance, adapt a discourse to provide a meaningful interpretation when the “usual” interpretation within the discourse did not fit one’s understanding and purpose. As we have seen above, not to answer to someone within the witchcraft discourse as a rule conveyed a clear message that the one who is not being talked to is being accused of witchcraft. According to the following narrative, however, the “accused” person transformed such an interpretation of the silence into evidence of the opposite. Instead of acknowledging that the behaviour of the neighbours who remained silent in his presence, in spite of his repeated attempts at communication, suggested that they had identified him as a witch, he, on the contrary, interpreted their silence as proof of *their* bewitching act.

II: And he said that that this father came, his younger son drove him to the place where they had dug out the foundations to build a house. And he said that they went to that place and the old man stood there and uttered no sound. He asked them what they were doing and he said that they kept totally quiet. And he said that they had managed to build their house in no time. While he was struggling with building his house, it only took them one year to build their house. He said that it was like they took his success²⁵ away, everything went wrong afterwards. (53)

Christian Discourse

Christian discourse is a discourse which was occasionally embraced by the clergy and only marginally by the people in the region (when talking about witchcraft). This discourse does not deny the reality of the effect of malevolent magic deeds, but ultimately ascribes it to the agency of the devil. This is how the act of burying objects in a neighbour’s field, typically understood as a bewitching act within the witchcraft discourse, was interpreted by a Catholic priest in a public lecture a few years ago:²⁶

A man once came to me and said that nothing ever grew on the field where he was planting. And then he noticed that his neighbour was always burying some things in it, which were causing the vegetables not to grow. We call this spells (...) this is the external manifestation of the direct work of the devil.

Later in his lecture he explains the “spells” as

the most frequently used manner of harming others, when via certain objects which are first given to Satan to imprint his evil power into them, one can harm others. (...) Spells do not depend so much on the material as such, as they depend on the will and hatred of the person who wants to harm others with the help of Satan.

Obviously, the priest did not understand the act of burying the object, as narrated to him by a client, as witchcraft—in fact, the term is not mentioned at all. While he nonetheless believed in its harmful consequences, he instead interpreted it as a manifestation of “Satan’s” deed. The procedure of an unwitcher, which within the witchcraft discourse was often understood as necessary to counteract the effects of witchcraft, was also understood as the devil’s work within the Christian discourse, and to visit magic specialists no more and no less than to summon the devil:

Black, or I should say white²⁷ magic, means to direct evil against a certain person through magic formulas and rituals in which Satan is being summoned, in order to affect a sequence of events or to affect people on someone’s behalf. (...) In order for a fortune-teller to affect a certain person, they need something of theirs: hair, nails, an undergarment or a photograph. (...) Now, the problem is that I know people who claim to be very religious, they go to mass, but on Monday at three they scheduled a bioenergeticist, on Wednesday at five they go to their fortune-teller ... Well, you can’t follow two different paths – if you do, the devil will come. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwmUaU0jYK0>; accessed 5 May 2015)

However, Christian discourse, within which bewitchments were ultimately ascribed to the agency of the devil, was not strongly embedded in our region. Even the name Satan, common in Christian discourse (cf. Wolf-Knuts 2002: 152), almost never appeared in the narratives of the people we interviewed; instead, euphemistic appellations such as *hudič* (*malus*), *vrag* (*inimicus, hostis*), *hudobni duh* (evil spirit) were used in the sense of “devil”. Occasionally, however, both discourses, the Christian (attributing the malevolent magic actions ultimately to the devil) and the witchcraft (attributing them to evil people, i.e. witches) partly overlapped: while the witchcraft discourse attributed bewitchments to the agency of witches and the Christian discourse ultimately to the agency of the devil (without any reference to witches), people would sometimes attribute the source of witches’ power ultimately to the devil. As Wolf-Knuts observed, people were forced to combine Christian doctrine and “knowledge of

religious topics apart from Church teachings (...) otherwise it would be impossible to maintain a functional world view. This does not have to be logical, neither does it have to be consistent, and it does not have to avoid contradictions.” (2002: 148) Typically, however, the relationship between the devil and the witches was only evoked when explicitly asked about and seems to refer more to a general stereotype of witches being evil and evil being ultimately related to the devil, than being an intrinsic part of the discourse. Here are some of the answers to the question about the relationship between witches and the devil we received during our fieldwork, varying from the confirmation of their connection, to doubts about and denial of it:

- F: *Did witches have something to do with the devil?*
 I: *Yes, yes, absolutely. Because that faith, that superstition had it that they had business with the devil, well, that the devil was their superior.*
 F: *Were people saying that here?*
 I: *Yes, yes, yes. Witches were like that, they had business with the devil. And, how should I say, none of them belonged to the notion of good, but to the notion of bad. (108)*
- F: *Were witches connected to the devil?*
 I2: *What?*
 F: *Were they related to the devil?*
 I2: *No...[laughs]*
 I1: *Probably, otherwise they couldn't ...*
 F: *But you never heard about it?*
 I1: *Well, otherwise they couldn't know ... (59)*
- F: *What about the relation between witches and the devil?*
 I: *I wouldn't know about that.(93)*
- F: *Have people related witches with the devil?*
 I1: *No, here they didn't relate them with the devil but with evil people. They related them with such people. Not with the devil, no. (53)*

Even when the relation between witches and the devil was confirmed, the picture of the devil, when elaborated, did not usually exhibit the characteristic traits he is attributed within the Christian discourse. As Ulrika Wolf-Knuts argues, there are two contrary discourses on the devil, the official discourse of church tradition and the discourse of folklore, yet there is no clear borderline between them in folklore, and they should both be

taken as a whole (2002: 148). The two traditions thus to a great extent coincide, but while the devil of the church discourse is unequivocally evil, in folklore the evil is not that self-evident, and the character of the devil is much more varied and nuanced: the devil of folklore is more vivid, more personal, more concrete, and less symbolic than the devil of the church (Wolf-Knuts 2002: 163).

In our region, at any rate, except for some general statements about the devil's relation to evil, he played only a minor role; we recorded altogether 13 narratives in which the devil was mentioned, and he was not always pictured as altogether negative in them. One was a migratory legend about men playing the cards (Christiansen, ML 3015: *The Cardplayers and the Devil*) in which a player recognises the devil by his hooves when a card falls to the floor. The legend obviously supported the strong moral and religious prejudice against card-playing, which the church considered a serious sin (cf. Grambo 1970: 253–255; Gwyndaf 1994: 236; Wolf-Knuts 2002: 160–161), but it was not in any way related to witchcraft. The next two legends related the devil to a hare which caused men to follow him and to forget to save their friend from hanging himself due to a bet,²⁸ obviously an admonition against committing suicide (or even joking about it), as the souls of suicides belong to the devil. Another narrative was about a woman who, by dragging the chain on her way back home from the field, dragged home the devil—the story explained the poltergeist phenomena that had occurred in her house several decades earlier; yet another was a personal narrative told by a man who went hunting on St. Mary's day, when hunting is forbidden, whereupon a large number of hares suddenly appeared and started jumping around him—which he adjudged to be the devils which had appeared in front of him because he was hunting when he should not have been (160). In all these narratives, the devil appears when social norms are transgressed in one or another way. The devil is also sometimes ridiculed and presented as far from being a frightening creature: he is described as sticking out his long tongue and chasing children while they are hitting him, obviously not even managing to frighten the children (cf. inf. 63, p. 83). The image of devil thus seems far from the image of the fearful opponent of God in religious scriptures. In none of these narratives, however, was the devil described as having any relation witchcraft.

In a few narratives, on the other hand, the devil was in fact associated with witchcraft. In three narratives, the devil either had the role of the accomplice of a neighbour-witch, appearing in the form of a hare (cf. Thompson motif G3033.3.2.3. Devil in form of hare), indicating and

supporting the accusation of their neighbour's witchcraft, or was related to the death of a woman who opposed the priest.²⁹ Four other narratives related the devil to "witching" (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 152): in these a person gains material wealth from the devil in exchange for something (a child's soul, a favour in return). This coincides with Wolf-Knuts' observation that the notion of the devil supports the ideals of self-discipline, self-restraint, and moderation, as the devil appears when individuals desire more than they should have. However, even if the devil appears in these narratives, he does not figure as the typical devil of the Christian discourse, of whom nothing good can be expected, but is more typical of folklore discourse in general, in which both discourses on the devil in fact coincide (Wolf-Knuts 2002: 163–165).

Actions too may acquire different meanings in Christian discourse than they have in witchcraft discourse. An example of how the same action can be interpreted differently within the two discourses is the annual blessing of the homesteads with holy water, performed by priests. While the blessing according to Christian doctrine is understood as "an appeal to God to be merciful and close to the person who receives a blessing or who uses a blessed item or stays at a blessed place" (<http://zupnija-stolna-nm.rkc.si/zakramentali/>; last accessed 6 May 2015), within the witchcraft discourse people understood the same ritual as a protection against witchcraft, and priests were occasionally called to perform the blessing not only as a preventive measure but also against witchcraft when misfortunes, interpreted as a result of bewitchment, had already occurred. In the eyes of the people, blessing rituals helped prevent (further) bewitchments even if the (church) officials held witchcraft to be mere superstition (cf. also Dobler 2015) and never consciously and willingly performed rituals as aimed against witchcraft.

When a "blessed item", such as holy water, was applied by an unwitcher acting within the witchcraft discourse, the holy water too had a slightly different meaning than it had within Christian discourse. Whereas in Christian discourse the holy water is meant to petition God to be "merciful and close", the unwitchers used it for a quite different purpose. Once they confirmed that the misfortunes of the client were a result of bewitchment, the clients were obliged to bring along fresh holy water from their parish. After the unwitching ritual was performed, the unwitchers washed their hands in the water in order to protect themselves from bewitchment—if they did not, that is if the water was not brought, the "evil", i.e. the bewitchment, would "pass onto the unwitcher" (164). Apotropaic deeds known within Christian discourse,

for instance the sign of the cross, were also used as and combined with other actions known and interpreted as protective measures against night witches within the witchcraft discourse (cf. Valk 2011: 849).

Rational Discourse

However, it seems that even the priests in our region did not often resort to the Christian discourse, within which the evil deeds of envious neighbours, understood as bewitchments triggering misfortune within the witchcraft discourse, would ultimately be ascribed to the agency of the devil. As the educated elite, they seemed to prefer to draw upon the “rational”, “scientific” discourse, pronouncing all talk about witchcraft to be “superstition” (cf. Correll 2005: 2; Valk 2015: 149). During my field research in 2000, I talked to the local parish priest, who boasted that after having read the results of a study done by students at the local primary school (which had taken place not long before our conversation) that revealed strongly held “beliefs” of the local population in witchcraft, he vehemently warned against “superstition” in a sermon.

Rational discourse, of course, was not embraced by priests alone. Many people spoke from outside the witchcraft discourse and took a rational stance, proclaiming those that believed in the reality of witchcraft to be “superstitious”, “stupid”, “foolish”, and the like—these designations were typically adopted by people talking from within this type of discourse.

Discourses can also transmit concepts of power that reflect the interests of the power elite: by defining their opponents as superstitious and dismissing their discourse as irrational, backward and foolish while on the other hand declaring their own discourse to be “self-evident” and “commonsensical” (cf. Henry and Tator 2002: 25), and by labelling their narratives “fairy-tales” and “legends”,³⁰ those who wanted to be excluded from the “superstitious folk” marginalised the proponents of witchcraft discourse and established their own discourse as the dominant one (cf. Motz 1998: 344). The following interviews relate the acts of placing a toad-witch, burying an object on another’s property, and getting lost in the woods at night, that is, acts and experiences typically understood as bewitchment within the witchcraft discourse, through the lenses of “rational” discourse:

- I: *There were one, two silly old women, and you know those toads ... That was ... Old people used to be stupid, there were one, two, three such silly*

- old women and they were putting them near the thresholds at nights, and I don't know ... Otherwise people were already more or less educated.*
- F: *And why were they putting them near the threshold?*
- I: *They had a stupid belief that it was going to be fortune or misfortune. Oh, this was stupidity! How people used to be superstitious!*
- F: *And what happened to people that got a toad put by their threshold?*
- I: *Foolishness! That was a daughter that was angry with her mother, who was so stupid and always fantasised something and wanted to do evil. (101)*

People used to bury eggs at crossroads so that when you crossed them, you [would experience] misfortune, or a plague. These were superstitions. (23)

Yes, this they would say too: When they went to the forest at night and suddenly they got lost. And they wandered about for the whole night long and they would say that witches carried them. And that such lights burned – the same, these were witches. Folk used to be very superstitious! Well, nowadays, this is no longer. (49)

- I: *These are empty words, about witches! I know nothing about that. My parents still used to say that witches confused people and carried them off. And that they went to the cellar and drank and everything ...*
- F: *And why did they do that?*
- I: *But they didn't! (56)*

- I1: *Nonsense! They were cross with each other.*
- I2: *Plenty, there was plenty of such nonsense! [laughter] The other thing was ignorance, the biggest ignorance. People always searched for something, but they were not well versed, they were not educated, they couldn't read, they couldn't, and something sacred appeared and they thought ... God knows. (...) You know what was going on here? This is already some supernatural phenomenon [referring to lights, in the witchcraft discourse interpreted as witches] ... but it is not ... these were various gases, various things, but they did not want to figure out ..., what it was, to study ... and so they ... one dozed off, another one got drunk, and then witches drove them and God know what else ... Or when he drove a car – witches ... all wrong!*
- I1: [laughter]
- I2: *These were such legends.*
- I1: *Yes. (...) And they [witches] also had their gatherings and they also said that they bewitched some ... so that their livestock died, a cow died, for*

*instance, and it was already witchcraft, right? They believed all that ...
Yes, these are empty words, just fears! (62)*

Interestingly, people sometimes referred to others' beliefs as superstition, while at the same time explicitly expressing their own belief in witchcraft which they did not consider superstition. When one narrator related a story about her bewitched cousin bringing home bewitching objects that he picked up from under a tree, she comments on his mother ordering him to immediately throw them away by saying that she was "a bit superstitious", yet she concludes the narrative by stating: "This I strongly believe, that this [the bewitchment] did him harm, this I strongly believe!" (cf. inf. 53, p. 204). Or when another narrator commented on her neighbour's practice of putting eggs in their field by saying "she just had this superstition", she at the same time responded to our question about whether that woman was considered a witch by saying: "Yeah, 'cause that's what they said. You definitely have to know something" (cf. inf. 104, p. 120).

New-Age Discourse

People living in the villages and small settlements were not aware of and did not use New-Age discourse, which is more typical of urban environments. Only extremely infrequently did some terms which are somewhat familiar in New-Age discourse crop up in the conversations:

- F: *What do you say here when witches bewitch people, that they get lost?*
 I: *They can do that too. Like when he gets you into his hands ... that biomagnetic ... no, not biomagnetic ... what do you call him? Hipnotizer?*
 F: *Hypnotizer?*
 I: *Yes, hypnotist. He can also do something to you, people are just like that, they do such things to you. When he hypnotizes you, he betrays you, and you go totally insane ... he makes you take off your clothes and walk around ... when you are hypnotized ... (56)*

In fact, the only person who occasionally used this discourse was the grandson (and great-grandson) of the unwitchers from a famous family of fortune-tellers, Ivan H., who officially did not live in the researched territory but just across the river in a neighbouring region—nevertheless, his family had been intrinsically linked to witchcraft in the region since the beginning of the twentieth century, as people from the region mostly sought help from this particular unwitching family whenever they assumed

that their misfortune was a consequence of bewitchment. When talking to me, he used particular terminology, like “bioenergy”, “bioenergeticists”, and “energy”, which can be identified, in a broader sense, as a typical or even as a key concept of New-Age discourse (Valk 2011: 862; cf. Kis-Halas 2012: 84; Mencej 2015: 47, 57). In fact, this particular narrator tended to switch from witchcraft to New-Age discourse and back again, but it is not unusual for the narrators to combine various discourses in the course of the interviews, and individual narratives can be moulded by more than one discourse (cf. de Blécourt 2013: 363), as we have seen above. While throughout our interviews my interlocutor mostly talked from within the witchcraft discourse and clearly expressed his firm belief in the power of witches and the reality of witchcraft, he switched to New-Age discourse on two occasions: first, when talking about his great-grandmother, the famous unwitcher, who he designated as having had strong “bioenergy”, grounding his statement with the claim of another bioenergeticist:

She is a hospital nurse (...) everybody likes her, she's got such energy. She saw a picture of Una [his great-grandmother], and she immediately said: This one had power, she really was a bioenergeticist! This you must know: A bioenergeticist recognises another bioenergeticist. (164)

And second, when talking about priests, who he clearly also held as magic specialists and considered utterly suspicious and dangerous. Discussing their ability to bewitch, he referred to them with the expression “they knew”, typically used within witchcraft discourse, yet at the same time, he associated their ability to bewitch with the “system of chakras” and their taking away of energy. The teaching of chakras comes from the Hindu religion but has become known to laymen in the West mainly through New-Age discourse, and in the given context, I consider it as an indication of this particular discourse (cf. Heelas 2003: 1; Kis-Halas 2012: 78). In addition, he equated priests’ exorcisms with witchcraft in the sense that they both take power away from people—power that he equated with “energy”—resulting in an illness:

- F: *How could a priest be harmful?*
 I: *He performed exorcisms, he practised witchcraft.*
 F: *But how did he do it? What could he cause by it?*
 I: *Illness. If he took your power, he took your energy. Now we are getting somewhere, we have arrived at the basics: up there we have points, this is a system of chakras, seven points. You are getting energy there – yes or no?*

Good, that is all perfect, right? But as they, the priests, know about that, they know that if they took energy from someone ...—not everybody could do this, they have to have power, they have to know, and even if they didn't know, they had power, everybody can have power, but in their case they have to practise. Others, bioenergeticists – they give [energy], while these [the priests] take it away.

F: *But how can they take it away?*

I: *They take it away in an instant. I don't know how, but they can. A bioenergeticist took energy away from me by phone. (164)*

In the following narrative, he referred to the research of “water memory” conducted by Masaru Emoto, who claimed that human consciousness has an effect on the [molecular structure of water](#) and that emotional “energies” and “vibrations” can change the physical structure of water. His hypothesis was that water reacts to positive thoughts and words, and that polluted water could be cleaned through prayer and positive visualisation. Emoto’s work is widely considered to be [pseudoscience](#),³¹ and his teaching is mostly endorsed by New-Age adherents, and one can understand it as an indication of New-Age discourse too. The narrator, however, did not talk about the memory of water in general, but attributed the special knowledge of water manipulation to priests as being one of their magic capacities:

A priest would give some water, holy water. You know, don't you, that water has memory? Water has memory, you know that! Memory stays in it, water has something in it. A priest can do abracadabra and it is over. Or, else, he can pray above the water for a long time and then that memory stays in the water and this water has something in it. (164)

Choosing to speak from within the New-Age discourse enabled the narrator to talk about witchcraft as real, not dismissing his personal belief in its reality, while at the same time using (pseudo-)scientific and rational rhetoric to analyse and explain it. It enabled him to discuss witchcraft without degrading it to mere “superstition”, which he should have done were he talking from within rational discourse, while at the same time to present himself as a rational, educated, and analytical person. This switch to New-Age discourse seemed to have imparted the narrator the authority to elevate his own position to one that was equal to that of the magic specialists in terms of knowledge. And by doing so, he also refrained from talking from the position of a (potential) victim of their power, which he

would have done if he were using the witchcraft discourse. Instead, he took the position one who “knows” as much as the priests and is able to compete with them. His family background was certainly not insignificant in this regard as it gave him the authority to take such a position in the first place—a position that was obviously not available to other narrators.

*

When talking from within the witchcraft, Christian and New-Age discourses, a person who believes in the power of witchcraft does not need to deny their personal attitude. Rational discourse, on the other hand, represents the opposite: it is the “discourse of disbelief”. Scientific and pseudo-scientific rhetoric could be used in the rational as well as in the New-Age discourse, while elements of Christian discourse could be partly integrated into witchcraft discourse, as mentioned above. In addition, New-Age and witchcraft discourses, as well as rational and witchcraft discourses, can be used by the same narrator, and even intermingled in the course of the same narration, with the narrator slipping from talking from within the “rational” or New-age discourse, to talking from within the witchcraft discourse and back again. Moreover, the choice of a particular discourse made by the one and same narrator may also be conditioned by the particular narrative that is being related. This, however, brings us to the question of repertoires and the different attitudes of the narrators toward particular items in their repertoire as well as to possible differences among the repertoire, of different narrators.

REPERTOIRES

Willem de Blécourt argued that “[o]ne of the ways in which we can gain more insight into local witchcraft discourses is to examine the legends of individual informants” (1999: 169), i.e. their repertoires. The research of repertoire, “the store of tales at the narrator’s disposal, the tales that he or she can tell when asked to entertain” (Holbek 1998: 176), in folklore studies usually pertained to the outstanding storytelling personalities of a given community, who besides their convincing performance, authority and credibility, their ability to narrate, properly shape and present tales, also displayed a quite extensive repertoire³² that they were able to narrate, indicating the narrators’ vivid and excellent memory and their power of recollection over a long period of time (cf. Dégh 1989: 165–179). But when the repertoire of people who talked about witchcraft is in question,

we can hardly judge the narrators from the perspective of their artistic ability, convincing performance, or the quantity of the narratives they tell, and this certainly was not what de Blécourt had in mind. The quantity of witchcraft narratives that formed one's repertoire and the ability to narrate witchcraft narratives fluently and persuasively were not the factors that helped a narrator gain the reputation of a "good storyteller" in the community, as witchcraft narratives were usually not recognised as "stories" having any particular cultural value. In fact, the people who turned out to be the most interesting relaters of personal experience narratives and legends about witchcraft were never recognised as good storytellers in the community. When people tried to help by suggesting good storytellers, we were as a rule directed to those individuals who could relate historical legends and were well-versed in local history. Contrary to knowledge of witchcraft narratives, knowledge of these legends was highly valued.

Since the typical context for telling witchcraft narratives, i.e. shared work in the evenings when the inhabitants gathered together, no longer existed at the time of our research, and, not being participant observers, we were also not able to witness other possible situations when witchcraft may have been discussed, it was not possible to observe the narratives as told in their natural context; instead, we stimulated and participated in a context which was artificially established between the researcher and the narrator. It is thus impossible to estimate how well the narrators performed and how many narratives they would have told if we had participated in the spontaneous exchange of witchcraft narratives. Narratives about witches were seldom told for the purpose of entertaining and providing aesthetic pleasure—above all, they communicated information about experiences that one can have in the community or its vicinity, instructions on how to behave when confronted with witches, what to do and how to cope with witchcraft, how to counteract bewitchment, who to fear, etc. The power of storytelling and the ability to provide aesthetic effect was therefore not what was demanded from the narrators of witchcraft narratives, and the artistic ability of the narrator was not the crucial factor that stimulated the interest of the listeners. A large quantity of witchcraft narratives in one's repertoire, the other criterion of a good storyteller, usually implied deeper personal involvement in witchcraft discourse and a stronger emotional charge, which may have even resulted in the opposite outcome as regards the quality of the narration: confused and poorly constructed narratives.³³

The regularity of the narration, another criterion for a person to be regarded as a storyteller, as emphasised by Reimund Kvideland, who claimed that the decisive factor is not the number of tales but the *regularity* of their telling—thus even if a person tells only one tale, but does so regularly, he or she should be considered a storyteller (cf. 1993: 109–110)—was likewise not a criterion according to which one could judge an individual as a teller of witchcraft narratives. Since the main context for telling these narratives no longer existed, it was impossible to estimate how regularly someone used to tell (certain types of) witchcraft narratives. In addition, people could choose to stop talking about witchcraft publicly because they had nobody to talk to, because they were mocked when they told such stories, because their narration was not being reinforced, or because they felt that their narratives were not valued as they would want them to be, while at the same time continuing to narrate them within their family or close circles of friends.

Nevertheless, even if not taking into account any of the criteria according to which the narrators were recognised as good “storytellers”, on whom folklorists usually focused when discussing repertoire, research of individuals’ repertoires of witchcraft narratives can still help us shed light on the various nuances of individual attitudes toward witchcraft and various modes of individual appropriations of witchcraft narratives circulating in the region.

Individual Repertoires

Even though we can talk about a general repertoire of witchcraft narratives circulating in the region, with only slight local differences, more or less available to every inhabitant in the region to draw upon, individuals’ repertoires reveal a heterogeneous picture: the repertoires of the narratives that individuals chose to tell clearly differ one from another. People obviously made a selection from the available stock of narratives and adapted them with respect to various factors, such as their character traits, personal interests, the problems the narratives were addressing, the tensions they needed to release through narration, and many other factors (cf. Asadowskij 1926; Jones 1988; Dégh 1995: 39–44). While some narrators primarily related themes that addressed the social aspect of witchcraft, that is, tensions among neighbours, others mostly focused on stories about the night experiences with witches that had more to do with the “supernatural” than with the tensions within the community. While some narrators

mostly referred to their own personal experiences with witchcraft, others mainly talked about the experiences of others or narrated well-known fabulates³⁴ without any personal involvement. Others still mixed both.

To offer a glimpse into the variety of the repertoires of our narrators, I shall present three narrators, all of whom talked from within the witchcraft discourse but whose gender, age, economic status, and repertoires differed extensively. The first, Igor K. (63), who was interviewed in 2000, was born in 1925. He has been a peasant his whole life and has no formal education. Together with his wife, who during his entire narration played the important role of prompter and corrector of his narrations, he lived in a small, secluded old house on a hill, surrounded by forest, in rather poor living conditions. The second narrator, Jera B. (53), born in 1955, is a housewife who lived with her husband and grown-up children in a huge, modern house located toward the end of an elongated village, near the main road leading through the village. In contrast to the first narrator, she came from a wealthy farming family which used to have farm workers living in their house (her husband moved to her family's estate when they got married). Her daughter, born in 1977, and at that time a student, was present during our first visit in 2001, but was absent during my second visit in 2015. Like the wife of the first narrator, she actively supported her mother with remarks and comments, supplemented her narration, and occasionally took over the narration herself. The third narrator, Marica Z. (29), was born in 1925. She has been a housewife her whole life, living from what she produced by working on a small piece of land she owned. At the time of our visits, i.e. in 2000 and 2001, she was already a widow, living together with her grandson of about 20 in even poorer conditions than the first narrator: her house was tiny, consisting of an open-hearth kitchen and a living room, located at the very end of a small hamlet on the hill.

Igor K.

While not eloquent, Igor K. was nevertheless a very vivid narrator and obviously narrated his stories at least within his family, as his wife was well acquainted with all of them. He was a very convincing narrator and recounted his narratives without the slightest doubt that what he was saying was true, even when he admitted to not having witnessed the events himself. He narrated several etiological legends, second-hand memorates about the wild hunt, a narrative about dwarves observed at the ruins of the nearby castle, and many second-hand memorates about people encountering

the dead, receiving omens at the time of their death, and restless souls. He was also very well acquainted with the available cultural repertoire of witchcraft narratives in the region. When asked, he confirmed that he knew most of the usual narratives forming local witchcraft discourse: he knew narratives about the unwitchers who people consulted in case of misfortune; he was aware of the practice of stabbing or burning toads, even though he himself did not associate toads with witches but considered them a sign of misfortune; he had also heard of the practice of burying objects in neighbours' fields in order to cause harm to the crops, which he explicitly ascribed to envious neighbours and not witches. He was aware of the narratives told by people who got lost in the forest at night, ascribing the experience to the agency of witches, yet these narratives too he distinguished from witchcraft and ascribed them to drunkenness, and did not want to spend any time talking about them. None of these topics, though, triggered his interest and engagement, and he only mentioned them very briefly. He also narrated none of them as first-hand accounts—in all of them he was, one might say, a passive “tradition bearer” (cf. von Sydow 1948: 12–13).

His attitude toward the narration, his mode of narration, and the length of his narratives, however, changed dramatically the moment he started to talk about his ancestors, as well as his own personal experiences with their closest neighbours, with whom his family has had a long history of strained relationships, lasting at least from the time of his grandparents. The members of the neighbouring family clearly played the main role in his narratives, and he explicitly referred to his neighbour's grandfather as being a “hard witch” (*ta hart coprnik*), meaning a very powerful witch, allegedly known as such in the whole community. The narrative about his neighbours was a very long and extensive one and actually not only encompassed several episodes about his own as well as his grandfather's experiences with them but also included many well-known motifs from the store of European witchcraft legends. Such was, for instance, the episode of shooting a devil in the form of a hare (cf. Thompson motif G3033.3.2.3., Devil in form of hare; cf. Nildin-Wall and Wall 1993: 67–68; Valk 2001a: 127–128) which appeared at an appointed place at exactly the time when his neighbour had announced it would be there (G295*—cf. de Blécourt 1999: 172) and no matter how much one shot at it, one could not hit it; or a devil-hare grinding his claws which caused sparks to fly around (cf. Thompson motif G222.1, When devil combs witches, sparks fly).

- I1: *Yes, yes, this happened at that house where the witch [their neighbour] lived.*
- I2³⁵: *Yes, he invited someone to go hunting with him.*
- I1: *Indeed, he invited one from K. And he said: You, if you have time, come up here today and I will show you a hare and you can shoot it there where I show it to you. Yes, he said, but we have to go to wait for it in the bush. (...) Yes, yes, yes. This happened on that hill there [shows], and the house was about hundred and fifty metres to the side. He said: I shall tell you at what time the hare will come and we can just talk until then. And they talked and drank. [The guest:] But how do you know that the hare is going to be here at that exact hour? [The neighbour:] I can assure you that it is going to come at that exact hour and you will be able to shoot it there. It is all right. And then the hour came, they had this old clock with weights, and he [the neighbour] said: Now open the window and I will show it to you, he said. It is right there inside, right there. [pointing] The branches of the hawthorn extended to the ground there. You see that hawthorn branch? It is right there! Do you see it? [The guest:] Yes, I see him, it is a hare, of course! What else could it be? Now you better take aim at it, he [the neighbour] said. He aimed at it, and lowered the gun. I looked, he said, that hunter, I looked and aimed at him and fired a shot and it hit the hare, but the hare ... – nothing but sparks striking on all sides while it kept grinding its claws. The more he ground, the more sparks were striking on all sides. Upon my word, he said! My hair stood on end. What is this now? I fired the second shot. Even more, he said, even more sparks were striking. He said, Good Lord, I didn't dare shoot anymore. Something was wrong here. Of course it was wrong! He [the neighbour] was a hard witch, as they used to say in the past, he bewitched something that this happened. He said: We went to look then, there was no hare, and nothing was damaged, no branch was missing. Nothing! And I saw what had happened there. I was so horror-stricken that I thought I would piss myself, he said. Well, he said, I never went with anybody that invited me since. (63)*

The episode about the same neighbour's prolonged and painful dying, typical of witches, and about his funeral also acquired a legendary quality: upon the arrival of the priest, the neighbour, although nearly immobile, allegedly jumped from his deathbed onto the stove, yelling that the devils want to take him. The narrative about the funeral includes one of the very well-known motifs of international legendry: the neighbour was said to have vanished from the coffin at the first cross, confirming that he was taken by the devil who cannot endure the Christian signs (cf. Thompson

motif G303.16.3.4., Devil made to disappear by making sign of the cross). The episode about his neighbour's "walking back" (an expression that in the region refers to the restless dead appearing to the living) after the funeral and making noise, typical of those who for various reasons (sins committed during their lifetime, including their dealing with witchcraft) cannot leave for the other world until they are blessed by a priest, also belong to the traditional repertoire of narratives about the restless dead, people without status who are stuck between the worlds of the living and the dead and cannot proceed to their otherworldly residence.

- I1: *And then when he was dying ...*
 F: *That witch?*
 I1: *That witch, when they brought him to the first cross ...*
 I2: *No, when the parish priest came, he jumped to the stove ...*
 I: *Yes, yes, yes, you are right. Well, he was dead, no, he was still conscious, when he waited for that deacon ...*
 I2: *That he jumped to the stove before he would come.*
 I1: *Yes.*
 I2: *The more he approached the house, the more he beat the devil.*
 I1: *The closer the priest was approaching ...*
 I2: *While he was so ill that he couldn't do anything, and yet he jumped to the stove ...*
 I1: *He couldn't even move, and he still jumped from the bed to the stove – he also used to have a stove here [indicating the kitchen range] but then we threw it out, and they had the same stove. He jumped from the bed up to the stove, and they saw him, those who were with him. What is going on? He had an old knife and was swinging it around, and beat around, and the devils were pressing on him. What is going on now?*
 I2: *He said that the devils wanted to take him.*
 I1: *Devils want to take me, devils want to take me! [imitating him]. The parish priest said to him: No, no, calm down, and come down from the stove. You climbed up there so you can come down here! And now you [addressing the present family members] put him back on the bed! I shall not take his confession on the stove. Well, they put him on the bed, and he started to talk about what he had done, here and there. This was terrible! But to whom you have done this? To my neighbours! And where do these neighbours live? asked the priest. Here, they are my nearest neighbours. He gestured towards our house. Well, now, you have to call the neighbour here so that you will reconcile. My grandfather actually went there when they came to pick him up. I cannot give absolution when so many terrible things have happened, the priest said. He told him everything about how*

he was bewitching. Here was the boundary and we had pigs in the pigsty there and he bewitched them. The first day one pig died, and in a couple of days they were all dead. It was always something. And then my grandfather said: If God forgives you, I shall also forgive you. But if God doesn't forgive you, I can't forgive you either, there was too much suffering. And because of who? Because of you! When he died, they took him down to K., and they buried him there. At the first cross down there they placed him on the ground, to rest a bit. Before there was still something inside [the coffin], but when they carried it past the cross, they were only carrying an empty box. What now? Did he jump out, or escape, or what?

F: *This happened just when they passed by the cross?*

I1: *Right by the cross! And they said that the devils took him right by the cross, by the first cross, that they couldn't wait to get his soul and that they came to take it. And then he was coming back to rattle at home at nights. All night long they [his family] had no peace. The parish priest had to come to bless that, and everything. This was really horrible. Yes, and this was all true, it was true, indeed. (63)*

The only other theme, apart from his neighbours, that attracted the narrator's particular interest and also triggered a prolonged narration, was the Catholic priest from the neighbouring parish, who was accused by a certain woman from that parish of having fathered a child with another woman. Although the narrative starts with the woman accusing the priest, the focus of his narrative, and its moral, is on the priests and their magic and social power, as well as on the consequences that those who make a stand against them suffer even after their death (the earth does not accept their dead bodies unless blessed, devils appear near the grave). The narrator referred to priests as "knowing", thus linked them to witchcraft, and even explicitly warned about losing their favour.

I1: *There was this parish priest, his name was D. ...*

I2: *Better not tell this one! [laughter]*

I1: *That priest, right, in that parish, he had a woman there, she was very mouthy, she always disagreed with her son ... They were suing each other, here and there ..., and then she said this to the priest ...*

I2: *The priest said that ...*

I1: *She accused the priest having made a child with this woman, right? I don't know whether it was true or not. And it came to his ears and he sued her. And of course, she lost. You know, before they used to side with each other, well, they still do. And then she went to the spring and she slipped and she killed herself, they found her dead in the spring. Well, then, of*

course, the woman needed to be buried in K. as she was from the parish of K. There was that priest, D., and they told him that she had died and he allowed them to bury her and he went there and blessed the grave. Whether he did or he didn't, I cannot know. And that gravedigger was to fill in the grave. He said, I heard him with my own ears, he said: The more I filled up the grave with the earth, the less earth there was in the grave. And it rattled within that coffin. So I worked at night by the light, as I had too much other work over the day. I couldn't stand it anymore. The more earth I put into the grave, the less there was of it.

I2: Wait, there was also a devil flying around.

I1: That's okay, I will tell about it. So the next day, he said, he went to the priest, and said what was going on there, that he should go and bless it, that he cannot do that, that something like this had never happened before, only in the case of this woman. Oh, he said, just cover it. I can't, I can't, he said. Well, finally, he went, he said. He said: You go and sprinkle the grave! He said he then went and sprinkled it – and then I was able to fill it in like any other grave. There must have been something between the two ... And then the next day I went to the school, there was this teacher there, [and] a cute baby, and several boys said: Christ, children, you have no idea what we saw! What? we asked. While we were passing by that grave a devil chased us and showing us his long tongue.

I2: A devil, a devil! [laughing]

I1: He ran after us! Right then the teacher came in and said: Hush, boy, hush about that. He said: Why should I be quiet when it was true, he said. It was true, right?

F: And what did the devil look like?

I1: Well, allegedly he had horns, and a long tongue, and he just went towards the children. And the children beat him on the hooves, here and there, and he did nothing to them. Well, he stopped after a short while. He said: But where did he come from? Well, he said, he just appeared out of the blue sky, or from the earth, or something. Yes, by that grave, where that woman was buried.

F: When did this happen? Soon after her death or...?

I1: Soon, soon, the next day. The day after the priest blessed the grave and the grave was covered. They said that you should never lose the priest's favour. [They said] that priests know a lot. He [the grave-digger] said: What I saw never happened to me either before or after! And it was true that he had a child with that woman and she went insane. The old people knew that, right. And he also said that once he went to mass, and was one of the first ones there, and that priest had a housewife, a cook, who cooked for him. And he didn't know what they had there inside, but he remembered that the child, that daughter was with them for some time. And she, that

cook, said: How naughty you are, you are naughtier than any other child, since you are the holy father's child. And I thought to myself...— said that man who told me all this. (63)

Jera B.

While Igor K. only told extensive narratives about people that he knew personally, i.e. his neighbour and the priest, and who had even personally affected him and his family (in the case of the neighbour), the next narrator, Jera B., included practically all the motifs and types of witchcraft narratives that we came across in the region in her repertoire, and many that we heard exclusively from her—without being personally involved in any of them. She narrated about witches in the form of lights carrying people away in the woods at night, about a particular woman from the village that had a reputation of a witch, about the practice of burying eggs and placing other objects on neighbours' property, about the practice of dragging sheets over neighbours' wheat, stories about witches magically milking cows, passing on magic knowledge or magic books before their death, narratives depicting prolonged and painful dying of witches, about unwitchers, witches making a pact with the devil in order to gain wealth, and many others. She narrated many second-hand personal narratives about personal experiences with bewitchment that happened to other members of her own community, and told stories about a woman who had the reputation of a village witch in her own community, yet she narrated about no personal experiences with bewitchment, except for an incident when the village witch bewitched their pigs which she witnessed as a child, but even in this case this particular bewitchment was actually directed against her grandmother and it was her grandmother that interpreted this misfortune as a result of bewitchment.

In addition, she included in her repertoire legends that can be clearly recognised as fabulates, and which belong to the international stock of witchcraft legends. Most of them she heard from her father, who upon marriage moved into the village from another village in the same region. Examples of such internationally known legends include, for instance, a legend about a person who made himself a Lucy's Stool in order to expose witches at midnight mass: to a person kneeling on such a chair at the moment of the elevation of the host, they were believed to appear with their backs towards the altar; a legend about witches possessing a cauldron which secretes cheese for them (cf. Vukanović 1989: 20; Pócs 1999: 122–124); a legend about a man following his wife by

flying on a broomstick “through thick and thin” (cf. Christiansen ML 3045 *Following the Witch*; Klintberg 2010: 276, N2; Thompson motif G242.7. Person flying with witches makes mistake and falls); about a man who joins witches on a journey in a barrel, and picks cherries at the seaside (usually on the other side of the sea, in Italy) to present them as the proof of their journey (cf. Bošković-Stulli 1973: 96); and a legend about a witch replacing her arm with a wooden one when her own went missing after she and other witches had been throwing their body parts in the air (cf. Matičetov 1959: 79–90; Pócs 1989: 42; Šmitek 2003: 26; Kropěj and Dapit 2006: 28; Kropěj et al. 2010: 98).

Unlike the first narrator, who narrated at length, dramatically and with an emotional charge only those stories in which he and his family were personally involved and about people he personally knew, while merely briefly mentioning other witchcraft narratives, Jera B. narrated all of her narratives in the same mode of narration and with the same personal attitude toward the narrated content. Her attitude and narrative mode did not change in the slightest during the entire conversation, no matter whether she narrated second-hand personal experiences of her close acquaintances or fabulates. All in all, she narrated her narratives, without exception, with the same unquestionable underlying conviction in their indisputable veracity. She never even introduced a discussion on the possible unreality of the stories she narrated: no comment on the (un)truth of these stories, or even doubt in their veracity, was either uttered or hinted at. There was no laughter or mocking tone accompanying her narration of legends that could clearly be recognised as migratory legends and whose unreality for people thinking from without the witchcraft discourse is indisputable, such as, for instance, a legend about witches throwing their body parts around or travelling over the sea in a barrel to bring cherries. Many elaborate details also seem to underline her strong belief in the reality of what she narrated, although one should be cautious in taking these as a proof of belief—Dégh warns that painstaking, factual depiction serves the purpose of authenticating the narrative and, as an essential stylistic feature of the legend, the purpose of its telling (1996: 39). Let me present just a few of the narratives she told, many with a strong support of her daughter (see also inf. no. 53 elsewhere in the book):

11: *Yes, our daddy also said that, well how he got to know that ..., he was telling this. One couldn't die and couldn't die at all and in the evening, at dusk, a cock came and sat on the bank by the stove.*

F: *A cock?*

I1: *A cock! And they were trying to chase that cock away but nobody dared to chase it out and the cock did not leave. That father said: Get it out of the house! They said that it crowed and crowed and that man could not die, right? They said that as long as it was there one couldn't die. And then next day a goat came in. All kinds of animals were coming. And the next day Anka's father came, she was not from here, and he said: What do you have in this house that the father cannot die? You have something here due to which he cannot leave this world. He said: What do you have? And then the young one brought the breviary from somewhere (...) This is such a big special book, and if you read it you can summon people back, they used to say.*

I2³⁶: *That book went missing, Tone took it, I remember that much.*

I1: *That one died already, no?*

I2: *Yes, but when he died, he said, there came a – neither an animal nor a man – something on two feet, with horns, strange thing. (53)*

I1: *And they said that around midnight they go somewhere ...*

I2: *To the seaside for cherries, when here they were not yet ripe, here at the B. So they made a plan to go and a boy hid ...*

I1: *... yes, they travelled by barrel, right?*

I2: *... and he hid in the barrel.*

I1: *Yes! The witches were sitting on the barrel but he crawled into the barrel.*

I2: *Yes. (...) And they rode that barrel and went to the seaside for cherries. And whether they picked them there or ate them, it doesn't matter, that man picked some branches of cherries too and took them with him into the barrel, and when they came back he went to that place where there was a party and they asked him where were the cherries from and he told them he went for a trip with witches. (53)*

I2: *[Witches were eating] and when they ate everything they started to throw bones from that cauldron. And [they were doing that] for some time and when one of them wanted to gather them back, one bone went missing because the dog took it away. And then they made a replacement for that bone out of wood, I don't know what sort of wood. And then one who was observing them or saw them, well, doesn't matter, when the women there started to talk and they started to mock him, he said: How can you say anything when you have ...*

I1: *... a wooden...*

I2: *... a wooden bone, made of pine.*

I1: *... some wooden bone.*

- I2: ... made of pine, I don't know ... They put in a wooden bone. And at that moment she burst.
 I1: Yes. (53)

Marica Z.

Like Jera B., this narrator too had an extremely vast repertoire of witchcraft narratives, yet most of her narratives were about her own, or her family members' and close acquaintances' personal experiences with the bewitchments carried out by their neighbours. It seems as if the life of this particular narrator completely revolved around witchcraft—her husband was bewitched by a male neighbour (see inf. 29, p. 132–133), her grandson by a female neighbour (see inf. 29, p. 279), her hens and cows were bewitched by yet another neighbour, and her sister's pigs by her neighbour (see inf. 29, p. 187–188). All the misfortunes that befell her and her family were explained away by witchcraft and resolved either with the help of an unwitcher, by her knowledge of counteracting practices, or else by prayer and the power of her (Catholic) faith, as she considered herself very religious. All of her narratives about bewitchment flowed smoothly from one to another, without a break, and were not only clearly absolutely believed in but also reflected her strong emotional involvement and personal engagement in witchcraft discourse. Even when narrating a migratory Witch Bridle legend (cf. Shojaei-Kawan 2004: 404, 411; Kropěj and Dapit 2006: 14–15), told by some as an entertaining legend, the terror she felt when recounting what she held to be a true story was almost palpable:

- I: *Oh, and another thing! A woman from P. told me that she still knew that woman ... That she bewitched one guy so that he had to ride a mare every night. And that she transformed into a mare*
 F: *A witch?*
 I: *A witch! Transformed into a mare! And there was some sort of a fortune-teller. She said [to the man]: Do you know what you should do? Do you have a black scarf [that one wears at funerals]? You take this scarf and wrap it around her neck, if only you will be strong enough. And he did this, he said he was barely able to hold her like that ... And she stayed a mare. And then she also said, Jesus!, she said that she was taken to the smith, and they gave her fodder to eat, she ate hay ... and that she had hooves on her hands, on her feet ... And I don't know what else she said ... that that woman was dying for three weeks!(29)*

The repertoire of this narrator involved narratives discussing all possible types of bewitchment, mostly referring to the social dimension of witchcraft, but she also narrated about her father's and husband's experience with night witches making them lose their way. Yet, the key characteristic of the narratives in her repertoire is that no matter whose experience she was relating, they had acquired a strong personal meaning for the narrator and reflected her strong personal engagement—while she (and her family) had many personal experiences with witchcraft herself, and was involved in witchcraft-related tensions with most of her neighbours, the personal experiences of others with witchcraft were told with just as much emotional charge as the narratives that recounted her own experiences.

*

Each of these narrators chose different types of narratives from the stock of witchcraft narratives in the region and expressed different attitudes towards and personal involvement in what they narrated. The first narrator focused particularly on narratives about the bewitchments of their neighbour and a priest, both of whom he knew personally and both of whom were men. His narratives often took on an anecdotal quality, and were preoccupied with men's power and references to the devil. The second narrator included in her repertoire all possible types and genres of narratives, from second-hand personal-narrative stories about social witchcraft and memorates about night-time experiences, to internationally known fabulates, without ever narrating about her own personal experiences with bewitchment and without being personally involved in any witchcraft-related dispute, and yet, at the same time, without ever doubting the veracity of her stories. The third narrator, on the contrary, mostly focused on first-person experiences, explaining all sorts of misfortunes with their neighbours' bewitchments, and even when narrating second-hand narratives or fabulates, her personal involvement in witchcraft was no less profound and her emotional engagement no less binding.

Gendered Repertoires

As the repertoires of these narrators, one male and two females, clearly differed, there is a question of whether the difference in repertoires could also be in any way accounted for by their gender. That is to say, do men's repertoires differ from those of women and are the differences in women's and men's repertoires so significant and distinct that one could actually talk about gendered repertoires?

We have seen above that the one topic that the male narrator repeatedly addressed in his narratives was the devil. We have also seen that while people sometimes did in fact give positive answers to our questions about witches' relationship to the devil, it was obvious that their answers more or less confirmed a general stereotype about evil being connected to the devil. However, the few narratives about the devil in which he did not merely feature as an abstract, stereotypical source of witches' knowledge and power were told by five male and only three female narrators. Moreover, one of these female narrators, Jera B., heard the story about the devil bringing fortune in exchange for a child from her father. In addition, in several narratives the appearance of the devil was related to the hunt, which was obviously a male domain, and in one to male card-players. This sample is too small to allow for any firm conclusions, yet given the overall predominance of female narrators (about two-thirds of our interlocutors were women), it might support de Blécourt's conclusion (1999: 172) about the devil being a "male motif".

Power, magic and social, was another topic implicitly addressed in Igor K.'s narratives, attached to the priest as well as to his male neighbour. The idea of the neighbour-witch clearly conveyed the notion of power—he was presented as "a hard witch", incorporating the power of the devil within his person, indeed, being almost a devil himself. Priests in general often featured in narratives in the region as having magic ability to cause hail in another parish and to protect one's own parish against hail sent by the neighbouring parish priest, and narratives sometimes related their involvement in hail-fights with priests from neighbouring parishes. They were thought to be able to bewitch and were ascribed the ability to "read people to death", literally "to outread someone",³⁷ when they lost their favour—while their power was considered sacred, it was at the same time also dangerous and occasionally turned out to be lethal for their victims. Thus apart from the social power the priests had in the rural communities,³⁸ their magic power too, sometimes additionally underlined by the (magic) book in their possession, was strongly emphasised in the narratives (cf. similarly Czégényi 2014). While they were told by male and female narrators alike, the women narrators had in most cases heard them from male narrators. As these narratives usually emphasise the preoccupation with power (magic or/and social), this too would conform with de Blécourt's opinion that the discussion of power is characteristic of narratives related by male narrators rather than those told by women (cf. 1999: 176, 2004: 95).

Since the priests as well as the neighbours discussed by the narrator Igor K. were male, one could conclude that male characters were in the focus of his attention: his repertoire thus at first glance further confirms de Blécourt's conclusion that stories about male witches can be expected to occur in male repertoires (1999: 173). However, any general conclusion on the predominance of male witches in male repertoires in our region would be too hasty, as male witches were very rare, and the narratives about those few that had a reputation of having the evil eye or of being a village witch were narrated about equally by both genders. In addition, men often narrated the same narratives as their wives, which usually involved female witches.

GENDERED SUBJECTS

Gendered Victims

While it is difficult to ascertain significant specifics of gendered repertoires, it is evident that some motifs and subjects in the narratives were indeed gender-related. Two types of bewitchment narratives that appear to be gender-related and mostly affected men, and whose original narrators were predominantly men, were about a witch stopping livestock and/or carts in their tracks and about night-time experiences with witches. In the narratives about witches immobilising men's livestock or stopping them on their tracks when driving carts, usually on their way to the forests and distant fields or back, with the carts loaded with logs or hay, or on their way to the fairs to sell livestock, and back from the fairs with newly-bought livestock, it is always men who figure as the subjects against whom the bewitchment was directed, even if the consequences were visible on their draught animals or carts that could not move. The fact that it was only men that had suffered this type of misfortune is clearly a result of the fact that cutting trees in the forests, loading hay and driving the loads back home, as well as driving to the fairs to sell or buy livestock, were men's jobs. But while in Utrecht this type of bewitchment was typically ascribed to male witches and the narratives mostly told by men (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 173), this assertion cannot be confirmed for our region—the witches responsible for stopping livestock were more often women than men, and the narratives about this type of bewitchment were related by men and women alike. The prevalence of the male gender was only typical as far as the victim of bewitchment was concerned.

Similarly, the fact that men cross the village boundaries much more often than women also accounts for the prevalence of men among the

victims of night witches in the forests. However, once the narratives about their personal experiences entered into circulation, women took just as much pleasure in narrating these narratives as men, and these memorates were by no means restricted to male repertoires or presented more frequently in men's repertoires than they were in women's.

Gendered Witches

Witches too were obviously strongly determined by gender: in our region they were predominantly women. While there are several known terms in the local dialect for masculine equivalents of a term for a female witch (*coprnica*), such as *coprnik*, *cuprjak*, *cuprek*, *cupernk*, and *coprjek*, people in most cases used the feminine gender when referring to witches. Only when they were explicitly asked whether they knew of any male witches, we received several positive, but even many more negative responses (the gender of the informants was not significant for their answers).

- F: *Who were the witches?*
 I: *Who were they? Just women. Not men.*
 F: *What, there were no male witches?*
 I: *No, no, no.*
 F: *Just women?*
 I: *We women, are wickeder. [laughs] Women have more evil power. Their power is more evil, you know. So they can use it. (56)*
- F: *What about male witches, were there any? Or just female witches?*
 I: *I only know about female ones [laughs], I don't know about any male one. I know this, that there were just female witches, yes. I don't know that there were any male witches. Jesus, all sorts of things went on! (60)*
- F: *Did people talk about male witches too?*
 I2: *No, not men ...*
 I1: *... just poor women from Croatia ... (30)*
- F: *Were witches only women?*
 I: *I think so, I have never heard about a man. (35)*
- F: *About these witches—have you ever heard about any man being a witch or having such power?*
 I2: *No, I haven't.*
 I1: *No, we have never [heard].*
 I2: *Only women. [laughs] (59)*

Even though female witches generally predominated, in one subcategory of witches, the number of male witches increased dramatically. These were people who earned their reputation due to their possession of a book of magic. In our research area, this book was called *Kolomonov žegen* (“Kolomon’s Blessing”);³⁹ in addition, a German book *Die 1000-fache Fundgrube* and a breviary were also mentioned once each as magic books.

Ownership of a magic book was ascribed to men significantly more often than to women: as many as nine of our interlocutors referred to male owners of the book and only four to female, and of those four only two narratives referred to a particular woman, while the other two narrators referred to witches in general. This is contrary to all other reasons that led to the reputation of a witch, which, as a rule, pertained to women (see Chap. 7). The ownership of a magic book was also sometimes ascribed to Catholic priests, who, of course, were always men, and it was also ascribed to the most famous male unwitcher to whom people in the region turned, Jan H. (see Chap. 6).

A slightly higher number of male witches compared with the general prevalence of women can also be found in the category of people with the reputation of having the evil eye, even though women in general still prevailed:

I1: *When those little pigs, right, if one of them saw them, they would just spin around.*

F: *The pig started spinning around in circles?*

I2: *Yes, yes.*

F: *After he had looked at it?*

I1: *Yes.*

I2: *Yes, of course.*

I1: *‘Cause they mustn’t, they say, see them. (63)*

I: *They used to say that, yes. There was someone named Luka here, but mother didn’t allow him to see the pigs. When he saw the pigs, they got sick. Well, if that’s really true. I don’t know.*

F: *Was he one of those who could harm the pigs?*

I: *Well, my mother always said so, right? Also when he saw cows, they didn’t give any more milk. But that’s a damned lie. Those things used to happen! Nowadays there’s no more of that. (82)*

De Blécourt, distinguishing between bewitching and witching⁴⁰ (while bewitchment is concentrated on harming others, that is, causing misfortune, witching is concentrated on the accumulation of wealth by

witchcraft, that is, “causing fortune”) (1999: 152), concludes that witching is a type of witchcraft closely associated with male witches: “The stereotypical male witch was the epitome of individual gain and achievement in a surrounding that valued the communal.” The acquisition of profit whereby nobody in the community claimed the disappearance of milk would thus belong to the male sphere, whereas the disappearance of milk would be the “harmful female variant” (2000: 299). In our region, however, no matter whether magical milking implied witching or bewitching, it always concerned female witches, except for in one narrative in which the perpetrators were men—yet in this particular narrative the milking in fact implied bewitchment (after their magic milking, milk was lacking in a particular household):

Yes, they used to say that there were witches. And they knew how to make witchcraft so that the cows gave no milk in the morning. This happened up there in the forest, there were two workers. They said: Today there will be no milk in that byre, in that village. Precisely in that byre there will be no milk. (...) I am not sure I am going to tell this exactly as he told me, I have forgotten a lot. I know that a man there swung the axe into the beam, well, I mean I didn't see it, but one man who was there told me so. He swung the axe inside and started to drag the handle and milk started to flow. Whether it was true ...? I believe it was. And in that house they really had no milk afterwards. From one cow or many, I can't say. Where he threw that milk afterwards I don't know. If this was true ... (124)

On the other hand, narratives about witching performed by summoning the devil in order to obtain wealth (in exchange for something, for instance, a child's soul or a favour in return) (cf. Thompson motif M 210, Bargain with devil, and M 211, Man sells soul to devil), when gender is indicated (which is not always the case), usually indeed more often concern male rather than female, witches. In only one narrative on summoning the devil (cf. inf. 53; p. 328–329), it was both, a husband and wife, that were said to have summoned him together in order to get money in exchange for their child's soul (cf. de Blécourt 2000: 299–300). Again, these narratives were rare in the region:

- I: My grandmother told me, my father's mother. There was this one poor fellow. A pauper he was. And he went into a magic circle, you know, a magic circle at a crossroads. He drew the circle with a stick.*
- F: A circle around himself?*

- I: *Around himself. Then he drew a circle around himself with a stick and left. [unintelligible] Then all sorts of animals showed up.*
- F: *What? How?*
- I: *Animals. All sorts of animals, and finally an evil spirit arrived, a demon ... And then he said, what would you like? And he said: I'm poor, and I'd like to, to be rich. If you could make me rich. Well, he said, what are you going to give me for it? Then he thought about it for a while, and then the evil spirit said if he gave the youngest thing he had in the house. And his wife was pregnant and it was a child.*
- F: *And he knew that that's what it would be?*
- I: *Yeah. And then that girl was born, she was twelve years old ... Such crashing and banging there was in the house And all of a sudden the girl disappeared.*
- F: *That child?*
- I: *Yeah, that child. All of a sudden disappeared.*
- F: *When she was twelve?*
- I: *I don't know exactly, I think she said that she was twelve. Just disappeared, they didn't know what to do next.*
- F: *And they never found her?*
- I: *Nope, never.*
- F: *Did you know this family?*
- I: *No, I didn't, my grandmother did. (29)*
- I1: *Yeah, something, with the devil perhaps, that they [witches] had a connection with him. Or if it was like some devil was carrying cash. They had arranged at exactly what time and where they would meet. If that guy was in bad shape, that the devil would help him, and then the devil made him promise to do something for him. If he didn't, the devil would come for him, if he didn't keep his promise [to the devil] who had given him money and said that he had to do something to help him out, the devil. At that time it was said that they went to the crossroads to make some agreement, but I don't know what they were up to, I don't.*
- F: *But did the devil show up?*
- I1: *Yeah, the devil, that was from the devil. That wasn't [obtained] by an honest path. (50)*
- I3: *There was this crossroad, a totally perfectly made crossroads. And people said that there was a magic circle there. You know what this is? This means that you have to stand in the middle of it and you have to have a oneyear-old hazel switch with you that you started to carve on Christmas eve. This means that you come to the Church on Christmas and that the stick is then blessed and you have*

to carve small circles into it until the Easter Sunday. On Holy Sunday you go to the crossroads and make a circle around yourself. So, this is a kind of safe area. In this circle nothing can happen to you. And we had a neighbour who did the magic circle and gave the soul of his child to the devil while the devil gave him a bundle of money (...) I don't know how old folk used to ... But that neighbour in fact always had enough money, and I don't know from where. And he could always buy himself some land that he wanted and money was never his problem. (159)

Or when the devil was bringing money. They would have an appointment at the precise time and place, if they were poor, so that the devil would help them, and then the devil demanded something from them in exchange. If they didn't [give it to him], he would take them. If they didn't carry out a promise, when the devil brought them money, then they had to do something to the devil's benefit. It was said that they went to the crossroads to make the agreements and I don't know what else, I don't know. (5)

In spite of the relatively high percentage of male witches in the category of those who were able to bewitch with the evil eye, all in all, females undoubtedly predominated in all other categories of witches, except for in the category of people who gained a reputation of a witch due to their possession of a magic book and those who gained the reputation because they were believed to have acquired wealth by summoning the devil.

MULTILAYERED WITCHCRAFT

Willem de Blécourt, questioning whether the notion of hereditary witchcraft is compatible to that of the learned, “or does it concern different discourses that are rooted in different social structures” (1999: 169), also raised the question of narrators’ access not only to various witchcraft repertoires and various discourses, but also to various *witchcraft* discourses. Is witchcraft discourse unitary or is it composed of a number of separate discourses, perhaps related to different social strata? Since my interlocutors mostly came from the same social stratum of peasants (even though there were differences in their wealth and family background),⁴¹ it was impossible to establish possible differences in their discourses that might have been rooted in the different social strata the narrators belonged to.

In our region, however, differences can clearly be recognised in relation to particular types of witchcraft experiences. The differences within witchcraft discourse are most clearly visible if one compares the discourse people

used when they narrated about witchcraft accusations taking place within the community and the discourse they used when they narrated about night-time visions and encounters with witches that usually occurred in the forest. While the characteristic expression for the bewitchment that was considered to be the consequence of the malice of neighbours was: “this was done”, when referring to the bewitchment that occurred in the forest at night and usually resulted in one’s losing one’s way, people preferred to use expressions such as “witches carried me”, “witches chased me”, “witches led me”, “witches confused me”, or “witches drove me”. Moreover, while a witch of the social variety was always a particular person from the community, referred to in the singular, employing the discourse on night witches as a rule implied talking about witches in the plural (witches carried me), even when the night witch was subsequently, albeit rarely, identified as a particular woman from the village.

Not only typical linguistic expressions designating the bewitchment and the use of singular/plural, but also the meanings ascribed to certain actions or behaviour also point to the differences in the witchcraft discourses on “social” and “night” witches. We have seen above that not to answer a person who addressed you directly conveyed a clear message to this person that he or she was considered a witch; moreover, not to exchange a word with them was considered a method of protection against the witch’s power. But silence only bears such a connotation and is imparted such power within the witchcraft discourse as long as it is directed against another member of the community who is identified as a witch. When the narrative relates an experience with night witches, silence either had no particular meaning, or conversely the breaking of silence was even considered necessary in order to counteract the witches’ power. As night-time experiences with witches more often involved men than women, while those referring to social tensions in the community more often involved women than men, we could perhaps at first glance understand the differences as specifics of gender-related witchcraft discourses. This, however, would be wrong: as mentioned above, women transmitted narratives about night encounters just as often as men, and men told stories about social witchcraft just as often as women, and they both used the very same discourse when narrating about the same type of experiences.

The specifics of the discourse thus have nothing to do with the gender of the victim, or that of the narrator, or for that matter any other variable pertaining to the narrator (such as age, social status, etc.);

instead, they entirely depend on the type of bewitchment under discussion. The question then is whether one should consider these specifics as part of the one and same all-encompassing witchcraft discourse, or are they so fundamental and significant that one should actually understand them as pertaining to two different witchcraft discourses. Whatever one decides—and I shall come back to this later on—these differences basically relate to different layers of witchcraft and different types of witches.

The first layer of witchcraft involves tensions within the community, especially among neighbours: here I am referring to those accusations of bewitchment which directly touch on social relations among members of the community, mostly neighbours, and in which people considered envy and malice to be the main driving force behind the harm that was being done. A person typically accused in such a case is an envious, malevolent, evil neighbour. I shall refer to this category of witches as “neighbourhood witches”. A separate category of witches, still of the “social type”, but with somewhat different characteristics, are (mostly) women who had the reputation of a witch throughout the entire community and more or less functioned as scapegoats in the community. This category I shall call “village witches”. A slight difference in the discourse regarding the usage of the designation “witch” is evident between these two as well. In contrast to the village witches, who were always directly and unequivocally labelled a “witch”, when people referred to neighbourhood witches, many preferred to use the label “envious neighbours”, “evil neighbours” or “malicious neighbours”, rather than “witches”. They would sometimes even explicitly distinguish between envious neighbours and witches, as the interview below clearly shows.⁴² Still, when asked about witchcraft, most people would immediately refer to their neighbours’ bewitchment, and many even overtly called their neighbours witches.

- F: *What about eggs that they buried, or bones, did you hear anything like that?*
- I: *Yeah, they did that! But those weren't witches. Those were wicked people. They did that.*
- F: *What did they do?*
- I: *Well, they buried eggs, brought them from home, did some kind of witchcraft, and then buried them in the fields.*
- F: *What for?*

- I: *So that nothing would grow for those Slovenians. So that nothing would grow. These were wicked people. This happened a lot at our place, when we went to harvest the corn, harvest the potatoes, and we dug up eggs. And it certainly wasn't the hen that went in and buried her eggs in the field. And we found them in the vineyard, on the terrace, everywhere ... and we dug, and we pulled eggs out. But the hen didn't put them there. She didn't!*
- F: *Whole eggs?*
- I: *Whole eggs. Yeah, sometimes we broke them. They said that if you broke one, or if you dug one up, that you had to take them somewhere. I believe this, that they do you damage, if some devil, a human by birth, does this to you, some, some sort of witchcraft they do. We found this in the barn and all around. (...) But then they also put other things in there. They would make these crosses in front of the door. Put other things in place. These harmful [things], so that the livestock would fail ...*
- F: *What would they put?*
- I: *They would put... pitchforks... across here, across there, then pitchforks, those barn forks, in all the stalls, they would put them ... and set up three crosses. We found this. And they colour the cats. If there was a white cat, they would colour it so it was grey, brown, black ... they did all of this here. That's what such wicked people do.*
- F: *So do you know anyone like that?*
- I: *I don't know. I can't be sure.*
- F: *Why do they do that?*
- I: *Because they do it so that only they would have [success], and others would suffer. To do harm to others. They do that around here. There were plenty of those 'uncles'.*
- F: *Just uncles, or aunts⁴³ too?*
- I: *Both. Aunts and uncles.*
- F: *What did they do with the pitchforks?*
- I: *Crosses, yeah. [makes a cross shape] If they had a lot of pitchforks, six pitchforks, then they made three crosses. And with barn brooms [they also made] crosses.*
- F: *What does that do, make the livestock fail, or what? So that they don't breed, or give milk?*
- I: *Not that. A cow has to give milk ... It doesn't succeed, it doesn't work when they should give birth, and worse. And it does them harm.*
- F: *And did this happen to you?*
- I: *Also. (...)*
- F: *Did you know any witches?*
- I: *No! That's just empty [talk]! And who has been telling you this foolery, that ...*

- F: *When you talked about the eggs ... some people say that those are witches who place the eggs ...*
- I: *But that's just what I'm saying, those could be devilish witches, spiteful they were ... These were wicked people ... (...)*
- F: *Did they say that the witches met somewhere?*
- I: *[laughs] ... I don't know ... I know very little about witches, 'cause that's, I'm saying, that's just propaganda. Perhaps they existed two hundred thousand years ago. That there were witches, and that they met, that's all ...(...) That's empty [talk], that's not at all true. (56)*

The two categories—neighbourhood and village witches—cannot always be precisely differentiated: some of the women obviously acquired the reputation of “village witches” as a result of a general consensus about their harmful activities born out of envy and directed against their neighbours, typical for neighbourhood witches. Yet there were also other, more common reasons for the acquisition of the status of a village witch that were in no way related to envy, or to misfortune, and I shall discuss these more fully in the chapter on village witches.

In addition to the “social” level of witchcraft, there was the level which should be differentiated from the first since it did not concern tensions within the community but rather tensions with the “supernatural”. Here I am referring to the visions and experiences which typically occurred at night or at the time which borders night and day, most often in the forests, and were recognised as or ascribed to witches: people usually understood lights floating around at night as witches, and their experience of getting lost in the forests as being caused by witches. Such events usually had no influence on the social relations within the community and caused no economic damage, although night witches were occasionally subsequently identified as women from the village and the causing of night experiences ascribed to a particular person from the village.

Witchcraft in our region, therefore, implies a complex of two layers of witchcraft (the social and the supernatural) and three types of witches proper (neighbourhood witch, village witch, and night witch), as well as unwitchers (who were sometimes also called witches), although to some degree there is a dynamic overlapping among them. Narratives referring to different types of witches tell of different ways of counteracting them and suggest various protective measures against them; they ascribe different reasons for their bewitchments and reveal different attitudes of people towards different types of witches. Neighbourhood, village, and night

witches, and narratives about them, also fulfilled different functions for the members of the community thinking from within the witchcraft discourse, and occasionally also to those thinking from without it.

Nevertheless, when talking about witchcraft in general, people responded to our questions with the narratives referring to the first, second, or the third type of witches in the same breath, without explicitly indicating which category of witches, or which level of witchcraft they were talking about. Therefore, in order to gain a correct understanding of the reality of witchcraft in the area, one has to pay close attention to the differences or rather specifics in the discourses and other nuances revealing which level of witchcraft and which category of witch the narrator was referring to. Failure to take these factors into account could manifest as a source of disturbance in the communication between the ethnographer and the narrator, as is clearly evident from the narrative above (cf. *inf.* 56, p. 98–99). An interlocutor's response to a question when referring to the social context of witchcraft can be completely different from their response referring to the night-time encounters with witches. If a person is asked, for instance, about whether witches meet in certain places, the interlocutor thinking about a neighbour who has bewitched them will strongly deny it; in contrast, one would probably receive an affirmative response from a person referring to the night witches' congregations in the shape of lights, which were sometimes believed to take place at the crossroads. To the question about the source of a witch's knowledge, one would usually receive a clear response that they got it from their mother (since knowledge is supposed to be passed down in the family, especially along the female line) from an interlocutor referring to a village witch; those referring to the neighbourhood witches and night witches, on the contrary, usually have nothing to say on this account.

It is important to pay attention to this already during the fieldwork, as even the way the interviews are conducted can determine the answers of the interlocutors: putting abstract, general questions about what witches look like, what they do, or where they get their power, will likely provoke answers referring to the stereotypical notions about witches, which coincide, to a certain extent at least, only with village witches. On the other hand, questions about a particular person suspected of witchcraft would usually result in an answer referring to either a neighbourhood or a village witch—depending on the position of the person discussed within the network of community relationships.

In addition, while the narratives about witches of the social and “supernatural” levels are grounded in and corroborated by personal experiences and are a matter of belief, disbelief or doubt, and everything in between, some witches who functioned as the subjects of witchcraft narratives had neither social nor “supernatural” reality. These narratives are often characterised by a humorous quality and seemed to be primarily told for entertainment, not necessarily because they psychologically and socially failed to adjust the changed social circumstances (cf. Gwyndaf 1994: 236). Since Linda Dégh argued that no criteria for a separate categorisation of memorates and fabulates can withstand scientific inquiry and proposed the umbrella term *legend* for both of them (as well as for other subcategories proposed by folklorists) (cf. 2001: 58–79),⁴⁴ it may not be justified to generically distinguish this group of narratives, but if one refers to the commonly used terms, this group of narratives would be termed fabulates, or *Unterhaltungsagen*. Here are a few examples:

I2: Just when he ... this fellow married this girl, right? Then, when they were married, in those times there was, well, no such thing as getting divorced or anything. The one you got was the one you had [laughs]. Then he heard, when they were married, that she was a witch's daughter. So then he wanted to see how he could get her on her own to start doing like her mother. He said: You know, we don't have any milk or anything, he said, I don't know, maybe we could arrange something ... Is there any way that milk could come from somewhere, so that you could make cheese, see? And she said: Yeah, if you want, I can show you. Then she set up a large pot in the kitchen ... [sighs], and said: Now follow me! Then they went one behind the other around the pot. And she said: I believe in this pot, but I do not believe in God, I believe in this pot, but I do not believe in God. [laughs]. And he said: I do not believe in this pot, but I do believe in God! He was the opposite, see? Then a whole pile of cheese fell from the ceiling into the pot. The whole pot was full. 'Cause she knew how to do that, see? Then he realized that she really was a witch, see? And then he grabbed a stick, and he beat her hard ... And he said: Never do anything like that again! [laughs] (59)

I: They say that this shoemaker was in there, and he sewed all day making shoes, and he worked and worked. That woman was a witch, she wanted to see him go right to sleep, while he was sewing late into the night. Then she said: You go to sleep, go to sleep! Then she had nagged him for so long that he prepared to go to bed. Then he looked through a hole to see what she was doing. And she took that fat and rubbed it on herself, saying: Jump under the branch, jump among the branch, jump under the branches,

- jump among the branches!, and then she disappeared from the home, and she was no more ...*
- F: *Never?*
- I: [laughs] *Uh uh [shakes her head], she came back, she came back! Just for the whole night those witches flew around in a group, and drank, and chatted up there, and whored themselves, they did everything. Whether it's true or not ...*
- F: *Who told you this story?*
- I: *My father told it to me. (56)*

They said it was like this, that with us, this is the story let's say. An old auntie told which women in the village were witches, right? You had to fell a young linden tree in August and make a stool, with three, only three legs, see? ... And then on Christmas Eve [laughs] you had to go, when everyone was already in church, see(...) and you had to knee, see, with one foot on that stool and those that were [witches] had their backs turned, see? Because a witch cannot look at the altar, see, they look backwards, see? And you saw them, and they saw you, see, and they said that then you had to run right smart and under a thatched roof. If they caught you first, then you were toast, see?[laughs] Yeab,[laughs] that's what she said, I guess. (24)

These narratives are typically situated in indeterminate times and places, and usually refer to an indeterminate person (cf. Bennett 1988: 25) whom the storyteller did not personally know. The use of pronouns such as “this” or “some” man or woman or the temporal adverb “once” was typical: “*This* woman told me”; “*This* girl went to visit *this* old woman, but she didn't know that she was a witch ...”; “they say that *this* shoemaker was inside ...”. These narratives are often accompanied by laughter (cf. Bennett 1984: 80; Ellis 1987: 54–57, in Oring 2008: 139), in contrast to the narratives about night-time encounters and experiences with neighbourhood and village witches, which—when narrated from within the witchcraft discourse—were usually related seriously, even fearfully. Yet, even when laughter sometimes did accompany also the narrations not told “for fun”, this was another kind of laughter, usually a tense and uneasy one⁴⁵. Humorous twists, which are usually not found in narratives about witches of the social and supernatural levels in our area, can frequently be noticed in these legends too. While narratives about witches of other categories have various functions—they inform people about the dangers of witches' attacks in one form or another, warn them about places and times when witches are dangerous, show ways in which people can protect

themselves against them, release tensions and similar—the function of the legends of the latter group is primarily entertainment. The witches in these legends were not the subject of personal experiences, but more or less subjects in stories that people usually recognised as intended for entertainment, even though they sometimes blended with others and were not always easily distinguished from those believed (or disbelieved): as we have seen above, several fabulates and internationally recognised folklore motifs were clearly narrated from within the discourse and believed by the narrators discussed above.

Therefore, despite the fact that witches are called the same thing, it is not possible to put them all into one basket. They had very specific roles in the life of inhabitants, and in order to truly understand the interlocutors' attitude towards witchcraft as well as the complexity of witchcraft in a certain area, one has to be aware of different categories of witches within the multi-layered entirety of witchcraft. The structure of this book, therefore, basically follows the categorisation of the levels of witchcraft and types of witches discussed.

NOTES

1. None of the texts on the geographic, social, and economic development of the region I refer to in this chapter precisely matches the region under research, but rather covers either a wider or a narrower territory. Nevertheless, the situation is more or less the same everywhere, except for in the small towns in the valley.
2. The process of transition from a socialist to a capitalist economy began after Slovenia gained independence in 1991.
3. In the first half of the twentieth century, farmers were classified according to the size of their farms. Large-scale farmers had more than 10ha of land, 10–15 head of cattle, a couple of horses or oxen, several pigs and poultry, and employed farm hands and maids; they also had seasonal workers and tenants. Medium farmers had 5–10 ha of land, 5–10 head of cattle and also hired seasonal workers. Small-scale farmers had up to 5 ha, 2–3 head of cattle and occasionally had to find other sources of livelihood. The lowest on the scale were tenants who paid the rental for flats and small fields by working for the master. Poor farmers called “cottagers” (*kočarji*), who lived in small cabins on their own piece of land with one or two pigs and hens, also

- worked for the farmers, or were engaged in crafts or performed seasonal work (Sok 2003: 35, 44–47).
4. The ownership of land was not encouraged in the communist regime, hence the late inclusion of farmers into the health insurance system.
 5. As remembered by a native, L.Z., her family only got to know about it at the end of the 1960s or even at the beginning of the 1970s (verbal information).
 6. A place for cooking in which the smoke from the stove is not led into a chimney.
 7. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1945).
 8. The first TV transmitter stations in the region were installed in 1971 and 1972.
 9. As the interview was recorded in 2001, the period the narrator refers to must be approximately 1965–1970.
 10. The interview was recorded in 2001.
 11. I shall, therefore, not use the term “belief” when referring to what has usually been termed as a proposition, a mental disposition, a mental or cognitive entity, an ingredient of worldview, an idea, a notion, a message, a pattern of thought and behaviour, a conceptual reality, and similar. This, belonging to the level of cognition, can only be grasped and become the target of research when articulated in direct statements, or actualized in any of cultural expressions, such as legends, actions, material culture, behaviour, spatial and bodily relationships or any other form of expression which gives shape and social function to its intangible content (cf. Primiano 1995: 44; Motz 1998: 350; Mullen 2000: 120; Valk 2001: 337; Bowman and Valk 2012: 7–8,10). The genre of legend is often emphasised as particularly liable to articulate and communicate such underlying propositions: “belief” is considered “the ideological foundation or core of the legend”, a stimulator and the purpose of telling any narrative (Dégh 1996: 35–36; 2001: 55–96), and legend as acting “[p]sychologically (...) as a symbolic representation of folk belief” (Tangherlini 1994: 316–317).
 12. Koski here appears to make a distinction between the term *belief* (referring to personal attitude) and *belief content* (referring to cognitive reality that is a matter of personal attitude).
 13. The narrator refers to two experiences of a witch stopping the livestock and one about witches carrying people away.

14. The expression refers to an envious neighbour who is believed to have tried to cause others misfortune.
15. The expression “This was done” connotes bewitchment (see Chap. 3).
16. Discussion at the conference *Faith and Doubt*, organised by the Pécs Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Pécs, Hungary, 16–18 October 2015.
17. Rhetoric, i.e. the art of persuasion, is supposedly acquired by native speakers conjointly with the grammatical rule of their language, sociolinguistic sensibilities, and socialization as storytelling (Oring 2008: 130).
18. Oring, considering legends as concerned with matters of truth, rather than belief (2008: 128–129), suggests that they be discussed in terms of their performance of truth realized by the strategies used by the narrators in order to make a narrative appear true, the “authenticating devices”, “the means of making claims for the truth, plausibility, and untruth of an account” that coalesce in what he calls the “rhetoric of truth.” This definition should, according to Oring, “shift the assessment of legends from matters of belief to the performance of truth”, whereby “the beliefs of the folklorist would be removed from the constitution of the legend” and the legend “would be relieved of some of the ideological baggage with which it has long been encumbered” (2008: 160).
19. Yet while concepts may be part of the discourse, they pertain to the level of conceptual reality, whereas stories and actions in fact *articulate, express* the concepts.
20. Cf. Bruner, who argues that since people organise their experiences and memories of events mainly in the form of narratives, narratives not only represent but also constitute reality, and are versions of reality (1991: 4–5).
21. Cf. also Henry and Tator’s definition of discourse: “Discourse is the way in which language is used socially to convey broad historical meanings. It is language identified by the social conditions of its use, by who is using it and under what conditions.” (2002: 25)
22. I am using the word “rational” not as my personal evaluation of the discourse, in the sense that I find this discourse more rational than witchcraft discourse, or that I would implicitly proclaim witchcraft discourse to be irrational. The “rationality” of the discourse refers exclusively to the emic position of those who used it in opposition to the perspective of narrators using witchcraft discourse. I would like to

- thank Kaarina Koski for her remarks on rationality and the use of the term. On the cultural grounds of rationality see Tambiah 1993; Eze 2008).
23. As it turned out later in the interview, the informant had in fact stopped talking with her neighbour even before this was suggested by the policeman. Moreover, since the policeman was a local, he too might have spoken from within the discourse, not necessarily as a representative of the educated “elite” who usually used “rational” discourse.
 24. Another explanation is also possible, namely that the narrator strategically placed herself outside the witchcraft discourse due to a current accusation (cf. Hesz 2015), as discussed above.
 25. The narrator used a rather unusual dialect word, explaining it in standard Slovenian as “success, effect, speed”; its meaning more or less coincides with the word “luck” (cf. Honko 1962: 119–120; Schiffmann 1987: 161; Stark-Arola 1998a: 116).
 26. This particular priest does not come from the narrow research area, but the practice of burying objects is not restricted to our region alone; it is also common elsewhere in Slovenia.
 27. He probably made a mistake and must have meant to say the opposite: “White or I should say black magic (...)”.
 28. One of them goes as follows: “Those threshers were threshing and they were saying how is it that when one hangs himself one hears music and the devil diverts him in order to get his soul. And they agreed that one of them would try and go hang himself and that other would save him before he died, [that they would just let him] hear that pleasant music. And then this poor man, they placed him there and hanged him but they would somehow save him? And just at that moment a hare came running by and they started running after him, those three threshers, and the man died in the meantime. Yes, the devil turned into the hare and diverted them so that they wouldn’t save the other one until he died.” (17, 11)
 29. Two narratives were told by the same narrator—see the Chap. 3.
 30. “Pripovedke”—an emic term that to our narrators bears a connotation of an untrue story.
 31. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masaru_Emoto; accessed 15 May 2015.
 32. As Reimund Kvideland showed, the number of folktales that one is supposed to be able to tell as a criterion for a narrator to be regarded as a storyteller varies considerably in scholars’ opinions. While

Linda Dégh states that a true storyteller generally knows at least forty tales (while the occasional one only knows four to six) (1989: 168), Bjarne Hodne regards any teller of minimum one folktale to be a storyteller, and Bengt Holbek considers those who have told more than two tales as true storytellers (in Kvideland 1993: 108–109). According to Kvideland, repertoire should also include what a person knows but does not perform (1993: 106). As regards legend-tellers, from Tangherlini’s analysis of the narrators in the Kristiansen’s *Danske sagn* it turns out that the majority told only one or two legends—these account for 56 per cent of all records. All together nearly 80 per cent of the narrators could tell up to five legends. “Individuals versed in the legend tradition”, who tell six to ten legends and are able to participate in active performance more than occasionally are already rarer; informants with repertoires between 11 to 14 legends who are “active tradition participants” and presumably use legends in their social interaction on a frequent basis constitute 5 per cent of the narrators; and only 2 per cent of informants, whom he calls “exceptional informants”, had 15 or more legends to tell and presumably perform regularly (Tangherlini 1994: 61–63).

33. Cf. for instance the narration of Marica Z. (inf. no. 29).
34. The first category of narratives could be called *memorates* (“narratives of personal happenings”) and the second one *fabulates* (“short, single-episodic tales, built (...) upon elements of real happenings and observations, but with this background of reality transformed by the inventive fantasy of the people” – cf. von Sydow 1948: 87, 73) or one could simply use the term “legend” for both categories. For further discussion of both terms see Honko 1964, 1969, 1989; Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1991: 19ff; Tangherlini 1994: 12ff; Dégh 2001: 23–97; Koski 2016).
35. I2 indicates his wife.
36. I2 indicates her daughter, a student at the time of the interview.
37. I was given no precise answer about how exactly this is being done, but I was told about a particular priest who allegedly already out-read three people in the parish because they were constantly in the church and he felt too much under supervision.
38. The narrator refers to this when he comments on the obvious outcome of the priest’s lawsuit in the court (they side with each other).

39. In Slovenia, the most well-known magic books were *Kolomonov žegen*, also called *Kolomon*, or *Kolomonova knjiga* (Kolomon's book), and *Duhovna bramba* (Spiritual Protection) (Navratil 1885: 170; Grafenauer 1907; Kotnik 1924: 32; Dolenc 1977: 180; Černigoj 1988: 48; Kropelj 1995: 143; Piko 1996: 89; Repanšek 1995: 215–220; Glasenčnik 1998: 84–85, 87–88, 97). There are two Slovenian variants of *Duhovna bramba*, translated from German original (*Geistlicher Schild*) at the beginning of the nineteenth century: Carinthian (*Koroška duhovna bramba*) (1800 and 1811), and Styrian (*Štajerska duhovna bramba*) (1810–1820). *Kolomonov žegen* was probably first published around 1790. They both comprise traditional “folk beliefs”, oriental and medieval magic, and elements of medieval and later mysticism. In addition, *Duhovna bramba* contains folk prayers against various misfortunes (hail, thieves, weapons, difficult delivery, etc.) and *Kolomonov žegen* additionally includes incantations, instructions to summon ghosts, raise treasures, get money from saints or spirits, and so on. (Grafenauer 1907).
40. Willem de Blécourt in fact distinguishes between four types of witchcraft: bewitching, witching, unwitching and scolding (1999: 151–153).
41. While their family background certainly differed (some belonged to those farming families that used to hire additional workers who lived on the farm, or only occasionally came to work, some belonged to the lowest level of peasants, who had no land or only a very small piece of land and sometimes had to additionally work for others) which might have influenced the repertoire that was transmitted within the families, the difference in the economic status of the households and their economic family background was not always clearly visible and evident at the time of the fieldwork.
42. Several questions during this interview very clearly display the insistence on the part of the researcher on the folkloric notion of a witch figure, in spite of the narrator's insistence on witches being neighbours.
43. “Uncle” and “aunt” are appellations that can refer to any man or woman, usually used by adults when talking to a child or by children addressing elder women, and do not necessarily imply kinship; in this case the words are used teasingly.
44. Linda Dégh also argues that “[i]t is obvious that all memorates might eventually turn into fabulates. Likewise, it is obvious that each fabulate necessarily presupposes a memorate (...)” (2001: 79). In our research,

we recorded an interesting case which could indicate such a transition of a memorate into an etiological legend. Several times we recorded a story about the origins of nearby churches, which were actually based on night-time experiences of losing one's way, which have been confirmed in this area in the form of countless memorates about people's own experiences with witches—in this story the night-time experience, on the other hand, took on an etiological function. As the explanation of the origin of nearby churches is in the foreground of this etiological legend, it is no wonder that the blockage of the path, which is otherwise typical of night-time encounters with witches, is not interpreted in the context of witchcraft: *There was [a countess], who lived here eight hundred years ago, see, and she rode a horse over these mountains [indicates the mountains around the castle]. Up on Holy Mountain she rode, and she went into some bushes, and she couldn't ... save herself. And she said, if God allows me to get out of these thorns and from these bushes, I will build a church here. And then she did build a chapel up there and then they ... built the Holy Mountain and the pilgrimage path up it. (91)*

45. Laughter could, for instance, also accompany the narration when the narrators felt uncomfortable in expressing their beliefs, or indicate that the narrator wanted to communicate that they are aware of the unlikelihood of the narrated event, or it can be understood as an attempt at face-saving, as an expression of the ambivalence of the narrators who believe the content of their narration to be true but have reservations about their interpretation (cf. Oring 2008: 139–140).

Social Witchcraft: Neighbourhood Witches

Evans-Pritchard, researching witchcraft among the Azande of southern Sudan, showed that on a social level, witchcraft involved in interpersonal relationships inside the communities provided people with a “natural philosophy by which the relations between men and unfortunate events are explained and a ready and stereotyped means of reacting to such events” (1976: 18). “Misfortune and witchcraft are much the same to a Zande,” he writes, “for it is only in situations of misfortune or of anticipation of it that the notion of witchcraft is evoked.” “In a sense,” he concludes, “we may say that witchcraft is misfortune (...)” (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 45).

It has certainly never been easy to come to terms with misfortune, and people have always tended to seek reasons to explain misfortune that befalls them. To be able to cope with it and to comprehend the unpredictable and inexplicable nature of everyday life, it was important to create some sense of order, to seek a rational answer to why and how things happened the way they did. Witchcraft offered a logically consistent explanation, and thus made sense of people’s lives (Macfarlane 1970: 241–243; Davies 1999a: 18; Pócs 1999: 9; Briggs 2002: 3, 56; Jenkins 2007: 205). As Gijswijt-Hofstra writes, “[t]hinking and acting in terms of witchcraft is a useful and culturally accepted strategy for the people involved to employ to combat certain problems. In particular, witchcraft forms part of the whole repertoire that is available to them in the event of misfortune” (1999: 98).

Even in the period of the European witch craze, i.e. from approximately the mid-fifteenth to about the mid-eighteenth century, when in the trials traditional notions about witchcraft became blurred with demonological ideas about witches' pacts with the devil, conspiracies and the witches' sabbath,¹ whenever the persecution was initiated from below, that is, from the members of the same community as the alleged witch, the initial reason for bringing charges against a person suspected of witchcraft was to punish them for their *maleficia* (Clark 2001: 4; Levack 2006: 136). Yet, the fear of bewitchment did not just cease after the decline of the witch trials in Europe. While some types of misfortunes may have no longer been interpreted in terms of witchcraft, and many people stopped interpreting misfortune in terms of it, witchcraft has, according to evidence from newspapers, court archives and ethnological field research, continued to provide a meaningful explanation for many types of misfortune to many people right up to the twenty-first century, as discussed above.

The basic premise of (social) witchcraft is that the origin of misfortune is social. In the discourse of witchcraft, the person responsible for misfortune is understood to be a witch. Ronald Hutton defined the characteristics that make up the witch figure as follows: a witch is somebody who uses apparently supernatural means to cause misfortune or injury to others; a witch does harm to neighbours or kin, rather than strangers, and represents a threat to the community; a witch operates not for straightforward material gain but from envy or malice, and thus is either inherently evil or in the grip of inherent evil² (Hutton 2006: 211–212). Once misfortune(s) occurred, especially if they accumulated and lasted for some time, the person that allegedly caused them had to be identified. The identification of the witch was considered necessary in order to annihilate the bewitchment, break off her harmful power once and for all and prevent further misfortunes caused by bewitchments.³ It enabled facing the evil element in life as a concrete opponent and offered the victim an opportunity to combat it (Henningsen 1989: 104–105; Paul 1993: 116; Mitchell 2004: 15), as “naming the witch is primarily an attempt to enclose within a figure something which in itself escapes figuration: as long as the power fatally drawing on the vital energy of the bewitched (...) remains unnameable, it can only be absolute” (Favret-Saada 1980: 6–8, 74; cf. Kruse 1951: 31; de Pina-Cabral 1986: 187; Mathisen 1993: 20).

Explanation of misfortune as being a result of another person's bewitchment ultimately helped people to relieve anxiety when facing it. Even the witch-hunt on a larger scale can be understood as a release of

a psychic turmoil that people were experiencing and a way for them to maintain equilibrium during a time of socioeconomic, political, and religious changes (inflation, increased competition for a limited amount of land, famine, plague, etc.) (Levack 2006: 165). Such a function of witchcraft, however, was observed not just in early modern Europe but also outside of Europe after the decline of the witch trials. Anthropological studies in particular understand witchcraft as the most effective channel of expressing and releasing social tensions and recognise its main function as providing people with a means of channelling repressed hostility, frustration, and anxiety (cf. Marwick 1969a: 238; Macfarlane 1970: 246–247). Witchcraft accusations, therefore, provided psychological consolation to the bewitched: the victim of misfortune seeks relief by accusing an enemy to be a “witch”, claiming them to be responsible for their misfortune. In addition, witchcraft also regulates communal conflicts and provides a resolution of interpersonal tensions by repairing or sundering problematic social relationships, and serves as a sort of safety valve for the hidden aggression that cannot be expressed through natural channels (cf. Henningsen 1989: 105; Paul 1993: 116).

On a social level, witchcraft is directed against others and thus understood as a deviation from the social norms of the community, the anti-social crime *par excellence*, the “quintessence of immorality”. Witches were considered destructive and malicious figures and have represented the opposite of positive values that the community held as their own. The witch was an incarnation of the Other, the agent of evil, the “enemy within” (de Blécourt 1999: 151; Briggs 2002: 1–2; Behringer 2007: 2). Through fear of being bewitched on the one hand and of being identified as a witch on the other, accusations of witchcraft also act as a form of local process of social control (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 208). People will try to behave according to the unstated rules of behaviour in order to avoid finding themselves in situations which could trigger suspicions of their being a witch or which could increase the possibility of them becoming bewitched (Macfarlane 1970: 248), and narratives about witches both transmitted and reinforced social norms (Mair 1969: 187; Marwick 1969a: 238).

Some researchers find witchcraft an (almost) universal phenomenon (cf. Behringer 2007: 244). Briggs argues that “one must start from the assumption that any given society will possess such beliefs”, the only exceptions being the societies with a nomadic lifestyle, whose response to social conflict was to move or split into new groupings (however, as soon

as they adopted a sedentary mode of existence, accusations of witchcraft also started there, because their traditional methods of diffusing conflicts were no longer available) and the industrialised societies of the modern Western world, in which people resolve social conflicts similar to nomads: they move or find new groups to associate with (2002: 1–2). People living in traditional rural communities seldom had such an opportunity: in the case of a conflict they could not avoid their neighbours or just move away. Research of early modern witchcraft as well as in the present day showed that accusations of witchcraft tend to arise especially in small-scale, close-knit, face-to-face agricultural communities, where people were bound to the land, where everyone knew everyone (Macfarlane 1970: 242; Pócs 1999: 11; Levack 2006: 137), and where other members of the community represented a constant threat.

When misfortune occurred, people usually seek culprits responsible for their misfortune first and foremost in their immediate environment. In particular, close neighbours with whom they were in everyday contact represented the most threatening potential source of harm and became the most common targets of witchcraft accusations. As Evans-Pritchard writes for the Azande, its members maintain that one can be sure to have both secret and open enemies among neighbours (1976: 45). Macfarlane claimed that accusations of witchcraft in the sixteenth century Essex trials were mostly made between people who not only came from the same village but also from the same part of the village and knew each other intimately, and that the accusations were limited to the area of intense relationships between individuals (1970: 168). Those who posed the greatest threat of magical harm in the nineteenth-century Finnish traditional rural communities were likewise neighbours (Stark 2004: 78), and in the nineteenth-century Dutch province of Drenthe, suspicions of witchcraft mainly fell on (female) neighbours (de Blécourt 1990, summarised in Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 110). Neighbours were also recognised as the usual target in accusations in much ethnological field research of twentieth-century rural witchcraft: what people in Alto Minho, Portugal, feared most was “the enemy near the door”—in other words: neighbours (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 177).

In the rural area of eastern Slovenia where we conducted our fieldwork and where witchcraft was very much a social reality at least until the 1970s, and for some people remained an explanation of misfortune even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the situation did not differ significantly. Misfortune was always suspicious:

I1: *When misfortune happened, people would say: You know, he was bewitched or something like that. Perhaps they would suspect someone, the person that caused harm (27),*

and neighbours⁴ were the first possible choice of a perpetrator when people who suffered misfortune started to think about its origin in terms of witchcraft. Neighbours were also the first thought that crossed their mind in the anticipation of misfortune, when they had found an object on their property that they believed to have been placed there with intent to bewitch them, and started to search for the perpetrator—the witch. This was a typical response we received time and time again during our fieldwork:

F: *But did he know who buried [the bewitching object to his property]?*

I1: *They suspected, they suspected.*

F: *Whom did they suspect?*

I1: *Neighbours. (122)*

I1: *Yes, one woman says that that one is a witch, and then the other one says that she is a witch ... One blames another. Between themselves, as if you blamed each other: she would say this to you, you would say this to her.*

I2: *That she did, that she bewitched the neighbour.*

F: *Who did she bewitch?*

I2: *The neighbour! (111)*

I: *But where did those eggs come from, 'cause the chicken didn't bury them in the ground. Where did those eggs come from? I don't know. Does someone want ... want to do me harm or something? (...)*

F: *Who put them there?*

I: *... Neighbours of course, who else!*

F: *Neighbours?*

I: *It wasn't someone who came here from Zagreb! [laughs]*

F: *Was this a specific neighbour or did all the neighbours do this?*

I: *I don't know. This neighbour ... a close neighbour was accused of it here. (16)*

Then, I don't know, they buried eggs, if you wanted to do harm to somebody, if one neighbour [wanted to do harm] to another, then they would bury eggs under the pigsty, and then their hens would disappear or their pigs or something like that ... (23)

Only occasionally, family members (see below) and beggars were also mentioned as feared in terms of bewitchment. Even if the following narrative underlines a greater fear of beggars' bewitchment comparing to

that of neighbours, generally speaking beggars played an insignificant role in accusations of bewitchment in our region, not comparable with that directed at neighbours:

- I1: The witches, usually they were not locals. They were those that wandered around begging.*
- F: Really?*
- I1: Indeed. Those who begged around houses. For alms, you know. (...)*
- F: Did you find everybody that came begging suspicious?*
- I1: No, no. You could see that in the person. You could see that.*
- F: But how could you see that?*
- I1: Somehow you could tell. Some were so kind, and everything was fine ... while such a person was just looking around all the time, always searching for something with their eyes ... You would find this a little suspicious, you know. Perhaps they were planning to steal something ... You cannot know ...*
- F: What about—since you were talking about witches—could they bewitch by looking alone?*
- I1: Well, you know, these strangers that come, you never know what they want, what they think, what they want ... And you found some more suspicious, some less ... You would simply give them something so that they would thank you and leave. Some wanted more: Just give me this or give me that ... They would want to have everything.*
- F: Could you tell at first sight when they were evil?*
- I1: Well, more or less. They were, you know, dourer. More dour. They were not that open, they had a surlier attitude. So that ... if afterwards something went wrong in the house, you would think: He was to blame, the one that left, you know. (111)*

Ethnological and anthropological research has demonstrated that envy, especially the envy ascribed to neighbours, is the most feared emotion, the emotion to which people ascribe the greatest destructive power and firmly associated with witchcraft (Henningsen 1982: 132; Alver and Selberg 1987: 28; Alver 1989: 114; Jenkins 1991: 323; Paul 1993: 114; Stark-Arola 1998a: 169–170; Hesz 2007: 25, 28–29). As de Pina-Cabral states, envy for the villagers in Alto Minho in northern Portugal is more than just an emotion: the concept of envy is wider and is one of the central concepts of the peasant's worldview. It is nothing less than the principle of evil, an uncontrollable force. As opposed to envy as an emotion, it does not exist only inside the person who feels it, but is more a relationship between the person who generates it and the person who suffers due to its effects. The power of envy is destructive and is considered the main reason

for misfortune: if misfortune occurs, there must invariably be envy, is the logic of the *Minhotos* that could not be shaken (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 176–177). According to the inhabitants of a Polish region, strong negative emotions such as anger, hatred, and envy, when not controlled, can materialise in the form of harm (Schiffmann 1987: 160–161).

Envy and the fear resulting from it may have been grounded in the underlying cognitive orientation of limited good,⁵ typical of close-knit communities. By this cognitive orientation, Foster understood various types of villagers' behaviour, the pattern of which indicates that they understand their social, economic, and natural universe as one in which all desired things (land, wealth, health, friendship, love, manliness, honour, respect, status, power and influence) are available only in limited quantities. There is always too little of them, and there is no way to increase the available supplies (Foster 1965).⁶ In the framework of the closed system of a rural community, in which the amount of "good" is understood to be limited and cannot be increased in any way, a person can increase his or her status only at the expense of others: all improvements of someone's position are viewed as a threat to the entire community—somebody else loses, whether they notice it or not. Those who have less therefore envy all those who have more, while those who have more fear the envy of others (Alver and Selberg 1987: 28). The characteristic personal traits most commonly ascribed to the neighbours believed to have caused bewitchment in our region were also, indeed, envy, jealousy, and malice:

Also, before there was this thing that if anyone had a bit more, others immediately envied them and this just intensified. (152)

[They bewitch you] because they are wicked people. Envious. They do it so that only they would have, and they do harm to others. In order to do harm to others. (56)

F: *Have you ever heard of or seen anyone burying eggs?*

I1: *Yeah, I found eggs several times that spring, when we ...*

I2: *And they were in that molehill.*

I1: *... in the field, [and] I said: Well, where the hell did these eggs come from? How could they have got here, eh? They said that it's envy, right? That someone was so envious of someone whose crops grew, that they would have more on their land than their neighbour on theirs, right?*

F: *So the one that was envious would bury eggs on their neighbours' property?*

I1: *Yeah, yeah.*

I2: *Or they cut pigs' tails.*

- I1: *Yeah, yeah, yeah.*
- I2: *And then, when they got angry with someone, they would bury them there [on their property].*
- I1: *Yeah, that's right. (...)*
- F: *Why did they do that?*
- I2: *So that they wouldn't be successful, so that they wouldn't have [a harvest].*
- I1: *So that nothing would grow and so, nothing. (63)*
- F: *What objects did they bury, these witches?*
- I1: *Well, I couldn't say, only our mama told us this, that [something] was placed, that the pigs didn't want to eat any more, that they had their snouts tied. They didn't want to eat. That was a kind of envy, and they did people harm. (50)*
- F: *But what about burying eggs, did you ever hear about that?*
- I: *Oh, that's ... oh, that's ... my mama and dad were ploughing and they found an egg in a furrow, deep down, and they found a totally healthy egg. And I said, maybe a chicken brought it here, and it crawled in there. They also said that, that [people] buried eggs.*
- F: *But who would do that?*
- I: *Well, that ... I mean those women who are envious or something, so that the eggs wouldn't hatch, the chicks or something. (84)*

Historical and anthropological witchcraft research often assumed the existence of some tension between neighbours even before the accusation of witchcraft took place, and witchcraft accusations were thus at the same time treated as an indication of pre-existing tense personal relationships (Marwick 1969a: 240; Schöck 1978: 128; Paul 1993: 116; Mitchell 2004: 14). Anthropologists researching in Africa discerned two stages in the formation of an accusation of witchcraft: “firstly, the presence of some tension or anxiety or unexplained phenomenon; secondly, the directing of this energy into certain channels” (Macfarlane 1970: 231). Moreover, it was suggested that in the early modern period some women in their testimonies even strategically used the witchcraft discourse to transmute local quarrels into stories of *maleficium* (Purkiss 1996: 92). Indeed, people in our region often emphasised strained relationships among neighbours in the village communities and talked about them with bitterness: they would lament that one has to be very cautious about what to say to other members of the community, as they tend to gossip and talk badly about each other; that there is no trust among neighbours; that others envy everything one has, no matter how poor one is. When misfortune occurred,

the witch was thus often first and foremost sought among those neighbours with whom victims had already been in problematic relationships before the misfortune occurred:

F: Could one know who did harm?

II: Well, they had their ..., how should I say ... their enemies, you know, and when a misfortune befell them, it was them they accused.

F: And how could one know who that was?

II: This was, how should I say, when one was not on good terms with another, or something like that. And then one could be accused even if not guilty and totally innocent, right? (1)

Other studies, on the other hand, showed that tensions among neighbours were not always necessary for witchcraft accusations to occur. In the Drenthe region in the Netherlands, and most other Dutch provinces in the period between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, there were no signs of conflicts preceding witchcraft accusations. On the contrary, plenty of available information even indicates a relatively good relationship between the accuser and the accused before the bewitchment took place (de Blécourt 1990, summarised in Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 110). In the Bocage, France, where the original conflict, according to Jeanne Favret-Saada, originated in family tensions, the witch was never sought among family members but always among neighbours. For a witch to be chosen from among the neighbours, it was, on the contrary, necessary that they were *not* in an open conflict with the bewitched (yet they had to be in some relationship with the victim) (Favret-Saada 1989: 54). In Kwahu in Ghana, studied by Wolf Bleek, witchcraft accusations did not originate in conflicts either (1976: 530). Recent witchcraft case occurring in a Hungarian village in Romania too proves that “existing social animosity is not an inevitable component for witchcraft to work” (Hesz 2007: 20). Narrators from our region likewise confirmed that strained relationships with the neighbours were not a necessary precondition for a witchcraft accusation to take place. Moreover, these could have even been exemplary, as testified in numerous interviews throughout this volume:

I: And I suspected that woman. And we had an awfully good relationship.

F: You had a good relationship?

I: We did.

F: Where does that woman live?

- I: *She is not far [smile]. Yes, yes ... she is good, and kind, and she would give you everything, but I don't know, she's got this flaw ... (9)*
- F: *Did you know who put those eggs on your property?*
- I: *Yes, we knew that all right: it was the neighbour. But we were in good relationships, just like with you. We had no dispute or anything. She just had this superstition. (...)*
- F: *And so that woman was supposed to be a witch, is that what you thought?*
- I: *Yeah, 'cause that's what they said. You definitely have to know something. This neighbour up there said: We have more property up there than here, she was at home on the right, and he was on the left. He said that around four in the morning on Carnival she brought rubbish, first she swept everything up, and then took it to our field, to the pastures, and spread the trash all around. She must have had some belief, right?*
- F: *But did this ever do you harm? For instance, when you found the egg, did anything wrong ever happen after that?*
- I: *We didn't ... we didn't pay much attention to that.⁷ Even today, we never heard why that was, what was that for.*
- F: *And it doesn't happen anymore?*
- I: *No, when there are no women [laughs], everything is alright. (104)*

Nevertheless, regardless of whether or not preexisting conflicts between the victim and the accuser directly triggered suspicions of their bewitchment and influenced the selection of the witch, the role of the community and the relationships among its members cannot be overlooked when talking about witchcraft, and it is the social context that proves crucial for the understanding of the role that witchcraft played in the everyday life of the inhabitants.

ORIGINS OF WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS

Even though thus not always present, pre-existing tensions, not necessarily overt conflicts, and not only among neighbours but also among family members, sometimes did indeed play a part in witchcraft accusations—in fact, these were as a rule rather more suspicions than accusations, as they tended to be expressed covertly, rather than openly (cf. Bleek 1976: 526). Certain circumstances and types of conflicts within a network of personal interrelationships seemed particularly liable to trigger witchcraft accusations. In England, disputes over tenancies, property disputes related to trespassing, conflicts within families, childbirth, and lying-in periods were among the most typical origins or circumstances that generated witchcraft-related disputes (Davies 1999b: 201–207). Among Hungarians in

the old county of Csík in Romania, the most common types of conflicts that led to witchcraft suspicions and accusations were skirmishes about land boundaries, family conflicts, litigation, perjury in inheritance debates, the breaking-off of an engagement, jilted lovers, breach of promise, a lover's or spouse's jealousy, bad marriages, unfaithful husbands, divorces, abortion, murder, theft, denunciations to the authorities, conflicts with communal leaders, hostility, hatred, and brawling and fights for indefinable reasons within the family or among neighbours (Pócs 2004: 176). In a nearby region, the most frequent disputes concerned land ownership or inheritance, theft, fraud, marital problems, unrequited love, or attacks against one's reputation (Hesz 2007: 21).

From the interviews with people in our region who were involved in witchcraft-related disputes, pre-existing tensions are often difficult to determine. This, however, is only to be expected, as the admission of conflicts with a person later accused of witchcraft could potentially lead to questioning the narrators' own role in the process of the shaping of an accusation and could cast a doubt on the veracity of their version of the dispute. Therefore, any indicator of a preceding conflict that could point to the narrator having reasons to accuse a person of bewitchment had to be omitted in the first place. Nevertheless, occasionally it is still possible to get an idea of the tensions that may have generated the accusations and helped people to shape the identity of their witch. Some recurrent circumstances kept cropping up as typically triggering anxiety, which could result in latent tensions or overt disruptions of relationships and ultimately culminated in witchcraft accusations: these turned out to be above all tensions related to the choice of a marital partner, tensions within a family, trade and disputes over the land property, and the trespassing of the boundaries of the neighbour's territory.

Choosing a Marital Partner

The choice of a future spouse was a situation that seemed to have particularly often triggered fear of bewitchment. Until the second half of the twentieth century, arrangements for marriages in the region were in the parents' hands. They chose the future partners of their children above all with regard to the economic status of their family, the amount of land in their possession, the possibility of the joining of their properties, and the reputation of their family. In the case of the daughter-in-law, the amount of her dowry, her diligence and moral purity were also factors. The revolt

against arranged marriages only began after the Second World War, mostly from the end of the 1960s onward, when new possibilities for economic independence appeared, and young people obtained the opportunity to find employment and leave their family home, if necessary. The sons of farming families that owned land, however, were obliged to stay at the farmstead even in the 1970s (Sok 2003: 122–128). This means that most of the elderly people we were talking to were actually married into arranged marriages. The following narrative recorded by the late ethnologist Jasna Sok, researching in the region at the end of the twentieth century, presents such marriage trading very clearly:

Oh, oh, my father was so strict. I ought to have taken one Francek, who was very wealthy, but ugly, God help him. He had oxen in breeding at our byre and the fair was approaching. The evening before the fair was going to take place, he came to our house and said to my father: You, Lojz, you know what, and he punched the table with a fist, let's make a deal. I will leave you the oxen if you give me the young heifer. My father said: How could I give you a heifer—you have seen in the byre that I do not have one? There are only oxen and a cow. So he said: You can give me the one that is sitting right there. I left immediately, I went to the kitchen, and my mother came after me: You shall go, right? I said: Mother, do you plan to exchange me for an ox, do you plan to trade me? She said: We will have no livestock otherwise! I cried so much and so loudly that I didn't want him! Then I wrote to my aunt in Maribor and I packed my things and left home. (Sok 2003: 128)

Despite the prevalent patriarchy, it was the mothers that played the crucial role in making the decision about the future bride. Based on their own experience of cohabitation with their mother-in-law, they were very much aware of the importance of this relationship and consequently sometimes simply could not make themselves accept any new member to the family:

There were many boys who never got married because of their mothers. Their mothers simply didn't like any woman enough, and they would say: That one is not good enough for our house, or: That one is not for us, or: What will that one do in our house? And their sons listened to them, they were very much attached to their mothers, and they would leave their girlfriends and could not decide to choose another bride ever again. (Sok 2003: 125)

However, unlike the case described by Davies about a man who, not having been allowed to marry the girl he wanted, fell into depression and was consequently believed to have been bewitched (1999a: 134–135), and

unlike several cases recorded in the era of the witch trials, when children and their spouses occasionally used witchcraft accusations against their mothers(-in-law) who disapproved of their marriage (Levack 2006: 157), several narratives show that in our region forbidden marriages mostly triggered a fear of bewitchment by the rejected girl in the mothers who did not allow their son to marry them (see also *inf.* 166, p. 45–47).

I: She was married for the second time, the old lady who is dead now. They called her Laura. And she was married twice. And she, that widow, that Laura, was angry at my mother because she didn't allow my brother to marry her, you know—well, my brother left for France then, he also died there. She was angry at her. And she did so that my mother got someone from Z., he was beating her, my poor mother. Yes, and he broke her hand with a dung-fork, with a dung-fork. He hit my mother's hand so hard that she broke her finger. They had problems all the time. (...) Then she [the mother] went to T., to see one such [woman] who told fortunes. And she said she [the mother] should bring a piece of cloth from those, right. And they used to have those scarecrows, you heard about those, haven't you? And then my mother took care to [do it when] there was dusk and she couldn't be seen. And she saw that scarecrow and cut off a piece of cloth for which she knew was of that man.⁸ And brought it there. And she [the fortune-teller] wrapped it [and made] like a small pillow. And told her to bring money with her. And from then on she has never beaten again.

F: The fortune-teller told her that?

I: Indeed, the fortune-teller told her that. She said: You should always carry this with you and you shall not be beaten! (66)

If the son listened to his mother and married the person she chose for him, and thus rejected the one he might had been in love with or had even been in a relationship with and promised to marry, the mother feared the revenge of the person she had rejected. If, on the other hand, the son married the person he preferred, thus acting against his mother's will, such a decision would have likewise produced tensions. The following narrative suggests that in such case, it was the son (sometimes also the woman he married against his parents' blessing) who could fear becoming a victim of his mother's revenge.

I: (...) we were at my grandmother's, making sausages, and my cousin went home and he was already almost at home (...) when he turned back here ... and suddenly we heard something like dogs barking ... and he was being thrown up and down and such things were done with him ...! And

they said that it was a witch that was doing this to him (...) and we saw on the hill that there was a light up there ... there was a hill and a light was following him all the way up to the forest ... this must have been done by some-one ... But that, my brother's wife, she said that this was his mother ... that she had said long ago that she would do something to him because she did not marry her sister, that this was certainly her, that she knew to do this. He was being led⁹ ... it was like everything was done by itself, and he never before and never afterwards ... it was like he had an epileptic seizure.

F: *Did many people witness this?*

I: *Oh yes, all the neighbours were there. (20)*

Several narratives also express men's tensions triggered by fear of a revenge either on the part of the woman that was unhappily in love with them or a woman (and her family) who they did not marry in spite of having been in relationship with her, and married someone else instead.

Well, here, we have a relative, well, she is still alive, born in the same year as I am. She married a guy from P. and one neighbour liked that guy very much, but the guy didn't care about her. He preferred another and married her. And the other one allegedly threatened him, she said: You shall never be happy! Then he spent four years in that house, the house is still there, when a terrible storm happened (...) There was a storm and they had a brand new corn-rack and that wife of him, and two kids, boys, the grandmother, and the husband of that relative of ours was also there. And it started to thunder, and there was a terrible wind, and my husband said to that woman: let's run under the corn-rack. But he [the husband] didn't allow the others to go under the corn-rack, so they all ran to the house, while he himself ran under the corn-rack. And suddenly the woman heard—they had a kitchen from which there was a view up there—she heard a terrible crack, as if all the shelves in the kitchen fell down. So she looked through the window and saw that the whole corn-rack had fallen on him, the whole corn-rack broke on him. He was about thirty-five years old at the time, when he died. She ran to him and crawled into the ruins, he could still speak, she was screaming and ran to the school in S. and plenty of people came sawing and they were sawing and sawing but it was pressing him stronger and stronger and he was becoming more and more blue and when they pulled him out he was already dead. (96)

Even more often than transmitting men's fear of being a target of a scorned woman's bewitchment, the narratives reflect fear of the women that they married becoming the victim of the rejected women's bewitchment,

which probably hints at the competition among women in finding themselves marital partners (cf. Eilola 2006: 42).

My grandmother told me about a woman who married someone who was very much loved by another woman. But he didn't like that woman, he married another one. And that [the rejected] woman said to the bride: I shall do something so that you won't be able to walk! And when there was a wedding, they approached a bridge and when the bride stepped on that bridge, her leg suddenly swelled up and she was not able to move any more. And they said that woman who threatened her could have indeed done this. What happened afterwards, I don't know. (96)

They knew about that down there, my dad said that they knew, that this one was a witch, that one was a witch, yeah, I don't know how. Then one [girl] came from Bosnia, she went out with my cousin, she's still alive. But she was convinced that her neighbour who also lived in a flat in her block [was a witch]. Well, later she [the girl from Bosnia] married my cousin, he was a very handsome fellow. And that woman [the neighbour] came to tell her that there would be no wedding the next day. She [the girl from Bosnia] said that she [the neighbour] was coming to visit her for years and years as a witch. Her husband, he's dead now, my cousin, he listened to his [wife] here, when they came, when she was telling us this, but he preferred to stay silent [about it]. [laughs] He was silent, but she [his wife] said: She [the neighbour] is, she is a witch, how could she not be! But, how, cut it out! There's nothing I can do, she said, nothing. That day, when they had the girls' party, she [the neighbour] also came over, she was probably in love with that Slovenian, well, probably, because he was really handsome and she had caused serious problems for a couple years. That woman is still alive. She was saying—well, if my cousins were here, we were all laughing at her—but she was one-hundred per cent convinced that she [the neighbour] was a witch, that one [who lived] in her block ... yeah, that she's a witch ... Well, I don't know. (76)

Although the man referred to in the following narrative denied having had any relationship with the woman, the illegitimate child and the pressure of her family on him to marry their daughter suggest that the child mentioned in the narrative was his and that this was the very reason why her family insisted on marriage. His immediate and firm conviction that it was her father who caused harm to his wife seems to reflect his latent guilty conscience for not having done what was considered his duty, i.e. marrying the woman and recognising the child as his own, and expresses his fear of retribution by the rejected woman and her family:

11: *And this too, if we are already speaking of witchcraft, my sister-in-law, her husband, he had — well he didn't date that woman, but they [their parents] wanted him to marry her, she had a child. But he didn't like her, he took my husband's sister. (...) And they married. And she [his wife] went to the meadow one summer and found a thread there, a thick thread, laid over the meadow from their house [the house of the woman who her husband did not want to marry] up to here, about three hundred metres long. And she started to wind up the thread. This woman got such pain in her arms that she carried them like this [she shows how she could not extend her arms]. She went to see all possible doctors and nothing helped, nothing at all. And her husband said: nothing else but this had caused this! And they felt exactly who caused that. The father of that woman who he was supposed to marry. (...) He said: I know I should have married that one, but ... (53)*

Even when already married, jealousy and rivalry among women sometimes continued, and women's constant efforts to keep their husbands and fear of bewitchment by their rivals (and their families) continued to trigger anxiety long after marriage:

I know that suddenly he stopped loving me. He had no more pleasure—before we liked each other, we cared for each other, and then suddenly nothing. I know that the witch wanted to get rid of me. Her daughter was a widow and she didn't know how to harm me, she would want me to drown in a spoon of water. She wanted to get my husband for her own daughter. When I was going to bring the meal to the vineyard she offered to take care of my child until I was back. But my heart was telling me no, no, no. Who knows what she could give him to drink or perhaps sting him with a needle or something. She would do anything to drive me away from my home. And those Gypsies came and told me everything. That really helped. She told me I have an enemy in the village. She gave me three seeds of thyme, I think. She told me to put them into my husband's pillow ... and to tell him nothing. And true, I looked and looked and he really had no power any more. These women were calling him and calling him and he had no power to stay there any more ... Before that, on the contrary, every Sunday when he was bringing milk to the shop they intercepted him and lured him to their house. Well, after it had helped I told her that. And that Gypsy said that if she ever came back I would kiss her heels. Well, she never did. But she knew everything: that that woman was the biggest enemy I have ever had. (...) Well, that woman didn't have enough power to drive me away and marry her daughter with my husband instead. I saw it with my own eyes that she was a witch. Once I was bringing firewood and I noticed her walking down the railroad tracks. I just put the firewood down and went out to look—it was like she sank into the earth. Where could she go that quickly? I had no idea. Well, when

I went to work in the garden I found a pot buried upside down to the ground. I never had such a pot at home. (...) My husband was not at home at that time. They say that if one finds something like that, one should put it onto another's land. But I was afraid to touch it and waited for my husband to come back home. When he came, I showed it to him. And he said that it must have been her. They also caused him to fall on the flat ground and break his leg. He went to the vineyard and didn't respond to them and he ... They have such power, devilish women ... (83)

Tensions within the Family

Although conflicts within the (enlarged) family were only very rarely mentioned in relation to witchcraft accusations, some narratives occasionally do reveal these tensions to be part of their origin. A household in our region was often composed of a three-generation extended family: grandparents, the (usually eldest) son and his wife, and their children. When two nuclear families lived together in the same household, at least sporadic if not constant and deep tensions must have certainly been present among them. The introduction of a new member into a household was an occasion that could profoundly upset the relationships within the family. One can assume that at least at the beginning the new member may have been treated with mistrust and suspicion, and tested, as reflected in the following narrative which refers to an event that allegedly took place as late as around the year 2000. At the same time, the narrative seems to reflect the fears of the new family member, and his or her partner, of mistrust and consequently bewitchment, directed against them in order to separate them, especially if the union was made without their (grand) parents' blessing.

For example, a boy from the village, almost the same age as my son, got married down there (...) He married down to K. and that girl (...), her grandmother feared what kind of a bridegroom she would bring to the house. And she [the grandmother] was causing him as many problems as she could and she—that I, too, heard for the first time—she placed beans around their bed, you know. Well, that woman finally realised that they understand each other and that she won't be able to separate them with any magic since they loved each other (...) so she went to see a woman (...) that you call a witch [the unwitcher] (...). So that you won't think that witches only lived earlier, right! This is no witchcraft. This is simply something which someone believes in. And if you believe in it, it works. Just like medicine. My father also said that whenever something hurt

him, he took some alcohol and anointed the spot that hurt him and because he believed that, it helped. And that woman also told me that she kept finding the beans and she picked them up and threw them into the manure each time, and I don't know how many times she had to do that. And that is the truth. She [the grandmother] was testing that boy, she wanted to check him out, since he came from another village and she didn't know him and didn't know whether he was alright or not. The beans were supposed to bring misfortune. This was like some sort of witchcraft. But it is no witchcraft! (91)

The son's marriage and the creation of his own family did not mean that he could also immediately take over the farmstead from his parents. His parents usually handed it over to him only upon their death or when physically debilitated, which is reflected in a widespread saying in the region, *I give you a key, You give me a light*—referring to the usual practice of the *pater familias* handing the household over to his son only upon his death when, according to the custom, a candle is lit for the deceased (Sok 2003: 149–153). Only occasionally did the young couple manage to assure that the farmstead was handed over to them after a certain amount of time after the marriage, but not before at least several years had elapsed. The handing over of the farmstead immediately after the wedding was indeed more an exception than a rule. Until they were given the farmstead, the young couple was absolutely economically dependent on the (husband's) parents, who decided on every purchase, even on buying clothes for each of the family members. Even when the parents finally handed over the property to the son, they assured themselves of a legally agreed right to means of subsistence: a room (or among poor families, a corner of a room), joint use of the kitchen, food from a common dish,¹⁰ as well as part of the food and drink produced on the farm, a certain quantity of firewood, healthcare, heating, and similar; sometimes they even demanded a field or livestock for themselves. The young couple was bound to deliver what was requested by the parents, which was especially difficult to assure when the harvest was poor and when they were facing financial problems; occasionally, they even had to buy food they were obliged to give to the parents according to the contract (Sok 2003: 150–157). The cohabitation of two generations under the same roof thus often triggered tensions not only due to potential personal differences but also due to practical, economic reasons.

Mutual dependency at least to a certain extent helped to prevent overt engagements in conflicts among the members of a family living under the same roof: in the case of overt animosity, reaching its peak in witchcraft

accusations, cohabitation would ultimately no longer be possible, which would certainly have wide-ranging consequences. An additional factor that inhibited and prevented open conflicts between the two generations was education: from a very early age children were brought up to be obedient, submissive and obliging to their parents (Sok 2003: 83). These were personality traits that were not only cherished, but also absolutely expected from the children, and also actively supported by the church. These could be the reasons that family members were so seldom overtly identified as witches. As Jeanne Favret-Sadaa showed, the conflicts within the family were always redirected to the network of neighbours—while the true tensions originated in family history, members of the nuclear as well as the extended family of the bewitched were always excluded from the list of suspects (1989: 54–55). Family members also seem to be generally, though not always, omitted from witchcraft accusations in our region.

Trading

Transactions such as sale, purchase or barter, and even gifts, especially of domestic animals, were another vulnerable field of social interaction. As domestic animals were expensive and played a crucial role in a family's sustenance, their health and successful breeding were of utmost importance and the purchase of new livestock always meant a risky transaction: if anything went wrong, the previous owners were likely to be accused of witchcraft. The following narrative refers to the barter between relatives, yet the risk of this type of transaction was by no means restricted to interactions among relatives alone, as shown in the following narratives too:

I had an old aunt who spun very beautifully. You know what spinning means? (...) So, of course, during the winter she was spinning for us and also for others. And she [the old aunt] brought yarn to her aunt. Her aunt said: What can I give you for it?—No need to give anything—Okay, I shall give you a pig, the aunt said. A pig of about fifteen, twenty kilos. I can't say, I was not yet born then. And then that pig, they fed it with everything, and it wouldn't grow, it was always the same. And they left it out, in the yard and so. And one day the aunt of my great aunt came by on the road. And she stopped and said: What kind of a housewife is that, what kind of a pig she has? But that great aunt of mine was outside and said: Well, auntie, as you wished it, so it is. The woman then said: For shame! Fie! at the pig and spat three times around herself.¹¹ From then on the pig started growing and growing and at the end we had plenty of sausages. I heard this a thousand times at home from my aunt. Okay, that's one example. From my home. (92)

Not only the previous owner, but any (envious) neighbour could be blamed when the transaction was at risk:

- I1: *This was also the case ... and for God sake, it is also a truth! Tell them about this, Mira!*
- I2: *Yes.*
- I1: *When they had calves, at your home. A cow had a calf and it was so nice that they decided to keep it, for breeding. And it was I don't know how old when it got ill.*
- I2: *It got ill before they gave it away. I know that. And then they bought another calf from somebody, to keep it for themselves.*
- I1: *For themselves, right?*
- I2: *And then it was ill, it laid down, its head down ... And the daughter-in-law started crying ... and she went to her weekend house ...*
- I1: *No, it was not like that! You skipped something! They called the vet!*
- I2: *I was meaning to say that ...*
- I1: *Well, you can't just skip the sequence of events! They called the vet and he came. And he said: I shall give it an injection and if it doesn't help ...*
- I2: *... you should call again.*
- I1: *He said: You should call again. But I believe it will help. And he gave it an injection.*
- I2: *The calf was beautiful, healthy.*
- I1: *After the injection, it was the same. The calf was just lying, didn't want to eat ... nothing of it! It couldn't even stand on its feet. Nothing. Catastrophe! Now you can tell about this neighbour [addressing his wife].*
- I2: *And it was not lifting its head, not drinking, not eating, the daughter-in-law was crying ... And there was this old lady. And the daughter-in-law says: It will die, and we paid so much for it! What's wrong with it? It's just lying there, just lies, nothing, nothing ... She [the old woman] said to her: Wait a minute, where is your fireplace? Do you have charcoal? She said: I do. If not, I can get some. And she performed that drowning of the spells. Throwing the burnt embers into the water. And she was saying something. I don't know how many ... And then she went and anointed the calf with the water and poured some water into its muzzle. She said: It already lifted its head a bit. And she anointed it with some more water. And that woman said: This was done. Someone did this to you. Toward the afternoon they called the vet and they told him and she told him about this, what happened and what that woman did and how the calf stood up after that. He said: Everything is possible.*
- F: *And do they know who did this?*
- I1: *Up there, there was a neighbour.*
- I2: *Yes, yes.*
- I1: *The neighbour in the vicinity. (142)*

Regrets about the transaction performed can also end up in the accusation of the new owner:

I1: He bought himself a small pig and bred him for three months. And then his close neighbour came and provoked him so that he presented him with his pig. And afterwards he was complaining around: That damned bastard, he is a real witch, he bewitched me so that he got a pig from me! He is a witch! [laughs] (128)

The next interview seems to suggest a reverse accusation of witchcraft made by the seller, perhaps after she had been accused of witchcraft by a buyer, or in order to prevent such an accusation:

I1: Yeah, yeah, I know, for that Marjan they said that he practised witchcraft around there, and our mama said that they bought a cow, and that they bought her down in G. and ... no, they sold her in G.! And here she gave fifteen, sixteen, seventeen litres of milk at a time, right, it depended, and then, after they brought her down there, that man kept coming back complaining that the cow gives no milk, the cow gives no milk. Yeah. Then my mother said they she would go down there to see what was wrong [with the cow]. And they ... mama said that they had a [mentally] disabled man at that house, he was slightly off, and that man read Kolomon's Blessing. Yeah, he read Kolomon! Yeah, that he read that Kolomon. But instead of reading it ... mmm... now I don't know how to put it ...

I2: I heard that, yeah!

I1: ... instead of saying something else, he said: Toads. And there were, I don't know, just toads, all around the house. And that man was a witch. And mama said, even to grandmother there: ... You don't have to come [to our place]. I know that the cow gave enough milk, that now she doesn't at your place is nonsense. And after that he never came again ... And my mother told them that they can give the cow back. That it wasn't true [that the cow didn't give milk]. And mama told that story a lot. And they had that man locked up in the house a bit.

F: And that man lived in the house where they bought the cow?

I1: Yes, yes.

I1: They were there. And there they said that he had read Kolomon and that he had to, I don't know how to put it, that he must have said something instead of something else ...

I2: They believed [in it] here! (127)

Disputes over Property

The circumstance that most often triggered suspicions of witchcraft, however, seems to be a dispute related to the boundaries of another person's property and trespassing. Several narrators clearly connected their disputes about land with subsequent accusations of bewitchment. In the following narrative, the neighbours who saw a toad on the piece of land that was an object of dispute with their neighbour regarding its ownership, obviously recognised the narrator with whom they were in a conflict about this particular piece of land in the toad. In the witchcraft discourse, the appearance of a toad meant that the witch came to bewitch, and the usual procedure was to burn it or stab it. This is one of only three narratives we recorded in which someone implicitly, even if not directly, admitted of having been accused of witchcraft (cf. also inf. 5, p. 64; inf. 165, p. 293).

- I: *Some believed that the toads ... you know toads? Those big green frogs. [They said] that this was a witch, you know.*
- F: *That the witch turned to a toad?*
- I: *Yes, yes, yes. I had some disputes over land with that neighbour, here, behind this forest, by the plum tree. In the end, they even got that few metres of land. So, we came once, our neighbour [another one] came first and she wanted to take out the stick that was stuck to the tree when she noticed that there was a toad stuck to it. Twice stuck. Alas, she just ran away! Then my grandson, no, my granddaughter's husband, and I went to mow the grass there. So he says: What is this, what is here? And there was a toad stuck to the stick twice and that stick stuck to the plum tree. It was already dried up. And I don't know how people can ...*
- F: *Why did they stab it, that toad?*
- I: *I don't know. They probably thought that that toad, that person, is going to die. (79)*

The next narrative too reveals that the origin of the conflict escalating in witchcraft accusations lay in the boundary-related conflict between the neighbours:

- I: *We have such a neighbour here. Yes.*
- F: *Is she still alive?*
- I: *Yes, she is. Her husband knew, and his mother knew.*
- F: *Really?*
- I: *Yes, he knew. And, you know, he bewitched my husband. This is the devil's power, not God's, it is the devil's power. He was evil and he learned. Once*

he came down here and he wanted to talk about this and that (...) he stood up and sat again (...). My husband said he became sick. And I didn't immediately understand why he got sick. Later on he was diagnosed with sclerosis and he knew nothing any more (...). And then seven years later: He wasn't able to pee or move his bowels; his stomach was as hard as a stone. This was terminal. (...) He got a fever and he was sent to a psychiatric hospital. There they realised that they couldn't help him and they sent him home. They could not find out where his problems came from. But I was very sad, I am deeply religious, deeply religious, you know. And I went there to the psychiatric hospital (...). And there was a Way of the Cross and by the first station I said a Hail Mary on my rosary. Please, Mary, let my husband get better! And she did. He got better (...). But he [the neighbour] can do it [bewitch] for seven years ...

F: *But why would he do that?*

I: *He did it so that his illness would last for seven years and he would die afterwards.*

F: *But why would he bewitch him at all? Were they on bad terms with each other?*

I: *My husband wasn't. But he [the neighbour] was so evil. You see—this land, behind the spring, it's theirs. They have trees growing up there. The branches [of our trees] grew and stuck with the branches of their trees. When he drove home, the ladder got stuck to the branches, and the fire truck could not approach, so he was reprimanded by the Commission, and he got angry. And he stopped talking, he didn't want to talk. Until [after seven years] when my husband started feeling better.*

F: *After seven years?*

I: *After seven years! My husband told me that he came down here. I was not there, I was working in a vineyard, but he was ill and couldn't walk properly and he went to lie down. In the afternoon. And he [the neighbour] was trying to persuade him to talk a bit longer, to chat, but behind his heel he had a death-scarf bound—the one that cadavers are bound with. And he let him know that it [the illness] will last for seven years. (29)*

Crossing the Boundaries of the Neighbour's Property

In the above interview, the narrator's conviction that the arrival of the neighbour at their home was the moment when the bewitchment took place could also be explained in terms of spatial relationships. As de Blécourt states, “[t]he witchcraft discourse exemplified the rules of proximity¹² as it distinguished between permitted and harmful closeness” (2013: 377). Every crossing of a boundary was considered potentially

dangerous for bewitchment and could trigger anxiety that could lead to accusation of witchcraft (cf. Purkiss 1996: 91–178; Davies 1999b: 207–212; de Blécourt 2004: 98–100; 2013; Pócs 2004: 176; Eilola 2006: 39–40, 46). Violating the rules of proximity in our region usually referred to a physical trespassing¹³ by neighbours or their domestic animals. As André Julliard’s research of the Ain region of France shows, the zones of proximity vary according to the structure of community and environment in which people live: in a flat landscape with fields with hedgerows and a dispersed settlement pattern of enclosed farmsteads that fostered individualistic social behaviour, the farm buildings and their immediate surroundings were considered private. In contrast, in an area of nucleated settlements surrounded by parcels of open fields, which was characterised by a fair degree of communal agricultural activity, one was even allowed to enter a stranger’s house without knocking, the only private space being the first floor with bedrooms (Julliard 1994, in Davies 1999b: 209). In our area, with mostly scattered houses and fields surrounding the farm buildings in the hills, and some serried hamlets in the valleys, one was allowed to come to the farmstead, but not to enter the house without making oneself known and being invited in. Nevertheless, when the arrival of a newcomer on one’s property was not anticipated or announced by directly approaching and greeting the owner, especially when people tried to hide their presence; already the trespassing of the boundaries of the farmsteads immediately triggered very strong suspicions of being an attempt of bewitchment. Their whereabouts were vigilantly observed and, after their departure, the place where they were staying immediately checked for any buried (bewitching) object. While pre-existing antagonisms may have played their part in such cases (cf. Davies 1999b: 203), not only the trespassing of those with whom people were in close relationships that was considered suspicious—instead, anybody’s trespass was carefully observed:

II: I was out accidentally, up there, when I saw four girls walking around, as if they were picking dandelions. One had a bag made of vine leaves, and those other three girls disappeared. (...) When they went home, I went there to look, to see what was there. (...) (50)

One evening when my husband was taking a bath, and in the evenings at that time I used to ... it was hot and I took sour milk and went to eat outside. And two people passed by, a father and a daughter. My husband said—they had just

passed and I was sitting behind the house—Come quickly to wash my back! But I was quiet, I waited, and then I went inside and said: They went somewhere but they immediately came back. The next evening I was waiting, I said I was going to wait to see if they came again. ... And the daughter came alone. While she was passing by, the dog was afraid ... She was back in no time ... suddenly a motorbike passed by. She jumped into the bushes so that it would not illuminate her. And this is who I suspected. And we had a wonderful relationship. (...) And the next day I went up to the slope to hoe potatoes. We freshly hoed and the earth was freshly dug out and an egg was put inside (...) (9)

Not just people, but domestic animals as well were not allowed to cross the boundaries of the neighbour's homestead.¹⁴ If an animal had crossed the boundary of the neighbour's territory, their owners also feared becoming the target of their neighbour's bewitchment performed in revenge:

II: And there is another case, but I shall not tell you who it is about. We used to have turkey hens. And these turkey hens, they like going to the meadows, they eat grasshoppers. So they were walking on the meadow, and a man there became very angry, he said: Damned turkey hens, all they do is damage! But how could I have the hens shut in? They go out, and so they did. Other livestock don't go, but the turkey hens like to go to the meadow. So they grazed there, and he did something. And that really happened then. He put a turkey hen's egg in the molehill and when the hens were hatching eggs, everything died. They just started to hatch and they all died. From that time on we haven't had turkey hens anymore, there was no luck. I knew exactly who put that and where. And I went to look immediately after he had left, and I saw a hole in the molehill and a turkey hen's egg in it. I took it out and threw it on their land [laugh]. (50)

There was a neighbour there ... She was an old lady, and [she had] grease everywhere, wherever you looked, everywhere those cups and pots and everything. When our pig once went to their land down there, she said: You shall see, girl, what shall happen to the pig since you don't take care of it. It came to my field! Then we thought—what could happen to it? I will drive it back home and it is going to be all right. It will stay home and I will take better care of it so that it won't escape again. I drove it back home and there was a fence there. And—mind you—the pig threw itself against the fence and hung there! She said: You shall see what will happen to the pig at home, you shall see—and lo!—it hanged itself! That woman was a real witch! I know that very well. (60)

In the frames of the farmstead, the boundaries that neighbours were particularly not allowed to cross under any circumstance were the entrances of the byres and pigsties. Any transgressing of this rule immediately triggered tensions and fear of bewitchment:

We had five cows ... And a neighbour, a woman came by ... it was Sunday morning, and my mother—I was still sleeping—says: Hey, girls, wake up, Francka came by ... My sister complained, she said: The whole week we were waking up at three to hoe and everything, at least on Sundays you could let us sleep, to rest! [angrily] Well, she is there. My sister and I woke up and looked through the window—she was nowhere to be seen. My mother then: I saw her, she was right here. She was looking around ... Then my mother hurried up down, she unlocked the door and hurried up down to the stall. Francka entered through the back door, there where the dung was being thrown out of the byre, and she stood behind the cow ... My mother then said to her: You know very well that they were on the pasture and everything! Why did you come to the byre? You could have come to the house, not go to the byre. My mother said thank God that she didn't know what was going to happen afterwards, 'cause if she did, she would have thrown her to the ground and trampled her down! Then my mother went to the church ... and I went to milk the cow ... it was my task to milk, I have been milking cows since I was eight. When I went to the stall, all cows together gave but a half a litre of milk. I milked and milked ... there was no milk. No milk. Then my mother came home, my mother and father came home to make breakfast ... we girls ... prepared breakfast ... And she sees that there is no milk in the pot. She says: Where is the milk? I said: There is nothing, this is all the milk I could get ... (16)

Certainly, not every occasion and circumstance that could potentially trigger tensions and conflicts always in fact did so, and even when tensions did occur, not every strained relationship necessarily ended up in an accusation of bewitchment. Nevertheless, whenever the narrations revealed pre-existing tensions in relationships, it was usually disputes over land, trespassing on the neighbour's property, sales, purchases, bartered goods and gifts, tensions related to the choice of a marital partner, and more seldom also tensions within the family that cropped up in the narratives as typical circumstances that presented a potential source of tensions which, when misfortune occurred, or even when it was merely anticipated, could lead to subsequent accusations of witchcraft.

TARGETS OF BEWITCHMENT

In spite of the fact that the witchcraft narratives from which it was possible to discern the origin of the tensions that subsequently triggered accusations of bewitchment sometimes pointed to mothers, brides, and bridegrooms as typical victims of the revengeful unrequited women, to disobedient sons as victims of their mothers, and to new members of the family as victims of the elders, these narratives accounted for just a small percentage of bewitchment narratives. By and large, it was still the neighbours that were feared most, and it was domestic animals, and to a much lesser extent children and crops, that were the most common target of their bewitchment. Generally speaking, bewitchment was above all directed against the economic well-being, that is, the prosperity of the household, rather than against the health of individual people.

Bewitched Animals

The great majority of the narratives about witchcraft communicated a strong fear that witches would do harm to domestic animals and their products. Bewitchment of domestic animals was undoubtedly the most often stated witchcraft accusation in the region, as was only to be expected due to the economic importance that livestock had for the family's economy, as well as the psychological attachment to them (cf. Davies 1999b: 210). Bewitchment was the most appropriate explanation available when it was necessary to cope with illness, poor yields, loss of appetite, and death of domestic animals. The animals that proved to be most vulnerable to bewitchment were cows, pigs, and to a lesser extent poultry. Cows and dairy products in particular were the most common targets of bewitchment. When cows were not giving (enough) milk, or when their milk was bloody, or more seldom, when it did not sour, when cows had miscarriage or gave birth to stillborn calves, these misfortunes were typically ascribed to bewitchment by the neighbours, as testified to by numerous narratives relating that a misfortune occurred as a consequence of a neighbour entering a byre. The close link between witchcraft and milk production everywhere in Europe certainly points to economic importance that milk and dairy products had for the nutrition of the population (cf. Nildin-Wall and Wall 1993: 69) as well as to the miserable living conditions of domestic animals, dying due to insufficient nutrition and unsanitary, dark, small and crowded byres (cf. Alver and Selberg 1987: 32), as explicitly confirmed by some of our narrators too:

- F: *Did witches ever steal milk?*
 I: *Yes, yes, [they said] that they milked the cows, yeah, so that there was no milk after that, yeah. That [happened].*
 F: *But was there anything you could do about it?*
 I: *Feed them better, right? [If times were] bad, if they didn't have anything to feed them, then it was a witch's fault, right? (110)*

(...) *And then this one fellow said [referring to the "victim's" visit of an unwitcher—see inf. 63, p. 258]: You know what, now I'm going to tell you the truth: You didn't ask the right person. He said: You should prepare more feed, good feed, and give it to the cow to eat its fill, and the cow would be fine without that [male] witch [an unwitcher] that you brought here and who [insinuated himself] into your threshold, and to and fro. He said: Give it [to the cows] to eat early. You go in there, but the cow day after day, we can hear her lowing, because she's hungry. This has nothing to do with a witch, he said. You yourself are the witch who is bewitching her. [laugh] (63)*

Pigs were the second most frequently mentioned target of witchcraft attack. Typical signs indicating that a bewitchment had taken place were loss of appetite, especially when lingering, illness, stillbirth, and death. While the consequences of bewitchment that affected pigs were similar to those that were ascribed to the bewitchment of cows, there was one kind of misfortune that was related to pigs only. If the death of a pig that was being slaughtered took longer than it should normally take, which resulted in their body lacking any blood or their blood becoming foamy, which ultimately caused the black pudding to become unpalatable, witchcraft was again the usual explanation.

Poultry featured in bewitchment narratives much more infrequently than cows and pigs, and usually only among other misfortunes that befell the homestead—when they did, it was usually their death, or more rarely also eggs not hatching, that was ascribed to witchcraft. The smaller number of these cases was undoubtedly due to the much lower economic and nutritional value of poultry compared to cows and pigs.

Oxen and horses were believed to be bewitched even more rarely. Their illness or death, however, was never explained in terms of witchcraft. The only sort of bewitchment they were vulnerable to was being stopped on their way to or from fairs or to the fairs to be sold, and in their tracks when pulling carts, yet this type of bewitchment was ultimately targeted at the men driving or riding them (see Chap. 3). Legends about witches immobilizing livestock, mostly oxen and horses, and stopping carts, wagons, and

horses in their tracks were also known elsewhere in Slovenia (cf. Kastelic and Primc 2001: 54), as well as in Europe, for instance, in Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Metohija (Vukanović 2000: 14–15), Russia (Tokarev 1957: 27), the Netherlands (de Blécourt 1999: 173), and England (Tongue 1963: 322, 324; Davies 1999a: 136). However, as only wealthy farmers could afford to have horses and oxen, any other animal, like a cow or a calf, could replace them when harnessed to a cart or a wagon: in this case, all these animals could equally fall victims of this particular type of bewitchment.

Goats appeared as targets of bewitchment in the narratives only exceptionally, but this is only to be expected as they were very rare in the region. Apart from these domestic animals, in one case puppies were also thought to have become the target of bewitchment.

Bewitched People

Bewitchment in our region, at least as far as social witchcraft is concerned, i.e. when members of the community were recognised as witches, was directed against people far less often than bewitchments that affected domestic animals. This could be an indicator of the diminishing role that witchcraft played in the region at the time of our fieldwork and the time that our interlocutors were referring to, as according to the grandson of the famous unwitchers, people were being targets of bewitchment in approximately the same proportion as livestock until the end of the First World War, or even until the Second World War. Those who became targets of bewitchment were mostly small children, but they only featured as vulnerable to bewitchment by the evil eye and praise. The consequences of these particular modes of bewitchment were usually recognised as their excessive crying, sleeplessness, and digestion problems. Unlike in Ireland (cf. Jenkins 1991: 310), adolescents never figured as targets of bewitchment in our region, and adults in general fell victims to witchcraft far less often than children. Problems interpreted as the consequence of bewitchment were temporary paralysis, general illness, vomiting, pain, epileptic seizures (possibly) and psychological problems, yet all these misfortunes only very seldom cropped up in the conversations. In addition, bewitchment was also occasionally recognised as a factor that triggered tense relationships among family members, or among members of the community, or, even more rarely, caused the ineffectiveness of farm work. It appears that adults may have occasionally also become a target of love magic, but this was never claimed by the “victims” themselves. Death was ascribed to bewitchment only exceptionally. Bewitchment accusations in our region also never appeared to be related to women during childbirth or during the

vulnerable period of the first 40 days following the delivery of a child, as was the case in some other places (cf. Davies 1999b: 205–206; Dömötör 1973; Roper 1996; Simpson 1996: 9).

Bewitched Crops

Harm done to crops features in the bewitchment narratives even more rarely, and usually only among many misfortunes listed in a row, or as a result of a particular magic practice aimed specifically against successful harvest, for instance, that of gathering dew. The accusation of witches for destroying the harvest by causing hail was seldom heard and mentioned more often as part of general stereotypical notions about witches' abilities rather than an actual accusation for a destroyed harvest—priests were blamed for causing hail more often than witches. Interestingly enough, even though vineyards are widespread and wine was an important product in the region, narratives about bewitchments of the grapes only exceptionally appear in the interviews. In addition, the praising of flowers was once mentioned as causing their withering.

MODES OF BEWITCHING

Witches were sometimes thought to perform magic practices and sometimes to be able to bewitch through their innate evil power, emanating from various parts of their body—eyes, mouth, hands, or feet. Even if people did not everywhere use specific terms for each of these bodily manners of bewitchment, the acts of looking, touching, and speaking were often crucial to the understanding of the mode of bewitching (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 192–193). In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, threats, praise, look, touch and gifts were considered methods of bewitching typically ascribed to witches (Macfarlane 1970: 172; Purkiss 1996: 125). In nineteenth-century Somerset, it was thought that witches could bewitch by sight, touch, and speech, and a gift from a witch was not to be accepted (Davies 1999a: 137–139). In the nineteenth-century France, certain sorts of misfortune were believed to be caused by a look, a touch, a praise, a curse, a spell, a gift, by a toad slipped under the victim's door or bed, and by a witch having access to the victim's hair (Devlin 1987: 103–106). In twentieth-century northwestern France, witches were believed to cause a loss of vital force and wealth through speech, sight, or touch (Favret-Saada 1980: 111–117). Witches in twentieth-century southwestern Germany were supposed to use

various manners of bewitching: evil eye, evil gifts, evil speech, and evil touch (Schöck 1978: 107–108). According to Scandinavian data, the power of witches to do evil could manifest itself in various parts of their body and was believed to be transmitted through the eyes, hand, tongue, and foot (emic¹⁵ terms such as “evil eye”, “evil hand”, “spiteful tongue”, and “evil foot” are known in Scandinavia) (Alver 1989: 118). In Denmark, a witch could inflict harm through wicked tongue and evil eye (Henningsen 1982: 133). In Alto Minho in Portugal, envy operated through actions of conflict, usually of an underhanded type, gossip or evil tongue, sorcery, curses, and the evil eye (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 178–186). Hungarians in Romania believed that magical harm could be done by the cursing or bewitching activity of a witch (Hesz 2007: 21).

Looking and speaking, often simultaneously, to a much lesser extent also touching, turned out to be main “bodily” emanations of bewitching power ascribed to witches in our region too. Furthermore, a witch was believed to be able to bewitch through a gift, by burying or placing objects on a neighbour’s territory, by gathering dew, by dragging sheets over neighbours’ fields, and by magically milking others’ cows (by milking a rope, an axe handle or other objects, as well by sending a toad or transforming into one, more rarely also with the aid of salamanders or black beetles).

These manners of bewitching do not always constitute clearly distinct categories, and firm boundaries among them are often impossible to establish: while some narratives focus on the bewitching technique as such, others emphasise the consequences of bewitchment, whereby the manner of bewitchment as such remains unclear. In addition, the same effect could often be achieved by employing different techniques. Richard Jenkins, for instance, classified Irish witchcraft legends according to the following “analytical categories, based on differences of believed or actual technique”: the evil eye; milk and churn blinking; and other miscellaneous forms of supernatural aggression (1991: 307ff). Yet, while the evil eye can be understood as a *manner*, a *mode* of bewitching (even though one could perhaps hardly understand it as a *technique*), under the category of “milk and churn blinking” he actually discusses the *consequences* of bewitchment (such as cows being deprived of milk, butter not churning) achieved by *various techniques*, among others the evil eye (cf. Jenkins 1991: 310). The “analytical” categories, based on the differences of the techniques, thus appear somewhat *un-analytical*, yet the difficulty in classifying the data into strict categories is understandable, as it is conditioned by the material itself. Nevertheless, let me present typical modes of bewitching in our

area, even if the categories somewhat overlap, and the boundaries among them are not always clear-cut.

Bewitching by Looking

The Evil Eye

The evil eye, a “mystical aggression relying on an innate power existing within the body of the witch for its effectiveness” (Jenkins 1991: 307), is based upon the idea that an individual has the power, voluntary or involuntary, to cause harm to another individual or their property by looking at (and praising) that person.¹⁶ Belief in the evil eye is widespread throughout the Indo-European and Semitic world¹⁷ but has also been found, for instance, in India, China, Africa, Egypt, among Inuit and American Indians, and in Talmudic Judaism (Dundes, ed. 1981; Lykiardopoulus 1981: 222; de Blécourt 1999: 192–197). In Europe it had been reported at least since antiquity, for instance, in Serbia (Đorđević 1938), Portugal (Cutileiro 1971: 273–278; de Pina-Cabral 1986: 180; Lawrence 1988: 130–132), Germany (Schöck 1978: 107), France (Devlin 1987: 103), Poland (Schiffmann 1987: 160–161), Scandinavia (Alver 1989: 118), Ireland (Jenkins 1991: 307–10), Greece (Stewart 1991: 232–237), the Netherlands (de Blécourt 2004: 99, 101), Italy (Pitrè 1981; Magliocco 2004: 158–161), and Spain (Perdiguero 2004: 140–142), to name but a few countries.

Since the first folklorists started to record folklore in the nineteenth-century Slovenia, narratives about the evil eye have also been recurrently reported in various parts of Slovenia (Navratil 1894: 151; Piskernik 1964: 311; Dražumerič and Terseglav 1987: 229–230; Kebe 1988: 51; Zajc-Jarc 1993: 35). While inhabitants of our region did use a special term for people who could bewitch by looking, calling them a “spelling person”, the emic terms that people most usually used were “harming eyes”, “harmful eyes”, “poisonous eyes”, “suspicious eyes”, and “damaging eyes”. They also referred to such eyes simply as being “sharp”, “strong”, “hard”, “angry”, “special”, “strange”, or “wicked”.

Bewitchment by an evil eye was often strongly intertwined with other manners of bewitching, especially praising. Alan Dundes even understood both modes of bewitching as together forming an evil eye “belief complex” (cf. 1981: 258). However, while praise can hardly be conceived as an independent process, without being accompanied by looking at the subject on the part of the person who praises, the evil eye can be effective even when not accompanied by the praise, and is indeed not necessarily always accompanied by it.

Evil eye has sometimes been studied as a separate concept (together with the countermeasures typical only of this type of bewitchment), that is distinguished from the context of witchcraft, yet there seems to be no definite grounds to delineate between accusations of witchcraft and those of evil eye. As de Blécourt argues, “[w]ithin the context of European witchcraft (...) the isolation and reification of the evil eye is untenable, a result of an outsider’s approach” (1999: 193; cf. also Jenkins 1991: 307; Perdiguero 2004: 140). Indeed, when asked about witchcraft, people would tell narratives about evil eye in the same breath as narratives about other types of bewitchment. Our interlocutors sometimes even explicitly called people believed to have the evil eye “witches”, or referred to their “bewitchments”:

I3: *She was bewitching something, the one from that house. (...) She shouldn’t see a cow. As soon as she saw it, it would give no more milk. (125)*

I: *This other woman, people were also saying that she was a witch, but she wasn’t. I was on good terms with her. And she came and said: No one shows me a pig, no one shows me a swine. Little pigs, right? No one shows.*

F: *Why not?*

I: *[Because they thought] that she was a witch, that she would bewitch, that it wouldn’t grow or something, right? Then I brought her pigs home. I bought those pigs and brought them to her home. I didn’t have that belief, I didn’t. (79)*

Envy (jealousy), the emotion that was considered crucial in the accusations of bewitchment in our region, also played the most significant role in the accusations of the evil eye,¹⁸ and our narrators sometimes explicitly emphasised the connection between envy and the evil eye:

I think ... that the harmful eyes, when they came to see the small child—and they said how the child cried after and didn’t sleep for the whole night—[that] they were envious when the child was beautiful. This is what I heard. This is how they were doing it, this way. (33)

Moreover, the accusation of bewitchment by an evil eye is often grounded in the same violation of the rule of proximity and spatial behaviour that often underlies witchcraft accusations, which additionally confirms that bewitchment by evil eye cannot be distinguished from the context of witchcraft. Uninvited arrival and entry into a house or byre, accompanied by a quick, brief looking, but also an intense, fixed gaze,

seems to be the way of looking that was especially feared. A violation of the rule of proximity is evident from the following narratives:

I1: They said that some people have such eyes that ... when they see a small child that is still in nappies and they come to see it So they used to have this custom that ... when there was a small child in the house and a neighbour or a stranger came, [they said to them]: Let you sit for a while so that you won't take the sleep away from the child. That otherwise it wouldn't want to sleep. This is what they used to say. And then one such woman came ... she came and just opened the door and just briefly looked around ... and the child woke up and the mother had no peace with the child for the whole night long ... That it started to cry and didn't eat anything and it got such runs that only green went out of it. (15)

And some women they suspected that they were, that they were ...—when in the old days they went around visiting their neighbours to see how they're doing, in the byre, right?—and these women looked inside, and then left, and after a few days they noticed that the pigs didn't want to eat anymore, it didn't work ... (33)

However, even though there are clearly no grounds for excluding narratives about the evil eye from the general context of witchcraft, there is indeed a characteristic feature of this particular mode of bewitching: a much more tolerant attitude of people towards those who were believed to possess the evil eye in comparison with their attitude towards witches blamed for other manners of bewitchments. Possessors of the evil eye were not always ascribed a conscious intent to harm others and were not always accused of being envious of their co-villagers. This tolerant attitude and readiness to accept the involuntariness and inadvertence of their bewitchment was a trait that researchers also came across elsewhere (Spooner 1970: 311; Cutileiro 1971: 274; Dundes 1981: 259; Lawrence 1988: 131; Jenkins 1991: 307; Kroepej and Dapit 2006: 39).¹⁹

I: They said that he must not see anything, because he's got harmful eyes— young people for instance, and young animals, like small pigs. Those who have harmful eyes must not see that—[otherwise] it doesn't grow, right? But people know how to hide these from them. They don't let such a person into the house. It is not their fault that they have harmful eyes. This is how it was said.

F: They wouldn't harm on purpose?

I: No, no, no, no. (87)

F: Do these people harm on purpose?

I1: Oh, no, no, they simply are like this. Not everybody has such a look, right? (122)

It is interesting to note that some people even openly admitted to having the evil eye—an acknowledgement that in the context of witchcraft occurred only in regard to this particular mode of bewitching—and even warned against being showed the livestock and pigs, obviously reckoning with the general tolerance towards the possessors of the evil eye. Such an open acknowledgment, however, may have been an attempt to avoid an accusation of bewitchment, should anything go wrong with the livestock after they had seen it, and was most probably based on previous experience(s) of being accused of bewitchment (cf. inf. 148, p. 146). While ethnographic records in some places show that there were rituals available to people with the evil eye in order to get rid of it (Blum and Blum 1965: 40, 186, in de Blécourt 1999: 194; de Pina-Cabral 1986: 182), no such option was available in our region, so people did not even need to fear being accused of not having performed the necessary procedures to prevent the harmful consequences of their look.

II: Well, I don't know, women used to know this ..., one said that when the other came to the house this and this happened. And then other women didn't let her in to see young animals any more.

F: Were such women called witches or what were they called?

II: Well, they had such eyes.

F: Were they aware that they had such eyes? Did they harm on purpose?

II: No, no, it was not on purpose. Occasionally they talked among themselves that a certain woman mustn't see anything young ...

F: But were they aware that they had such eyes?

II: Yes, they were, and they said: Go away, I shouldn't look at that! (148)

People possessing the evil eye were thus not necessarily blamed for (intentionally) acting out of envy or malice. Instead, they were often regarded as innocent “victims” of being born this way, of having bewitching eyes due to their particular body features or due to the violation of a taboo done by their mother, and their harmful power seems not to have necessarily weakened their position in the community (cf. Jenkins 1991: 309). While some cultures typically ascribe the evil eye to those whose eyes are of certain colour (usually different from the prevalent eye colour of the population) or to cross-eyed people (cf. Lykiardopoulos 1981: 223; Jenkins 1991: 308), no particular eye colour or specific feature was ever mentioned in relation with the evil eye in our region. In our region, the characteristic facial feature of those having the evil eye was occasionally, but

very seldom, thought to be eyebrows that meet—a feature that is often characteristic of witches in Slavic folklore (Tolstaja 1998a: 142):

How could I say, those people whose eyebrows meet—none of you [pointing to the students, laughs] have such—if such a person came to the house and had eyebrows that met, if such a person looked at the child, it got a headache, or if they looked at the piglets, they didn't grow any more. (130)

One narrator also stated that the evil eye was a consequence of renewed breastfeeding after a child had already been weaned²⁰ (cf. Dundes 1981: 264, 270–272; Róheim 1981: 216; Stein 1981: 228–232).

II: There was one neighbour who shouldn't see a young animal. A pig too she shouldn't see. If she saw the animals, every animal died. She said it herself.

F: She said it herself?

II: It was she who didn't want to come closer. It sufficed that she came once. She saw our child and was amazed by it. It was such a beautiful baby, indeed. Our boy is terribly handsome! And I said to her mother: Your Jana has spelling eyes. [She:] But how? Why? I said: I must always drown spells.²¹ Why is the child spellbound [whenever she comes]? He starts to roll his eyes and shake.

F: Was she evil?

II: No, she just had such eyes. This happens when a mother weans a child and later on takes pity on it and starts breastfeeding it again. Such a child gets spelling eyes.

F: Was it true in this case?

II: Yes, she said: This might have been [because] I started to breastfeed her again. I tried to wean her but the baby wanted to suckle and I put her back to the breasts. This is hard, this shouldn't be done! (148)

Relying on the general tolerance towards people with evil eye, the mother's confirmation of renewed breastfeeding may have been just a strategy to prevent her daughter's accusation of witchcraft—when one had no other option than to choose between the two types of accusations, the admission of having the evil eye was certainly the better option.

The most generally acknowledged consequences of bewitchment by an evil eye for people were illness, loss of appetite, excessive yawning, hiccoughs, vomiting, fever, headache, and death; for livestock, it was wasting away, cow's milk drying up; plants and trees withering and dying; buildings cracking or bursting, and agricultural equipment malfunctioning (Dundes 1981: 258; Lykiardopoulos 1981:

225; Woodburne 1981: 56; Jenkins 1991: 309; de Blécourt 1999: 192–197). In our region, it was particularly small children and (young) animals that were believed to be affected by the evil eye, the usual consequences being insomnia, inconsolable crying, digestion problems, bellyache, and loss of appetite.

I remember down here ... for instance, there was a woman in the village who had such strange eyes, really such a strange look, that people hid babies from her, because if she came to the child and look at it, they said that it cried for two, three days in a row, they couldn't console it. They said that she had such eyes ... I mean everybody ..., my mother even remembers it nowadays. Everybody said that when she came, it was better that you hid the child (...) She had such a look, literally heavy look, sharp, right? It is possible, though, that I was influenced by my parents when I heard them speaking about her and I automatically got scared when I looked at her ... [laugh] (24)

People didn't want anyone to look at the child while it was still young, until it was about five months old (...) They said it was not good. That not everybody has eyes for that. The child suffers then. It writhes in pain ... (65)

F: *What if someone, like you said, had such a gaze that the animals started to decline, right? Was there anything you could do about it, if they looked at the livestock?*

I1: *Well, not a whole lot, since [they were] such small pigs, no, if they saw someone like that, they just spun around. 'Cause they are not allowed, so they say, to see them.*

F: *What could you do to help them?*

I1: *Well, nothing.*

I2: *So such a person should not see young farm animals, otherwise the animals weren't okay, they would suffer.*

F: *But was there nothing left to do, if someone did that?*

I2: *Yeah, how, how are you gonna help them? You can't! (63)*

I2: *My mother said that once she went to K. and when she came back, that woman said [to her]: You, Neža! What is it, Marija?—You have such beautiful pigs, I saw them through the boards. (...) I looked inside, she said, and they are so beautiful! And my mother immediately thought that this would not be okay. And [it was] true! The pigs were each sitting in their corner, barking. (...) And they were not eating. They were barking, but not eating. Then they said that there was something in that woman. (146)*

They also said that animals, yeah ... that if [someone] has the evil eye, that they should not look at the calves but ... None of this is true. (15)

Apart from preventing children and young animals to be looked at, the only preventive measure against the evil eye known in our region was asking a visitor to sit for a while which may have been directed at preventing a brief, swift look of the visitor that was particularly feared (cf. inf. 15, p. 144). No other measures, such as rituals, apotropaic gestures, for instance the fig-gesture,²² or amulets (cf. Dundes 1981: 258–259, 264, 289; Rey-Henningsen 1994: 206–207; Apo 1998: 83; Stark-Arola 1998a: 122, 171; de Blécourt 1999: 194; Magliocco 2004: 161; Perdiguero 2004: 141) were known or practiced in our region in order to prevent harm from the evil eye.

Looking through a Sleeve

The power of looking was closely linked to some other modes of bewitching which the narrators, however, did not explicitly ascribe to the evil eye, for instance, the technique of looking through a sleeve. Looking through a sleeve at a pig while it was being slaughtered during the annual slaughter was believed to prevent the pig from dying. This manner of bewitching seems to specifically imply an intentional prolonged stare, a fixed gaze, which was particularly feared (cf. Lawrence 1988: 125). Lawrence, discussing the menstruation taboo during annual pig slaughter in Vila Branca, Portugal, and the fear of menstruating women who could spoil the sausage preparation by their presence, explains the taboo on their presence precisely by the power of fixed gaze: “The feature characterising both the evil eye and the menstrual taboo is belief in the powerful influence of fixed gaze: Whatever harm is thought to be communicated is transmitted through the eyes” (Lawrence 1988: 130–131).

While looking is a necessary precondition of this mode of bewitching, its power was additionally reinforced by looking *through* (something).

Yes, that's what they said about her, that it happened to many when they slaughtered pigs. That she looked through a sleeve and the pig wouldn't die. (42)

I1: *And my aunt also said that a certain person looked at it [a pig] through a sleeve and that if one looks through a sleeve the animal doesn't die!*

F: *If you look through a sleeve?*

I2: *Yes, you have to look like this, right? [showing, laughing]*

- I1: *And then Darko said that he definitely must have bewitched it!*
 I2: *Or up over here ... grandmother, right?... When the chickens didn't want to eat. [She said] they were bewitched ...*
 I1: *Those are devilish witches, yes...*
 I2: *When they didn't want to, yeah ...*
 I1: *It's just ... I ... but I believe in some of it, that there is something true in this! Well, I wouldn't say it if our Darko hadn't already slaughtered pigs countless times, right ... and one year we slaughtered one there in ...*
 I2: *I know, I know.*
 I1: *Yeah, he drove a nail into its head, but it didn't want to die. (127)*

The technique of “looking through” can be observed in many variants. If a woman looked through a man’s underpants in the laundry and at the same time uttered some special words, she was believed to get more fat out of her cows than her neighbours did from theirs (Rešek 1979: 150). In the Croatian Zagorje, we recorded a narrative about a car overturning when someone looked at it through his left sleeve. In Lobar, Croatia, witches looking through the left sleeve of their coat were thought to cause the loss of the cow’s milk and to transfer other people’s wealth automatically to their own chests. They could also cause a wagon to overturn in the middle of the road or bring long-lasting troubles to people (Đorđević 1953: 54). In Vlasenica, Serbia, women who wanted to steal milk from their neighbours would straddle a fence before the dawn on St. Elijah’s Day (July 20), ride a fence, put one leg of their pants over their head, look through it, and say: A little from [name], and a lot from [name] (Risteski 2000: 61). In eastern Serbia, these kind of rituals are among the most common in love magic—if a girl wanted to seduce a boy, she had to look at him (or, more rarely, a boy had to look at the girl if trying to seduce her) through a pork snout, the ring of a dead man, a pierced mole, a trouser leg, a crown, or the shirt which she wore during her first menstruation (Mijušković 1985). In southwestern Serbia (Ibar) it was believed that a man who looked at a swarm of bees through both sleeves could not get lost, while in the western Slovakia, they believed that no one can cast a spell on their calf if they looked at it through a sleeve (Levkieskaja 2002: 174). In lower Lusatia, it was believed that if one looked through a sleeve, one could see the devil in the form of a rabbit (Gura 1997: 188). In Scottish traditional folklore looking through the hole in “fairystones”, “charm-

stones”, and “witchstones” to produce visions or the ability to see fairies (Henderson and Cowan 2001: 93), whereas in Slavic folklore “looking through” was often considered a way to see ancestors, demons, or to recognise witches—in short, seeing what is otherwise invisible to people (cf. Jasinskaja 2013: 191–192). By looking (alternatively also crawling or creeping through any kind of crack aperture, a twisted branch, a cavern in a rock, and similar), one was believed to symbolically enter the other world (cf. Kotnik 1943: 115–119; Radenković 2000: 30; Levkieskaja 2002: 174) and by doing so to acquire the powers of the otherworld which could be manipulated at will.

Looking at Animals in order to Stop Them in Their Tracks

Another manner of bewitching that features in bewitchment narratives and is possibly related to the power of looking as well, although the precise manner of its execution is not quite clear, was stopping animals in their tracks (cf. Christiansen ML 3035, The Daughter of the Witch (C1)). As the animals stopped in their tracks were often horses and oxen which otherwise never featured in bewitchment narratives in our region, this might confirm Jenkins’ observation that horses fell victim to the evil eye more commonly than to other forms of mystical aggression (1991: 309). Many of these narratives emphasise the sensitivity and capacity of animals to recognise witches. On the other hand, the act of a witch halting livestock also emphasises the power of a witch over animals.²³ Some of the narratives about magically stopping livestock and preventing them from proceeding (a calf and cows in the following cases) seem to suggest that it was precisely through looking that bewitchment was carried out, as the bewitchment ceased in the moment that the witch could no longer see the animals, which were then again able to walk.

Il: I remember her, she was an old woman, really like—hooked nose—she really looked like a witch, one tooth, a long one, peering over her mouth ... She was called Katarina ... Otherwise she was a very good-hearted woman, but everybody said she was the witch, I have no clue why. She was always willing to give anything, but they said that she had a strange look and that she could ... But one day, I witnessed that myself ... Ado was leading the cows, he wanted to see them. And the calf didn’t want to move but a step when near her house. The calf resisted with its four legs and didn’t want to move ... And nothing. Two men were pushing it, one was dragging it from the front, the other one was

pushing it from behind, but the calf didn't move, right? Then they asked her: Aunt, please, move away from the window. She was looking through it. And listen, she was probably feeling uncomfortable, but she moved away, and afterwards the calf went on. She probably said something²⁴... (30)

Well, once I was delivering firewood. I met three guys, I don't know, I didn't know 'em. And one says: How could you load so [much] on such small cows? Yeah. I said: Well, it's not far, right? They leave, and I say: Okay, let's go, right—and cows in back, instead of in front! [laughs]. When they had gone far enough away that they couldn't see me anymore, then I said: Let's go! [laughs] [And they took off as if they were] running away behind me [laughs]. Well, that (...) I had [experienced], that I can tell [you], but nothing else. (2)

Other narratives referring to this manner of bewitching, however, only focus on the consequences (livestock cannot continue to walk, cart does not move) and do not even mention the actual technique by which a witch bewitched it, and it is therefore impossible to conjecture about how exactly the bewitchment was believed to have been carried out.

Bewitching by Speaking

Praise

One manner of speaking was deemed especially malevolent and harmful: praise. Praising was generally considered a strictly forbidden behaviour in traditional communities, and the interdiction of praising was not limited to our region alone. A taboo on verbal expressions of admiration, often firmly associated with the evil eye, had been reported already in antiquity (McCartney 1981) and in the early modern period (de Blécourt 2000: 299; Roper 1996: 222), and has since been recorded in many places in Europe, for instance Germany (Kruse 1951: 15; Schöck 1978: 109), Romania (Murgoci 1981: 124–5), France (Devlin 1987: 104), Portugal (Lawrence 1988: 131), Ireland (Jenkins 1991: 3089), Finland (Stark-Arola 1998a: 118), England (Davies 1999a: 137), and the Balkans (Vukanović 2000: 20–21), to name but a few. In Slovenia, legends about bewitchments caused by praising were recorded at the end of the nineteenth century (Navratil 1894: 151).

No specific emic term for this manner of bewitchment was used by our interlocutors; narrators simply talked about “praising”. While praising, a

person necessarily looks at the object of laudation, and it is, therefore, often hard to distinguish evil eye and praise from each other, as already mentioned above.

- I: *The mother of this neighbour here ... that neighbour had a vineyard here in the vicinity. And they sometimes drove pales with cows up to the vineyard. And their cows went to drink water to their spring. And that woman who was a witch says: Oh, what beautiful cows! What beautiful udders they have, what beautiful udders! When she said this, they didn't give milk for one week.*
- F: *So, when she said what beautiful udders they had, she bewitched them?*
- I: *Yes, by saying this, and she might have also looked them in the eyes and got power over them.*
- F: *But did she look the cows in the eyes [so that they would get sick]?*
- I: *No, no. People! Owners, right? The owner who was a person, right? The one whose cows they were, right?*
- F: *[She] had to look the owners in the eyes?*
- I: *Yeah, if she looked them in the eyes, she had power [over them].²⁵ (29)*

The fact that praising by people who already had a reputation of possessing evil eyes was particularly feared, additionally confirms the link between the two manners of bewitching:

- I: *A man still lives here, under K., [he] has such eyes. I never liked it when he came. Once he said: What a beautiful calf you have! If it was not [safely] at home, it immediately got ill. Or that cow! [He said:] What udders the cow has! Here, in three days there was blood in milk. Well, he is ill now and cannot walk around anymore.*
- F: *Did he do that on purpose?*
- I: *No, they say that he has such harmful eyes.*
- F: *But he wouldn't want to harm others on purpose ...?*
- I: *No, he must have power in him. It is said that when you see something beautiful you should never praise it: How this is beautiful, and how that is beautiful! You shouldn't do that, otherwise it won't grow anymore. This is what old people used to say. (83)*

However, as mentioned above, people with the evil eye were feared even if they did not praise. The fear of praising, on the other hand, was not limited to people ascribed the evil eye but was generally feared and considered harmful for the object of admiration. The consequences of praise were considered especially devastating when the act was directed

against small children and animals, and sometimes flowers, which, as in the evil eye narratives, featured as the usual targets. Misfortunes ascribed to the consequences of praising were similar to those caused by the evil eye: bellyache, insomnia, excessive crying, fever, and even death, and in case of flowers, their withering.

II: Once we had small puppies. They were really beautiful, black. This is a holy truth! This is what I personally experienced. I was thinking to myself what could this be ... We had them in the kitchen, because it was a winter, no, such beautiful black puppies ... There came a woman. She was our neighbour. And: Oh, what beautiful puppies! How beautiful they are! She took one to her lap ... How cute they are! That woman left after a while ... and every dog was lying on the floor, crying, almost dying ...

F: Immediately after she left?

II: Immediately! (28)

II: Here they say that if you compliment some[one's] flowers ... yoy, I mean, that you go up to some woman and say: My, what lovely flowers you have, they're blooming so nicely for you! And they say that they are damaged immediately.

F: What about children, could you say anything?

II: But of course not, come on! (15)

Praising was considered an absolutely unacceptable and strictly forbidden behaviour. Those who praised aloud—usually women who were more often than men involved in social interactions that triggered opportunities to exchange praise, such as paying a visit to another woman upon the birth of a child—were immediately suspected of trying to intentionally harm the subject of admiration. To praise meant desiring the object of laudation and expressing envy of somebody else's good fortune (cf. Dundes 1981: 263, 274; Devlin 1987: 104; Lawrence 1988: 131; Briggs 2002: 66), a wish to take what is being admired from the subject of admiration and seize it for oneself, as explicitly stated by the narrator below:

Somebody, for instance, praised. Oh, how you have this beautiful and how you have that beautiful! And they didn't praise because they really wanted to praise. They praised because they were envious of them ... (91)

F: What about if someone praised? What would happen?

II: In this case they would come hypocritically. They would bring a sprout of evil with them. (108)

The correct code of behaviour, therefore, allowed no admiration, and no subsequent “correction” helped. In some other places in Slovenia, an immediate countermeasure on behalf of the one who transgressed the rules of correct behaviour by praising could be taken should they wish to prevent the harmful consequences of their act on the victim. Thus one could immediately afterwards utter a phrase like “God bless it” (Navratil 1894: 151), or else a wish that the praise would not hurt the object of admiration (Cvetek 1993: 143). In our region, however, no such subsequent countermeasures were available to those violating the taboo of praising. One’s positive intention had to be proved by criticising the child or the animal one was looking at, labelling them ugly, dirty, or bad. In addition, one was expected at the same time to spit around oneself—spitting also being a well-known *apotropaion* against the evil eye (cf. also Allen Donaldson 1981: 71; Murgoci 1981: 125; Róheim 1981: 217; Scheck 1981: 199)—which again links bewitching by the evil eye and bewitching by praise.

Threats

Another manner of speaking, likewise feared for causing misfortune, was direct and overt threatening. This, however, only rarely appeared (loosely) related to bewitchment in our region (cf. inf. 96, p. 124, 125; inf. 60, p. 135; inf. 167, p. 182–183). In the few times that we recorded an account on misfortune directly following the threat, it was often uttered by beggars (cf. inf. 107, p. 191):

I: One man was also like this ... I mean, my mother didn't have time to give him something to drink ... we were just driving the hay home ... not a single cart made it without being overthrown ... my mother didn't have time to give him anything to drink ... and that man caused every cart for bringing the feed home ... every single one was overthrown. Then he said: All right, if you have no time, you shall have time!, he said to my mother. This was his reply. Good Lord, not one cart full of hay made it home safely ... every one was overthrown. There where it was the flattest, there they were overthrown! [angrily]

F: And how did he do that?

I: How could I know! He said: You have no time to pour me wine, so that I could drink a cup ... He was from Z., from Croatia. (16)

Bewitching by Touching

The above narrative about the puppies which fell ill immediately after being praised by the neighbour (cf. inf. 28, p. 153) continues with an

additional detail: the effects were most grave for the dog that the woman not only praised, but also took in her lap. Here an additional mode of bodily manner of bewitching, intertwined with speaking and looking, can be recognised: bewitchment can also work through touching. Again, no special term was used in our region for this specific mode of bewitchment. However, the act of touching, like that of the evil eye, clearly reflects the transgression of proximity: a person was not allowed to touch an animal belonging to another person—if they did and the animal subsequently got ill, the illness was immediately ascribed to their touch. In only one narrative is touching also understood as causing the destruction of the wheat.

My mother told me this. There were some women up here to who you ought not to show the livestock in the byre. They said that they stroked the cows with their hand from the tail up and there was no more luck with that cow, she died soon afterwards. (104)

- I: *If that woman only stroked the cow, she gave no more milk [loudly]...*
 F: *After stroking her?*
 I: *She just stroked her, this is how she did it [showing on the table] and the cow gave no more milk.*
 F: *This was your neighbour?*
 I: *Yes. She is gone now. [smiles] (16)*

There were such women when they went somewhere, they drew with their hand over the wheat and nothing grew. (123)

This mode of bewitching was seldom mentioned and played only a negligible part in the accusations of bewitchment in our region compared to that of evil eye and praise, yet it is not unknown in other parts of Slovenia (Rešek 1995: 247) and Europe (Schöck 1978: 109; Devlin 1987: 103; Schiffmann 1987: 157; Briggs 2002: 22; Davies 2004: 114; de Blécourt 2013: 377). The scarcity of this type of bewitchment is perhaps due to somewhat limited opportunities for people to touch their neighbours' livestock as the livestock was often kept indoors.

Bewitching by Performing Magic Practices

In addition to bewitchment induced through (mostly) bodily emanations of power, magic practices were believed to be another manner of bewitching a person or their property. In this chapter, I shall discuss all those modes of bewitching that presuppose the carrying out of some sort of

practice, no matter whether it is considered possible or not when judged from outside the witchcraft discourse.

Giving a Gift

Bewitching by giving a gift, usually of food, was very seldom encountered in our region and it is not quite clear exactly how this was supposed to work. As mentioned earlier, we have seen that the gift of a hen was rejected when it was offered by a neighbour who was considered a witch (cf. inf. 166, p. 45–47), but narratives referring to a gift as a mode of bewitching were extremely rare in the region. This manner was more often reported elsewhere in Europe, though: in nineteenth-century France any unusual gift, or a gift that one received just before a crisis occurred, was suspicious (and its link to misfortune was often additionally confirmed by a fortune-teller) (Devlin 1987: 104–105). A narrator from Poland assured the researcher that he would never take any food from any person with the reputation of a witch as they could bewitch him by putting spell on it (Schiffmann 1987: 156). In southwestern Germany, gifts given by witches were believed to cause pain, illness, and similar. In general, gifts were feared and could only be freely given during transitional events, otherwise, they had to be reciprocated (de Blécourt 1999: 180). Yet even at the occasion of a transitional event, such as Communion (cf. inf. 166, p. 45–47), they were not accepted if a person had already been sure about the bewitching activity of the donor.

- I: *The elections were being held and my son drove me and she [the neighbour] said if she could go with us, that she would want to visit a neighbour there, right? And he said she could. I put that milk [that the neighbour gave her] there and cooked it ... I felt so sick! I didn't eat it any more, instead I gave it to the cat ... The cat died. And she brought it again. I was disgusted and I said: I don't want it anymore! And I poured that milk away.*
- F: *Who brought you milk?*
- I: *The neighbour.*
- F: *Which one?*
- I: *I won't tell, otherwise they would know. She said: I made an apple strudel. I said I didn't want it. Why not? Perhaps the cheese [in it] was the same ... And then later she brought wine. I was hoeing and she didn't see me. She went to look, and it was locked, she was shaking the door, nothing, then she noticed me and brought that wine down. She said: Are you thirsty when you are hoeing? I said: No, I am not, I have my drink when I am thirsty. [She:] Drink! Are you angry with me? she said. And I said: Take*

- away your wine, since you gave me that milk! And then she left with that ... Were she not evil, she wouldn't have brought that milk, that poison ...*
- F: *Does she still bring you anything?*
- I: *Now she doesn't bring anything anymore. (51)*

Burying and Placing Objects

The burying of various objects in the fields, beneath the thresholds of the byres and pigsties, into the byres and pigsties, more rarely also beneath the threshold or beams of a house, or at crossroads, in forests and vineyards, was the best-known and by far the most often assumed bewitching technique in our region. The typical comment of the narrators when finding buried objects (“This was done”) clearly indicates that people understood them as a proof of bewitchment. The anticipated consequences of the buried items included chickens and hens being unable to hatch or to die, death and disease of livestock, and more rarely also poor harvests, and disputes in a family or among members of the village community. The damage sometimes correlated with the place where the object was placed—if one wanted to do harm to the cows, they would bury the object in the byre, if to pigs, in the pigsty, and so on, but the correspondence was not always quite precise.

The practice of burying bewitching objects on a neighbour's property was not only known in our region; it is well known in other parts of Slovenia as well. A folklorist recording narratives in Styria in the nineteenth century wrote: “If you bury bones in someone's field or garden, you steal their profit, and often accusations and hatred are born of such suspicions, which even happened in a village in Styria in the most recent era” (Pajek 1884: 27). In Bohinj, a place in the northwestern part of Slovenia, burying bones and claws beneath the threshold or in the manure pile of a neighbour was a common practice performed in order to do them harm (Cvetek 1993: 142, 149) and the same was recorded in southeastern Slovenia (Krejan 1999: 83; Primc 1997: 207; Kastelic and Primc 2001: 58). In Podpeca in northern Slovenia, near the Austrian border, people who wanted to inflict harm on others could bury a human bone under their threshold (Repanšek 1995: 211).

This technique was occasionally mentioned in other places in Europe: in Germany, burying bread and bones was supposed to cause harmful consequences (Kruse 1951: 15, 25), and buried eggs were believed to cause hail (Wieser-Aall 1987: 1874). In northwestern France, witches

were sometimes believed to bury toads in front of others' houses or byres (Favret-Saada 1980: 135). In Ireland, quarters of a cow were to be buried at each corner of a neighbour's field in order to destroy their crop, and eggs could be secreted around the property to destroy the cows (Jenkins 1991: 313).²⁶ Éva Pócs in her recent fieldwork in the old county of Csík in Romania, inhabited by Roman Catholic Hungarians, also recorded narratives about people creeping into other people's property (courtyard, house) in order to place bewitching objects there (2004: 176–177). The objects typically arousing suspicion of having been intentionally buried to cause harm in our region were most commonly eggs²⁷:

F: *What about eggs, have you ever found any?*

I: *Yes, in the field.*

F: *And what did this mean?*

I: *I would find five or six of them. Yes ... it will not be a good harvest. And I found ... when in the old days we still used cattle for ploughing ... we had only cows. We had two or three cows in one yoke ... we have very good soil here, fertile and lush ... and I found, a lot of times ... down there, way out in that field ... I would find five or six eggs.*

F: *And who put them there?*

I: *That it was ... probably witchcraft, that we wouldn't get along in our marriage, while from others I heard it was so that the harvest would be bad. One time when my husband and I were ploughing potatoes, I found six eggs this deep ... [indicates ca. twenty to twenty-five centimetres] ... six eggs, would you believe it?! I said: Thank God, the potatoes are so beautiful, even though there were eggs buried in there. Buried, I said. But it didn't do the witch any good at all. And I never saw any after that ... I never found any more eggs. Yeah. That was ... all that was true. I myself experienced this. (...) And at the time I said: Thank God the potatoes are nice despite everything, I said this when that [woman] who I suspected, could hear ... I suspected that she was envious when we ... We worked hard, and put in a lot of barn manure as fertiliser. In those days there was no artificial fertiliser. And it was a good harvest, [and she was] envious, you know. Later, after, like I said ... I never found any more [eggs]. (119)*

II: *Well, [eggs] were harmful. This was the basic notion. Witch's eggs are harmful because they were probably placed with the intent to do harm to somebody. (108)*

I: *Even one kilometre away from home, when we were working on the field, we found buried eggs.*

F: *And did you have misfortune then?*

- I: *Nothing good was going on.*
 F: *So it did have effect?*
 I: *It must have had.*
 F: *Was it the crops?*
 I: *Hmmm ... in the house it was not alright either.*
 F: *And how long did it last?*
 I: *It lasted about five years.*
 F: *Five years from the moment you found the egg?*
 I: *Yes, it lasted for about five years when everything went wrong. And we were finding those eggs all the time. Now, [we don't find them] anymore. Now maybe that person that was burying them has gone? (118)*
- F: *Have you ever heard, Ma'am, of anybody burying eggs around here?*
 I: *[laughs] That's, that's, that's true. That's ... there was one neighbour ... up there, he said that his wife went up there, and down here they had a weekend house, and they were digging in the garden, right, and they found eggs ... And where did these eggs come from, how did they get here, did a chicken stick them in the ground? Where did these eggs come from? I don't know. Does someone want ... to do me harm or something?*
 F: *What would they want to do harm?*
 I: *Well ... they say, that it won't thrive, it doesn't grow ... right ... what they had there. (16)*
- I: *Dad told me a lot about eggs, that they bury them at the crossroads.*
 F: *Why at the crossroads?*
 I: *I don't know ... I never thought about why. Just that where there are crossroads, people used to bury eggs, and that when you passed by, that you would have some sort of misfortune or something ... Those were superstitions ... Then, what do I know, they also buried eggs if they wanted to do something evil to someone, if one neighbour [wanted to do harm to] another, then they would bury eggs under the pigsty, and then their hens would die or their pigs or something like that ... (23)*

If it was a rotten egg that was buried, as told by some narrators—although, in fact, every egg rots after it is buried in the ground for a while—a possible clue to the understanding of the underlying logic of the practice lies in the law of similarity: just as eggs rot, so will the crops, the building (and, metaphorically speaking, the relationships of the people living in it), or the domestic animals that cross the place where the egg is being buried.

And then they also knew to place eggs. Rotten eggs. For instance, if someone built a house, and someone placed eggs on the beams. Such sick, rotten eggs, right, 'cause no hen could hatch them up there, nor bird, and this was done

there, in order to bring misfortune on the house, this is done by enemies, right? And also, for instance, I just remembered, if you want to do harm to someone, and you can't do it any other way, you bury rotten eggs in their field, so that their field wouldn't grow anymore, right? (5)

To a lesser extent, bones featured as buried bewitching objects too—these were usually suggested as the source of misfortunes also by the unwitchers.

Devils, yeah, at home I dug out and built new pigsties, and then under the troughs in there, where they [the pigs] are fed, well, I found bones in there. (2) Yeah, they buried all sorts of things. If you walked over them, then you would be unlucky.

They would put bones in the barn ... they had some kind of belief. They bewitched ... [so that] the pigs would die ... and what do I know ... That's what they said, that they were witches. (58)

II: Oh, my, bones! Wait, you have to go to our neighbour there. Here all our pigs died. The whole shoulder piece was (...) buried, my mother told me this. (...) Everything died.

F: And when did you find it?

II: Who would know that now?

F: Did you check after the cows died?

II: Yes, after they had died. Then they found the shoulder. (28)

Occasionally other objects too, such as buried herbs, bread, dead chickens, bacon, inverted pots, sticks wrapped with ribbons, pig hairs, knives, pigs' tails, or toads, were recognised as bewitching items, yet all these objects were mentioned only rarely—eggs, and to a lesser extent bones, by all means far predominated in the region.

Various objects, like roots, crosses made of twigs, thread, pieces of fabric, umbrellas, and ashes (or possibly fire) *placed*, that is not buried in the ground, also featured as bewitching objects that were believed to have harmful consequences if they were being picked up or stepped upon, but such narratives were much rarer than those about buried items. Unlike buried objects, these usually had no influence on the prosperity of the household, but were mostly targeted at individuals' health: if a man lifted an umbrella allegedly placed on the path by his female neighbour, that is, a witch who had in vain tried to seduce him, he would die; a woman who

started to wind up thread that was strewn over a meadow fell ill and has been constantly suffering from repeated illnesses for the last 50 years (cf. inf. 53, p. 126); a boy who picked up pieces of cloth lying on the ground under a tree has since stopped working and shut himself away (cf. inf. 53, p. 204):

- I: *Yes, and they also placed umbrellas.*
 F: *Umbrellas?*
 I: *Umbrellas. Up here there is a house ... When she [the neighbour] came to our path, there where we were walking, she placed an umbrella [for my grandson to pick up] when he was taking milk [to the collector of milk in the village]. She was also taking milk there. She poured it and ran back. And he was a curious young boy and he followed her and saw that she passed near the umbrella and did not pick it up. No.*
 F: *The umbrella?*
 I: *She did not pick up the umbrella. (...) He wanted to pick it up, he said. Jesus, what was that? He said he wanted to pick up the umbrella but it was as if something pushed him back. Yes, he had such a feeling as if something pushed him back. Ooooh, what was that? That was good, God protected someone from picking that up. Those human bones, they were grinding them and when you would open the umbrella that powder would fall over you and you would die in a year. And he told her that an umbrella was lying there. She brought it up there for him to pick it up. And it was not raining. (...) And I asked the fortune-teller what to do with it and she said one should burn it at the crossroads.*
 F: *And if the witch comes by?*
 I: *You shouldn't talk to her. (29)*

When a person stepped on the object, this usually resulted in the obstruction of their motor ability—sudden temporary paralysis, an inability to walk, with or without any visible physical signs, was believed to be a typical consequence in such a case:

- II: *A relative, yes, my mother's aunt, she had a foot like this [shows]: her toes and heel were drawn together. She said that, when I was still a child, she stepped over something that was placed crosswise on the path. As soon as she stepped over that, something in her foot was drawn together, it hurt and she fell unconscious. Well, she stood up after a while, but she couldn't feel her foot anymore, the foot got stiff and it was still drawing her heel and toes together. Well, they said afterwards that it was done.*

F: *Who did it?*

II: *That it was witches who could bewitch this. She didn't know who exactly and how, this is all she knew. (41)*

I: *One was such a witch. Yes, one Ana K.*

F: *What did she do?*

I: *Some bewitchments.*

F: *Did she do harm to animals?*

I: *Sure, but to people too.*

F: *How?*

I: *They couldn't walk, they couldn't walk. When they stepped over that, those ashes or fire, they couldn't walk any more.*

F: *Do you know anybody to whom this happened?*

I: *Well, no, everybody is dead now.*

F: *But back then, did you know of anyone?*

I: *Not really, I heard about them, but I did not know them personally. I was still young. (26)*

Gathering Dew

Gathering dew from the neighbours' fields by dragging sheets, afterwards wrung out at the witch's home, was a well-known practice in Europe, allegedly aimed at stealing the profit (yield) in crops (sometimes milk) from the neighbours. While we only recorded a few narratives relating this particular practice, Slovenian folklore records and newspaper reports from the middle of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century testify that this used to be a widespread mode of bewitching. The practice has not changed much since the middle of the nineteenth century when it was first described, except that in our region, the aim of the practice is not stealing milk from other neighbours but exclusively taking the yield of their crops: "Before sunset on the Pentecost²⁸ and on the first Sunday after the new moon the witches drag black sheets over other people's boundaries and pastures so long that the sheets get totally wet from the dew. The witches then wring the dew and sprinkle it onto the grass of their own cows, which causes that not only do they get extraordinary profit from their own cows but also everything from other cows that grazed there where they dragged sheets" (R.R. 1852: 93–95, in SAZU Archives; Pajek 1884: 5, 27; cf. Slekovec 1885: 572–574, II; *Slovenski narod* XXXV, 1902, no. 112, 17 May). The practice has also been described in various twentieth-century folklore collections but usually in the form of a "statement of

belief” about what people thought one should do in order to steal profit from their neighbour, or else, in the form of a summarised legend (cf. Kelemina 1997: 88–89; Kuret 1989/I: 339–340; Dolšek 2000: 81; Repanšek 1995: 210; Rešek 1995: 233).

Folklore from other parts of Europe points to the same practice. On Rathlin Island in Ireland, legends tell of witches taking the milk of their neighbours’ cows by gathering dew before sunrise on Mayday morning and saying: “Come all to me, come all to me!” (Ballard 1991: 74–75). Taking milk (“profit”) from neighbours by gathering dew was also known elsewhere in Ireland; another way of gathering dew was by dragging a rope woven on Mayday eve from the mane of stallion without a single white hair, through the fields (Jenkins 1991: 310–311). There are similar records from Russia, although there the practice is put into a different time context: witches were said to gather dew by dragging towels over the grass of others’ property, from which milk was subsequently wrung before dawn on St John’s day (Tokarev 1957: 28–29). Lithuanian legends likewise tell of women dragging a shawl over the ground saying: one half for me, one half for me! which resulted in depriving others of their share of milk (Būgienė 2011: 99–100).

In spite of abundant data on the technique, especially in various collections of folklore, it is usually not clear whether it is a matter of stories or whether it refers to an actual carrying out of a practice. Jenkins writes that the method of profit stealing by gathering dew was a matter of “strong belief” in Ireland, and refers to “folktales” that elaborate on the theme (1991: 310). The usual impression from the recorded data is that the technique was solely a matter of legend, yet although it seems reasonable to assume that the practice of dragging sheets over the dew declined while the topic continued to linger in the form of legends, that is in folklore, the folklorists reporting on the practice in the form of a “statement of belief” or a fabulate might have been, in some cases at least, too hasty in assuming that this was “merely” a legend and not an actual practice. In our region, at least some of the narratives seem to suggest an actual performance of practice, carried out by concrete women, yet other narrators seem to have recounted fabulates. The fact that not all narratives have been told by the victims’ perspective and that occasionally people did not even know how to interpret the practice (cf. the interview below), or did not believe in its effect, seems to additionally suggest that the practice may have been indeed carried out, and not only circulated as the topic of stories:

I2: *Yes, and exactly that woman [who had a reputation of a witch] was also blamed that on the Pentecost Monday she dragged sheets over their neighbours' wheat, that she took, how could I say, yield from them. That she took the yield of it.*

F: *Was that true?*

I2: *It was true that she dragged the sheets, they saw her, but nobody knew how this worked. She explained that she did this for her health, those sheets, that dew I mean, that she took it for her own health. But she certainly didn't tell the truth why she did this, did she? (105)*

I1: *Otherwise they also used to do witchcraft on Pentecost Monday. Up here, in the vicinity, there was a woman, a widow, and she fastened an apron around her waist and ran around Peter's wheat to take the yield, you know, she would take their profit, so that they wouldn't have any profit from the wheat, while she would. And that little that she got, she wrung into the chest. But that didn't help, that was witchcraft, it was nothing. (53)*

They said that this one was a witch, and that on Christmas, my mother's mom said (...) Now, look, she had all these things from a coffin, a chalice and everything, and she took a canvas cover and everything, well, how should I put it, she dragged everything to herself and so she was dragging that canvas. She [the grandmother] said: Now look how she is going to do it. Well, and she did that and that woman [the neighbour] immediately died.²⁹ (...) And she dragged with that on Christmas and put everything together, and when it was midnight she went with that canvas cover or sheet and took all the crops from others to herself. (70)

And then on the Pentecost Sunday, the one who is a witch has to go early in the morning and drag that sheet over the neighbour's field until it is wet, you know, from the dew, and then she has to go to her field and wring it out. Then the wheat grows there whereas it doesn't [grow] in the other field. I believe this (...) (57)

Magical Milking

In our region, the result of gathering dew does not overlap with that of magical milking, whereas elsewhere in Europe, the practice was often aimed at acquiring milk. The practice of gathering dew in our region was aimed solely at acquiring the profit from crops, while getting extra milk was achieved by various modes of magical milking. The focus on magical milking in the narratives was not necessarily on the loss, damage, or harm of others, as was typical of the narratives about bodily manners of bewitching. Instead, the interest of these narratives is usually in the practice as

such and/or in the witch's possession of greater quantities of profit than expected given her circumstances. The narratives in our region describe two main manners of witches' magical milking;³⁰ one is magical milking of (usually) an elongated object, like a rope, an axe handle, chain, i.e. something vaguely resembling an udder, in one's own byre—and in this way dragging milk from other people's cows. Another manner of a witch's magically milking other people's cows is sucking them in the form of a toad or with a toad's assistance.

Magical milking of an object is a widespread motif in Slovenian folklore; witches in Slovenian legends acquire milk from others by milking an axe handle (cf. 124, p. 93), a rope, a chain, a knife, knitting needles, stabbed in the wall or a beam, clematis and similar (Pajek 1884: 27; Dolenc 1977: 179; 2000: 52; Dražumerič and Terseglav 1987: 229; Piko 1996: 89; Primc 1997: 203; Glasenčnik 1998: 100; Gričnik 1998: 118; Cevc 1999: 95, 129–132, 169, 277; Kastelic and Primc 2001: 57; Tomšič 1989: 28). This manner of magical milking is known in some other parts of Europe too, for instance in Germany (cf. Kruse 1951: 16), Norway (Grambo 1970: 267; Alver and Selberg 1987: 31), Sweden (af Klintberg 2010: 262, M 135; 285, N 45), and Poland (Schiffmann 1987: 151).

II: Up near S., close to our vineyard, there was one such woman. That one really knew, who knows what! When you met that woman she never went otherwise than with her hands like this [shows them turned backwards]. That long skirt to the ground and her hands like this. And she lacked [milk]... she took it, but it was not like she carried it away, she could do so that it grew here but then came to her [sigh]. That one was a real one! That one was a real one! And my grandmother told me that she was in her house—that old house is still there, totally tiny, covered with straw, who knows how old it is ...—and that she fastened the ropes around the beams and milked. And she once brought it to a wedding ... she prepared plenty of cheese and everything and brought that to the wedding ... as one was supposed to do. And when women got food ready for the wedding, they put everything together, they put everything on the table, and rolled out the dough and were just about to put that [cheese] on [the dough], [when] everything went missing from the pots. And that was true. (25)

F: And what did witches do? Did they do any harm?

I: Yes, they did harm, and evil. My stepfather told me, when he was still at home, when he was a young boy, and his mother told him—they had no milk as their cow was with a calf—to go to the neighbour to get some milk. And he went there where the woman was a witch. [And she said] that

momentarily she had none but let him wait a minute. And she took a pot and went into the byre and the boy followed her after a while and she was milking on a rope.

F: *A rope?*

I: *On a rope! Then the other neighbour had no milk. (29)*

And there was another woman [laughs]. She was diligent, very diligent. And she made herself all sorts of things. She had a cow and she always had cheese, butter and all that. And she was also accused of milking others' cows. And that when she went to milk, she had some chain with her and that she threw it into the corner of [the byre of] the woman from whom she took the milk. (121)

Another manner of magical milking frequently ascribed to witches in our region was their transformation into a toad or their sending of a toad in order to suck others' cows' milk. While the narratives about the first mode of stealing milk usually focused on the technique of milking as well as on the consequences of the witch's action—the larger quantity of milk that the witch possesses in relation to the number of cows she owns—the focus of this type of narratives lies usually on the encounter with the witchtoad and its destruction. The toad's intent to suck milk is thus often only anticipated and witch's theft prevented in time, before it takes place (see Chap. 5).

F: *Do you know anything about, for instance, sending a toad into the house?*

I: *That one, yeah. That one, when I had an old house here, that one, yeah, that devil was going around but at that time I didn't know [why] there was no luck.*

F: *How do you mean? What happened exactly?*

I: *Yeah, the first thing I did was that I stuck it with a pitchfork, you know how pitchforks are, metal, right, I impaled it down there (...) but it probably lived for another week. But if the cow wasn't giving milk before, the milk began to flow immediately, as soon as I stuck it. And it didn't die, damn it! And I went to see, every day. And in the end, God, then this neighbour, who is now deceased, he also came here in front of the house, and he (...) and with the second board he made a base so that it [the toad, unintelligible] flew, some twelve metres high, and it was no more after that. It was no more. That's how it is, they keep trying to go inside, they want to go into the house.*

F: *And it was the witch [about whom he had previously spoken] that sent the toad, you think?*

I: *Yes, that witch. Yes, that one, who bewitches, she gets them, right, yes.*

F: *And that [a toad] means misfortune?*

- I: *Yes. That's misfortune, yes.*
- F: *Why did you bring the toad right there by the stream? Was it necessary to carry it across the stream?*
- I: *Yes, I stuck it into the ground, right, and it stayed there, so that others didn't see it, right, to the side, in back, so that I always knew if it was still waiting for me, and hadn't run off.*
- F: *And before there was no milk, and then the cows had milk?*
- I: *Then it was okay. (...) Now that should be enough of that, right? [laughs, unintelligible] Let's talk about something else. (2)*
- I2: *They used to say, when there was that toad, that it went into the barn, if there was a woman somewhere who was mad at someone in some house and then that [it] came and there was no more milk, that [it] sucked out all the milk and after that that cow never had any more milk.*
- F: *And what did they do with the toad then?*
- I2: *Then, if they happened to catch it, these were the old beliefs, then they put them on a stake, they didn't kill them, but put them on a stake so that they stayed there so long that that they just ... that they suffered for a long time. (105)*

The notion of the witch milking (sucking) neighbours' cows in animal form or by sending an animal helper is not restricted to our region alone, but does not seem to be particularly widespread either. A witch sending her animal helper in the form of a toad to suckle cows figures for instance in Lithuanian legends (Būgienė 2011: 100). Narratives about a witch making a supernatural creature resembling a hare or a cat which is given life and sent out in order to steal milk or dairy products are known in southeast Sweden and more rarely in Norway, yet in this case, these are not natural animals. Both ways of getting milk, that is, with the help of an animal helper and through a witch's transformation into an animal, occasionally overlap: on the Danish island of Bornholm and sporadically in southwest Sweden, a milkhare is a supernatural creature made by a witch in order to suckle other people's cows as well as a woman who transformed into a hare in order to do the same (Nildin-Wall and Wall 1993: 67). Narratives about witches who themselves transform into a hare or a rabbit in order to suck milk from others' cows are known in Ireland as well (Ballard 1991: 75; Jenkins 1991: 311; ní Dhuibhne 1993: 77). Nildin-Wall and Wall in fact write that the "tradition complex" of a witch who transforms into a hare is "a Continental belief", which is also current in the British isles, in Denmark, and sporadically in southwest Sweden and southern Norway, and add that the transformed witches are sometimes, although not very often, accused of sucking cows at pasture or in byres and carrying the milk home in their bellies (1993: 67–68).

The ability of witches to transform into an animal, implied in some of these narratives, and not necessarily related to sucking others cows' milk, is a motif that belongs to a stock of European legends cropping up at least since antiquity (cf. Isidore of Seville, Etym.11.2). It is mentioned in early modern witch-trial testimonials (Holmes 1984: 94) as well as in folklore records from the nineteenth century onwards (cf. Gerlach 1999: 968–972; cf. also Kruse 1951: 12; Rockwell 1978; Briggs 1980: 76–87; Woźniak 1984: 48, 61; Marjanić 2006: 175–180; Šešo 2007: 258). There are, however, regional differences regarding the kinds of animals that witches are associated with. In Nordic countries, Ireland and Wales, witches are usually associated with hares (rabbits) (Boyle 1973: 315; Nildin-Wall and Wall 1993: 67–68; Ballard 1991: 75; Jenkins 1991: 311). Hares appear in English narratives too, but there witches could also transform into cats (Briggs 1980: 76; Tongue 1963: 323–324; Davies 1999b: 189–190). In Flanders, Belgium, the animals that were recognised as witches were cats (de Blécourt 2013: 377–378), as was the case in southwestern Germany (Schöck 1978: 96–97), and Poland, where toads too were also believed to be witches in disguise (Schiffmann 1987: 151, 156, 159). Among Hungarians in Romania, toads and snakes were animals associated with witches (Hesz 2007: 27). In Lithuania, it was usually toads that were associated with witches (Būgienė 2011: 100). In the Slavic area, the toad is the prevalent animal figure associated with witches (Plotnikova 2004: 221), but they can also appear in any other animal guises, for instance, in the form of a cat, pig, dog, cow, fox, sheep, hen, fly, night butterfly, goose, spider, owl, wolf, hare, bird, mouse, turkey or magpie (Đorđević 1953: 27; Tokarev 1957: 28; Vukanović 1989: 12; Radenković 1999: 220). In our region, the animal that was immediately associated with the witch was always and exclusively a toad.³¹

I1: *A toad was every witch. That frog.*³²

I2: *A toad, what do you call it?—a toad—and it approached the threshold.*

II: *Every toad was a witch.*

I2: *The toad wanted to enter to the hall of my grandmother's house. She was in the form of a witch. (50)*

When people saw a toad, they often referred to it with expressions such as “Somebody did this”, “A witch is behind this”, or “Somebody bewitched this”, and similar. Even in the part of the region where narratives about toads related to witchcraft were not in circulation and the link between the toads and witches not known, they still retained a negative connotation:

If a toad passes by or crosses your path, it will bring you misfortune (37, II). Often impersonal denotations of witches in relation to toads may point to the process of depersonalisation, a sign that the agency of a human is disappearing (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 215–216), but individual women from the community were sometimes also identified as witches precisely through the destruction of a toad: the wounds imparted on the animal were believed to show on the witch's body, whereupon the woman was recognised by her bodily injury as the witch that had transformed herself into a toad.

The conceptualisation of the nature of the relationship between the witch and the animal in our region is not consistent. In fact, the manner in which a witch was related to a toad did not seem to trigger particular interest of the narrators—the exact relation between the witch and the toad was not something that occupied people's minds, and several contradicting notions coexisted side by side. The important thing was that toads were associated with witches, no matter whether it was the witch that transformed herself into an animal (and no matter how exactly she accomplished that), or if it was her animal helper. When the relation between the witch and the toad was touched upon, some narrators claimed that the toad is the human transformed:

- F: *Did people talk about the toads?*
 I: *Yes, they did too, they said they were witches.*
 F: *Witches?*
 I: *Yes, that the witch turns into a toad.*
 F: *That she actually changes into a toad?*
 I: *Yes, that she changes, yes. (87)*

Other narrators, on the other hand, referred to the toads in witch's possession as being her animal helpers, even though the narrator below at the same time claims that hurting the toad is “as if” hurting the witch—which would again rather suggest the witch's physical transformation.

- I: *Every witch had her toads. They wanted to cross the threshold and enter the byre, no? Over the threshold into the byre, you know! And my father used to say that the witch had toads and such things. (...) That the witch had ... that each witch had her toad. (...)*
 F: *And what did you do with the toads?*
 I: *We stabbed them with the forks. Or on the pile. And they dried up. Yes.*
 F: *And what effect did this have on the witch?*

- I: *That every witch had her toad ...*
 F: *And when you stabbed her?*
 I: *That this is as if you stabbed the witch's belly. (119)*

While the nature of relationship between witches and animals triggered no particular interest in people narrating about personal experiences with toads, and several alternative notions coexisted side by side, in academic discussion an animal identified as a witch was sometimes explained on the basis of the traditional conceptualisation of the double (external soul, alter-ego), operating outside the physical body, yet still connected to it (cf. Lecouteux 2003: 91–92, 128). Referring to the Norwegian legends about witches dragging butter from a churn in the form of an animal (a cat, a hare, a toad, or a blackbird), Alver argues that undergirding these legends is the traditional Nordic concept of a *hug* (soul, double, and psyche) which, assuming a physical shape (*ham*) can free itself from the body, that is, that the animal is in fact the witch's *hugham*, her soul out of body on assignment³³ (1989: 110–112, 119–120). However, Nildin-Wall and Wall could not confirm the suggested underlying concept of a person's soul leaving the body and taking on a different shape, as injuries to the milk-thief in animal form are seldom transferred to the witch, even though they find it likely that the concept was part of “traditional witch belief” (1993: 73). Even if some narratives about witch-toads in which the injury of the animal is reflected on the witch's body might be perhaps explained by the notions of a free soul, and consequently related to shamanism (cf. Grambo 1975: 40–41; Klaniczay 1990: 146–147; Ginzburg 1992: 136–139; Lecouteux 2003: 103–123), the concept in our region was never explicitly articulated as such, and a coherent conception of a double probably no longer existed by the twentieth and twentyfirst century (de Blécourt 2004: 100; 2013: 378).

While the task of the witch-toad in our region was almost exclusively sucking cows of other people in order to get more milk for the witch, witches were also believed to keep salamanders or black beetles in their pots with the same goal. Even more often, their function was explained by *making* milk, cream, and cheese for a witch. Similar narratives were also occasionally recorded in other parts of Slovenia (Möderndorfer 1946: 240; Gričnik 1998: 127; Krejan 1999: 81), but they are much less frequent than those about toads.

Down there in the village bellow ... there was a woman who people held for a witch. And one young woman came to help her to milk the cow, but the cow didn't have much milk and she couldn't get much milk. And she came another

morning again to milk the cow, and she saw there three pots full of milk and in each pot there was a black beetle (...) Yes, and then she said about that woman that she was a witch and that she made witchcraft at night to get milk and the black beetle was inside to make cream for her. [laughs] (47)

I: And witches had, those that knew, plenty of milk and cream. And then someone saw up here, in that house [shows], at that old witch, somebody saw that she had a salamander under a pot, a salamander, covered (...) A yellow animal, or rather black with yellow spots, yes. Old people believed that, but I do not.

F: And why would they have a salamander?

I: To milk other cows. (78)

I: There were these ... workers, when we built the barn... and the workers said that they had never had such good food as here, such cakes ..., right. Just cheese to spread ... such fine cakes made of fine millet she baked... but she didn't have cows in the barn, no, ... that she could milk ... yet she had cheese and everything ... (...) And she went ... there, yes, ... that time was funny too ... my brother... my mother's brother, right ... My brother went on and on, he went ... they liked to go down there to eat ... 'cause it was good, right, back then ... it was a fine thing, right, ... nut roll cake, fine hard boiled corn mush with veal cracklings ... you heat it up, and then ... He goes in to light his cigar. And when he went to light his cigar ... there was no one in the house [pauses]. Well, good ... even if you lit your cigar on the stove. Then they heard something ... working ... how that thing bangs, you know, banging up and down ... He looked, he said that he just looked and looked [pauses] ... he doesn't see anyone ... Then he lifted that cover ... and looks: a salamander [laughs] a salamander was staring out from that ... from that pot ... there, where it is open, and the salamander was looking out. He looked at that thing ... From then on they didn't eat a thing [there]. My brother threw everything up ... [laughs]. Nobody ate anything [there] anymore, right, the workers there ...

F: Why did the witch need that salamander?

I: It worked, and you didn't have to whip the cream. Where did you get cream from, if you don't have anything anywhere, no cow, no nothing? Where did she get it? ... That's why it was known ... And the whole village, the whole town knew that she was a witch ..., that she did that. (16)

ASCRIBED OR PRACTICED?

Before I proceed with the discussion on the uses of bewitchment narratives and the presentation of the culturally available repertoire of countermeasures against at least some of the modes of bewitchment presented above, let's pause for a moment to consider how are we to understand the

bewitchments that people were narrating about. Were the bewitchments described above, or at least some of them, at least occasionally, a matter of practice, or were they always just “mere” stories? While linguistic circumstances enabling the utterances and actions associated with witchcraft to convey meanings may be of crucial importance in witchcraft research, we may at least also try to question their possible relationship to the extra-linguistic world (cf. Clark above), that is, to find out whether there might be an objective reality underlying at least some of the accusations of bewitchment.

From the folklore records, which were usually written down without any information on the context, it is impossible to conjecture on the reality or unreality of the actions ascribed to witches. In addition, the factor of the time when the bewitchment narratives were recorded could be of crucial importance—stories can persist when practices may have ceased to be carried out. De Blécourt, for instance, noticed that stories were circulating 50 years after the actual bewitchment cases had taken place (1999: 215). Yet, what about when the alleged bewitching acts were not a matter of the stories from the past, but had real effects on interpersonal relationships—were they in such cases always “just” conceived, or were they also in fact carried out and observed? Let us see then whether there are any hints in the narrations of our interlocutors that might bring us closer to answering the question of whether the actions of witches described in these narratives were always merely ascribed, as often assumed by scholars, or may have been, at least occasionally, in fact carried out.

In his research of witchcraft among the Azande in Africa, E.E. Evans-Pritchard made a distinction between sorcery and witchcraft. He writes: “Azande believe that some people are witches and can injure them in virtue of an inherent quality. A witch performs no rite, utters no spell, and possesses no medicines. An act of witchcraft is a psychic act. They believe also that sorcerers may do them ill by performing magic rites with bad medicines. Azande distinguish clearly between witches and sorcerers” (1976: 1). As clear as this distinction might seem at first glance, at least in Europe the conceptual difference between the two categories is not clear, and most European researchers do not make any distinction between the two terms. Gustav Henningsen, one of the few researchers who do distinguish between the terms “sorcery” and “witchcraft” in researching European witchcraft, slightly revised Evans-Pritchard’s distinction between the two: “By sorcery I understand actions employing the use of magic, which, regardless of whether they lead to the desired result, are *possible to perform*.”

By witchcraft (...) I understand actions which employ the use of magic and are *physically impossible* and which thus exist only as conceived beliefs” (Henningsen 1989: 106; emphasis mine). Yet, the criterion of (physically) possible versus impossible performance of an action that Henningsen proposes seems an elusive one. According to this criterion, bewitching by sucking neighbours’ cows by transforming into (or sending) a toad would probably be labelled “witchcraft” and understood as a “conceived belief”, while burying objects in the neighbour’s field in order to bewitch their crops or domestic animals, and dragging sheets over neighbours’ fields in order to gather dew, could be considered “sorcery”. The latter acts are possible to perform, no matter whether they lead to the desired result or not, and one can at least hypothetically assume that people may have practiced them with the anticipation that they would, sooner or later, trigger the misfortune of their neighbours. But what about bewitchment by milking a rope, an axe handle, a chain, etc. in one’s byre in order to milk the neighbours’ cows? The act as such, i.e. the imitation of the milking of a cow by milking an elongated object, is possible to perform—which would categorise it as sorcery—even if it does not result in producing milk (but in Henningsen’s definition the question of whether the action leads to the desired result or not is not an important distinction!). Still, it seems unlikely that this practice would actually in fact be performed, since at the moment one tried to imitate the milking of an elongated object,³⁴ if not before, it would become immediately clear that it triggers no effect, that is, that milk does not start pouring from the rope or chain or axe handle that is being milked—which would probably classify it as a “conceived belief” and as such a matter of witchcraft. A similar example would be an act of looking through a sleeve at a pig during slaughter in order to prolong its dying—even if it is theoretically possible to carry out the act, in this case too it would immediately become clear that it elicits no such result as described in the narratives. Moreover, looking, speaking, and touching as modes of bewitching would probably be considered a “conceived belief”, i.e. witchcraft according to Henningsen’s definition. Yet these are “acts” that are “possible to perform”—which would classify them as sorcery—although admittedly it is hard to consider them as “actions employing the use of magic” when they are “done” spontaneously most of the time. Even so, one may (intentionally) speak (praise, for instance), look (briefly or gazing), or touch in a certain way for which tradition holds that causes bewitchment (and Henningsen, at any rate, refers to “actions employing the use of magic” in both cases, when referring to sorcery as

well as to witchcraft). In any case, the mere discussion of the possibility versus impossibility of the performance of bewitching deeds presupposes looking at them from an outsider's perspective and judging them from within the framework of the Western scientific paradigm: for the narrators, talking from within the witchcraft discourse, all bewitchments were equally possible, regardless of whether they were believed to have been executed through the performance of an actual practice, or whether they were considered to have been induced by a witch's innate evil power.

Henningsen continues the discussion on the difference between sorcery and witchcraft by defining the difference between a "witch" and a "sorcerer":

I use the term (...) sorcerer/sorceress (...) as the term for *practitioners* of sorcery, and finally I use the name witch (...) for male as well as female practitioners of supposedly magic acts. I write supposedly, for as will be observed, according to my definition a witch is always a person who has not 'done anything'. In opposition to a number of social anthropologists (...) I do not consider one can study witches without forming an opinion on whether they do in fact carry out any of the things they are accused of. If it becomes clear that a person accused of witchcraft *has actually practised* a form of bewitchment magic, then in my view he is no witch, but a sorcerer (1989: 106; emphasis mine).

Henningsen thus, while grounding the difference between actions of witchcraft and those of sorcery in the (physical) *possibility* of their execution (impossible vs. possible), defines the difference between a sorcerer and a witch *not* according to the action they were accused of—that is whether it was categorised as sorcery (i.e. possible to perform) or as witchcraft (i.e. impossible to perform)—but according to the person's *actual vs. ascribed practicing* of actions. Yet, an action that is *possible to perform* is not necessarily also one that is *performed*. While this difference is not crucial for the categorisation of a sorcerer—the moment it is confirmed that a person indeed practised some form of bewitching action, this also implies that the action was possible to perform, and labelling him "sorcerer" would be consistent with Henningsen's definition of "sorcery". But what about when a person is accused of practicing an action of bewitchment that is *possible* to perform—and yet, they never performed it, that is, the action was only ascribed to them? Should they in such case be called a "witch" (as the act they allegedly performed was only ascribed) or a "sorcerer" (as the act they allegedly performed was possible to perform and would thus be categorised as "sorcery")? And who, at any rate, is there to judge whether

they in fact performed the act or not? If one asked the accusers, they would assure you that they had and would probably even substantiate their accusations by claiming that had seen them performing the deed, as we shall see below. If, on the other hand, one were to ask the accused parties, they would, as can only be expected, as a rule deny any blame.

In our region, no emic distinction was ever made between various modes of bewitching according to their performative (im)possibility: the only emic terms used were *coprnica*³⁵ (“witch”—from the German *Zauberin*) for the person who causes bewitchment, (*za*)*coprati* (to “do witchcraft”, to “bewitch”—from the German verb *zaubern*), referring to the activity of the witch, and *coprnija* (“witchcraft”, “bewitchment”—from the German *Zauberei*), referring to the result of the witch’s activity. The same label “witch” was thus attached to people who were accused of having bewitched another person or a domestic animal by looking at them, praising them or touching them, to those who allegedly bewitched their neighbours by giving them a gift, who sucked neighbours’ cows’ milk by transforming into a toad or by sending a toad, or acquired their neighbour’s milk by milking a rope, a chain, or an axe handle in one’s own byre, or else, by gathering dew and burying objects on a neighbour’s property. The difference between witchcraft and sorcery and between a witch and a sorcerer thus seems irrelevant, and I have, therefore, not followed this distinction in this book. Instead, I use the term “witchcraft”³⁶ as encompassing all manners of bewitching—those that from the outsider’s perspective are “possible”, as well as those that are “impossible” to perform, and “witch” as a term referring to a person accused of having caused a bewitchment by any possible manner discussed in the previous chapter,³⁷ no matter whether they actually practiced them or were merely said to have practiced them.

Henningsen’s discussion on sorcerers as *practitioners* of sorcery brings us further to yet another question: Is there any such thing as *practiced witchcraft* at all, or are all bewitching actions, even those that are “possible” to perform, always conceived and ascribed to people who in fact never performed any of the deeds they were ascribed, or they, at best, performed acts that have only been (mis)interpreted as bewitching acts? According to many researchers of historical as well as contemporary witchcraft, bewitchment should indeed be understood only as an accusation, the ascription of a deed, rather than a deed performed. The German teacher Johann Kruse, for instance, claimed that in his research of witchcraft, he never came across a person who was accused of witchcraft and did in fact practice it (1951: 195). Jeanne Favret-Saada similarly wrote

that the position of the witch “is not a position from which one can speak (...) The witch is the person referred to by those who utter the discourse on witchcraft (bewitched and unbewitched), and he only figures in it as the subject of the statement.” She thus found it highly unlikely that there were in fact people who cast evil spells, and believed that the accused witches were (nearly) always innocent (1980: 24, 161): “It seems to me that even if an alleged witch had good reason to feel guilty of the ‘*jealousy*’ attributed to him or the ‘*force*’ of his words, looks, and touch, and if he also had good reason to feel threatened by the unwitcher’s ‘*force*’ opposing him, he is at least innocent of performing any bewitchment rituals” (Favret-Saada 1980: 135). Witches were consequently granted no voice in Favret-Saada’s research of witchcraft.

This view implies that the witch is always merely a fictitious person, one who was ascribed bewitchment which supposedly resulted in the misfortune of another person, but in fact performed none. Such a perspective redirected the focus of the research from witches and their deeds (which were in the focus of the folklorists’ interest) to that of the victims, that is, to the questions about why people believed they became victims of bewitchment, what are the reasons underlying the accusations, what makes certain people a particularly suitable choice to be identified as a witch, and so on. If there is no such person as a witch, then we can only access them through the discourse, and the understanding of European witchcraft must necessarily focus on the alleged victims’ testimonies and narratives that relate events from the perspective of the victims (cf. Briggs 2002: 7; Pócs 2004: 176; de Blécourt 2013: 262). But was witchcraft really only about ascription, and did nobody in fact ever perform a ritual or any other deed by which they tried to bewitch others, that is, perform what Willem de Blécourt called “active bewitchment”?

Some scholars do believe that some people occasionally did perform magic practices. Edward Bever writes that although seldom, some people confessed to performing sorcery in the trials in the early modern German duchy of Württemberg, and in some cases sorceress’ paraphernalia was found during trials (2008: 28), and Sørensen is sympathetic to the idea that some magic practices were indeed performed in early modern Europe (2010: 112). Jenkins claims that there is good evidence that witchcraft was in fact practiced, not only believed (1991: 307, 323, 2010: 91). Tekla Dömötör writes that preparation of an image of the intended victim, that is, image magic, was performed in Hungary, but in secret, and Lisón

Tolosana has no doubts about the existence of maleficent practices in Galicia (Dömötör 1982: 161; Lisón Tolosana 1994: 276, in de Blécourt 1999: 188). De Pina-Cabral writes that while in the alto Minho region of northern Portugal people would seldom admit to having been party to the use of sorcery, evidence that means of harming others were utilised could occasionally be found in the form of remains of the ritual actions involved (1986: 178). Laura Stark likewise believes that traditional forms of magic and sorcery were not only suspected, but also practised in the Finnish countryside (2004: 69). Éva Pócs, and to a lesser extent Ágnes Hesz in their fieldwork among Roman Catholic Hungarians in Transylvania at the beginning of twenty-first century, recorded narratives that indicate the reality of the act of bewitchment, and showed that people either performed the bewitchment (in this case in the form of a spell, and not a magic practice) themselves or, more often, had it performed by someone else, usually Romanian Orthodox monks and priests. This means that there were people who in fact induced bewitchment and openly admitted it,³⁸ despite legitimising their bewitchment as performed in a response to a previous bewitchment,³⁹ in order to dispense justice and restore order (Pócs 2004: 174–176; Hesz 2007: 21–22).

Some narratives recorded in our region suggest that certain practices ascribed to witches were indeed not only ascribed, but may have also been practiced. Almost each of our interlocutors claimed to have found various items, most often eggs, buried in their field, even those who did not interpret them from within the witchcraft discourse, such as a local priest. Certainly not every egg or bone or other object found buried on one's property was placed there by a neighbour with the intent to bewitch them—bewitching objects only *point* to the notion of a practicing witch and are defined as such by the alleged victims (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 189). A certain number of buried objects was certainly unjustly interpreted as having been intentionally buried with the aim to cause misfortune: a certain quantity of buried bones and eggs is somewhat expected on farms due to yearly slaughters, dogs carrying bones, and occasional laying outside the henhouses. Yet, such frequency of buried eggs as reported in a region where burying them was a widely known bewitching technique could hardly be a coincidence.

Indeed, nobody was ever caught *in flagrante*, that is, during the act of burying objects,⁴⁰ which would unequivocally confirm the practicing witchcraft or active bewitchment. At best, people would sometimes claim that they checked

the place of whereabouts of a suspicious person who came to their property immediately after they left and found freshly buried objects at the spot:

Once somebody told me that he saw that a certain woman that was suspected of being a witch stopped there by the garden and buried something and he went to look after a while and he saw that an egg was buried there. (47) (cf. also inf. 50, p. 135)

However, these claims were uttered by those who thought from within the witchcraft discourse, which implies that any found object could be automatically interpreted as a bewitching item. The evidence that a person was being engaged in “bewitchment”—rather than having been suspected, and ascribed the deed—is thus, at best, circumstantial and dependent on interpretation (cf. Jenkins 2010: 92). In addition, as such narratives were told by the “victims”, they can also be comprehended as a narrative strategy they used to substantiate the argument in their favour, the message that they wanted to communicate to the researcher.

Nevertheless, apart from the narratives told by the “victims”, we also recorded several narratives in which people in fact admitted to performing the act of burying (or placing) a bewitching object in a neighbour’s field, or of being an accomplice to the act. Bewitchment narratives told from the perspective of the “witch” are rare, though. The admission of inducing someone’s bewitchment can be inhibited for various reasons, for instance fear of social consequences, but also due to Christian morality (cf. Hesz 2007: 21–22). When one, in spite of the inhibitions, admitted to having carried out a bewitching act, this was never presented as a bewitchment as such, but without exception as a justifiable response to the initial bewitchment induced on them by another person, performed in compliance with traditional instructions about how to counteract it.

To return the bewitching object to the person, whom they suspected of having buried it, is one of the possible countermeasures that victims could draw upon when they found a buried object on their property. Another common option traditionally given to the victims was to remove or destroy the bewitching object, and this was what most people also claimed to have done. The Catholic faith and values may have indeed had an impact on the reluctance of people to carry out revenge by returning the object to the witch, but the frequency of these findings suggests that more people than were ready to admit responded to the finding of a bewitching object by

“returning” it, even if not initially burying an object on their neighbours’ property. At any rate, in the following narratives, the interlocutors clearly admitted the actual burying (or placing, throwing) objects to another’s property (cf. also inf. 50, p. 135):

I: *This father said: I know that there was no egg when I was shovelling in the evening. I know there was nothing, right? And then I came in the morning and I found three rotten eggs. And this was allegedly done by a neighbour who had no success ... her chickens and hens always failed, and she believed that if she put this on someone else [on their property] and, since she wished them ill, they will have misfortune. (...) And that man said: I know exactly which woman put the egg there, and I gave it back to her.*

F: *And how did he do that?*

I: *So that on the other hand he [buried it]... just that she didn’t know.*

F: *He buried eggs on her [property]?*

I: *Indeed. (91)*

I. (...) *Yes, I dug out that egg and threw it in their direction. [laughs]*

F: *Did anything happen to them?*

I: *Well, then something happened.*

F: *Did anything die?*

F: *Of course, something dies or something, something happens. (9) (cf. p. 134–135)*

Perhaps the fact that many people were reluctant to call envious neighbours who buried items in order to harm their neighbours “witches”, and preferred to label them “envious” or “malicious” neighbours can be better understood in the light of this perspective: by labelling such a neighbour “a witch”, they should, if they ever buried a bewitching object on their neighbour’s property, even if only “in return”, consider themselves witches too—which they certainly never felt they were. Yet although from their own perspective they were “victims” of bewitchment, from their neighbour’s perspective, that is, the perspective of the neighbour to whose property they returned the object, they were “witches”, whereas from an outsider’s perspective a person who decided to carry out such a countermeasure would, progressing through the sequence of events, actually assume opposing roles—from that of the victim to that of a witch:

A finds a bewitching object (A = victim) →

A returns the object to B, i.e. the alleged witch (A = witch)

If B, hypothetically speaking, finds an object buried on his or her property, he or she might choose to undertake the same procedure: to bury the found object to her neighbour's property. When conflicts existed in the relationship with A before the finding, B would probably suspect A of being their witch. Therefore, the chain of events might hypothetically continue *ad infinitum*, and the positions the persons involved are assuming would continue to switch endlessly from that of the victim to that of the witch. But while people who return a bewitching object are in their own eyes always victims who, in annihilating bewitchment, merely draw upon traditional knowledge of countermeasures, in the eyes of their neighbours, they are always witches who buried a bewitching object on their property in order to bewitch them.

A finds a bewitching object (A = victim) → A returns a bewitching object to B, i.e. the alleged witch (A = witch) → B finds a bewitching object (B = victim) → B returns a bewitching object to A, i.e. the alleged witch (B = witch) → A finds a bewitching object (A = victim) → ...

If, on the other hand, there were no preceding tensions in the relationship between the two neighbours, the victim might check all the indications that might lead him or her to pinpoint the identity of the witch. The person on whose property the object was buried might suspect another neighbour of having placed the object in their field, that is, of being their witch, not the one who may have actually done it. In this case, the object was in fact not being “returned”, yet this was, nonetheless, how the victims perceived and interpreted their acts. The chain of the persons and events involved might in that case look like this:

A finds a bewitching object (A = victim) → A returns a bewitching object to B, i.e. the alleged witch (A = witch) → B finds a bewitching object (B = victim) → B returns a bewitching object to C, i.e. the alleged witch (B = witch) → C finds a bewitching object (C = victim) → C returns a bewitching object to D, i.e. the alleged witch (C = a witch) → ...

Even when no object that could be interpreted in terms of bewitchment had been found buried on one's property in the first place, the interpretation of the burying of an object on the “perpetrator's” property as a countermeasure against their initial bewitchment could serve as

a strategy aimed at the justification of the act which they hoped would trigger misfortune for their neighbour. If a person added a missing link, that is, the alleged finding of a bewitching object, to the chain of the events, then their act of burying a bewitching object on their neighbour's property would be understood as justified in their own eyes, as well as in the eyes of public. Favret-Saada showed that those who were once accused of witchcraft always started their bewitchment narrative with the misfortune that had befallen them as a consequence of another person's bewitchment and skipped their previous experience of being identified as somebody else's witch. To admit it would cast a shadow of doubt on the veracity of their own bewitchment story, so they had to take good care not to mention this part.

(...) it is very likely that most of those who are accused of witchcraft manage, at some point or other, to transform their story into that of an ordinary bewitched. If one reflects that (1) the accused are innocent and (2) it is extremely difficult to escape the discourse of witchcraft—the sceptics only manage to preserve their conviction so long as they are spared the series of biological misfortunes—one is led to assume that a significant proportion of those who have been bewitched is made up of former alleged witches. However, this initial episode belongs to the foreclosed past which no one—apart from the accuser—will ever know about. (...) If the utterance '*you are my witch*' is to be transformed into '*I am bewitched by So and So*', one must once and for all shut off the episode of the initial accusation from that of the final bewitchment. (Favret-Saada 1980: 192)

In contrast to the situation in France, the process in our region would need another sort of adjustment to that made by the French participants in the witchcraft discourse: instead of “those who are accused of bewitchment transform their story into that of the bewitched” rather to “those who bewitch transform their story into that of the bewitched.”

Another corroboration that the acts understood as bewitching acts (no matter whether they had any effect on the “victim” or their property or not) were occasionally in fact performed, refers to the act of casting spells, which somewhat overlaps with threats or curses. This was not a common mode of bewitchment people would mention in our region (except when it referred to the evil eye, which was occasionally called “spelling eyes” and their victims referred to as “spelled”). In

fact, only one narrator ever mentioned it, and this particular narrator, strictly speaking, does not come from the region but lives about ten kilometres away from it; still, in all other aspects the witchcraft that the narrator was talking about corresponds with the situation in our region. In the following interview, she recounted a story about her late grandmother, who had a reputation of a witch⁴¹ in the entire community, and confirmed that she personally heard her performing the casting of spells as well as publicly threaten others with misfortune:

- I: *My granny often quarrelled with people, saying: You shall see, everything will die in your household! And something really happened afterwards. (...)*
- F: *Do you remember any such case when something happened?*
- I: *That woman who also died then ... They were quarrelling terribly; they even had a fight in the middle of the village once. My granny yelled at her: You shall die! And in fact she became totally addicted to drink and consequently died. (...) People said that if she wished something bad to [happen to] anyone, she also achieved that. When something happened, they would say that she had done witchcraft again. (...)*
- F: *Did she perform any practice?*
- I: *I didn't see her because she did it in secret.*
- F: *But you think that she did?*
- I: *Yes, since I often saw her doing such strange things ... she would just vanish somewhere ... to do various things ... these spells ... as she had a vast huge knowledge of this ...*
- F: *But how did she know?*
- I: *It looks like she got it from her ancestors.*
- F: *Did they also have a reputation of being witches?*
- I: *No, I don't think so ... She came from a very respectable family. Maybe life brought her to this, that she became like this, that somebody wished her ill and she just hit back ... She said that she knew things, this was in her nature, she had that in herself. She knew who was going to die, to whom something would happen ...*
- F: *What about those spells that you mentioned?*
- I: *At the time I didn't know they were spells ... I didn't know ... It was Sarah [the New-Age practitioner whom she contacted]⁴² who used this word ... People said that she bewitched you, this is the term they used ...*
- F: *But you said you saw her going somewhere?*
- I: *Yes, as a child, I saw her carrying holy water ... I don't remember ... I know she did something, she prayed something or other, I heard her wishing something bad to [happen to] somebody ... It sounded like some curses or incantations: This and this will happen to this person because they did this and this to me! But as a child you are not that interested in this.*

- F: *But you heard it yourself?*
 I: *Yes, I did. (167)*

Moreover, as some people are prone to dramatically act out the content of legends, that is, turning a narrative into an act of ostension⁴³ (cf. Dégh and Vázsonyi 1983; Dégh 2001: 422–424), bewitching actions and counteractions may have also been performed as lived-out legends that people followed as a script to their actions. While in folklore studies the concept of ostension was usually applied to criminal activities, or discussed in relation to the journeys to the sites related to legends, in which “legend-trippers express an extraordinary range of ostensive action, from thrill-seeking play to humbled reverence” (Lindahl 2005: 165ff; cf. Ellis 2003: 165–185), Stephen Mitchell applied the concept of ostension to explain a witchcraft assault that took place in nineteenth-century England. In his study, he interpreted the collective behaviour of the villagers as an act of ostension, that is, as their acting out of traditional narratives which were used as a template for the attack on the alleged witch: “(...) to the villagers, conditioned as they were by a unified system of witchcraft beliefs and supporting narratives, the attacks represented an appropriate remedy to their problems; their reaction was the enactment of an inherited script for a folk exorcism (...)” (Mitchell 2004: 21–22). In fact, Linda Dégh, who introduced the concept to folkloristics together with Andrew Vázsonyi (1983: 6), related ostension to witchcraft, considering “magic healing” an example of the most representative area of practice, alternating between narrative and ostensive variants:

Most of the traditional milk witch stories mix the two; the narrative describes the whole procedure, past, present, and future, and the act of ostension shows how action and counteraction are taken. Together both relate and show what had happened: how an evil witch bewitched the cow, how the healer was found, how the healer forced the perpetrator to appear, and how the witch was punished. The legend closes by drawing a conclusion, and offering general instruction about what people should do when they have a bewitched cow. The same structure accommodates legends about healing people who are under a curse, particularly when they are afflicted by the evil eye. (Dégh 2001: 424–425)

While ostension as a concept with which to explain certain practices seems persuasive when the practice directly follows the sequence

of elements in the developed narrative plot, the concept, in my opinion, seems less useful in understanding witchcraft as a social institution, encompassing a great variety of legends, actions, and patterns of behaviour. If the same cognitive notion can inform and underlie legends as well as practices, why should one consider a practice to be an actualisation (ostension) of a legend which in itself may be a verbalisation of the same underlying proposition as the practice, just that the first is narrated while the second is acted out? Understanding practices and behaviour in terms of witchcraft as ostension, that is, acted-out legends, thus seems redundant. De Blécourt and Davies also caution against seeing witchcraft stories simply as guides for violent actions, claiming that such a perspective could amount to “the denial of a previous process in which choices have been made and implies that what is narrated is also feasible” (2004b: 12).

NATURAL OR SUPERNATURAL?

Apart from the understandable reluctance of people to admit the active bewitchment even when they had indeed performed it, there is another factor that might blur the discussion on conceived or actively performed bewitchment: the question of how one defines witchcraft. Jenkins defined witchcraft as “malicious *supernatural* aggression, whether employing spells and rituals or innate individual powers, outside the framework of legitimate religion and ritual” (2007: 203; emphasis mine). “Supernatural” also features in Ronald Hutton’s definition of a witch as a person “who uses apparently *supernatural* means to cause misfortune or injury to others” (2006: 211–212; emphasis mine). But how is “supernatural” in these definitions to be understood? Does it reflect the emic perspective, that is, did people, thinking from within the witchcraft discourse, believed the acts of bewitchment to be (exclusively) “supernatural”? Did they distinguish between acts that could not be explained on the rational ground as “natural” and could thus be proclaimed “supernatural”, from purely “natural” acts that caused misfortune—by understanding the first as witchcraft and the latter not? To put the question differently: did people exclude the “natural” acts that caused misfortune from the accusations of bewitchment or not?

Edward Bever argued that the allegations of witchcraft in the Württemberg trials often, rather than concerning magical crime, concerned a physical crime, such as a theft, arson, poisoning, assault, surreptitious milking, and harming animals (2008: 6–11). In his study of English witchcraft from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the

twentieth century, Owen Davies too suggests that at least some percentage of cases of sudden and strange affliction of animals, ascribed to witchcraft, could be in fact the result of poisoning,⁴⁴ while putting some soap or sugar into milk could result in the spoiling of the butter churn (1999b: 176–177). Bever and Davies thus offered several possible explanations of misfortunes, interpreted by people as a result of bewitchment, as being actually (intentionally) physically induced.⁴⁵

Causing harm to, assaulting, and performing various other malicious deeds against the neighbours seemed to be a common rural experience, especially in the past, when institutional protection was almost inaccessible due to seclusion or the expenses related to bringing charges against a perpetrator, which most people could not afford. Some of the narrators in our region clearly referred to crimes taking place among neighbours, not understood in the context of witchcraft, as a normal part of peasants' everyday life: if you were not good to the neighbours, they could harm you, committing arson and the like. "You think someone is your best friend but they turn out to be your worst enemy", or "You have to look behind yourself all the time" were just two of the typical comments clearly reflecting fear of others' malevolent actions.

People were mean, you have no idea how mean they were! I can tell you, there were so many stories about neighbours, how malicious they were, as malicious as they could possibly be! If they couldn't do anything else, they broke a cow's leg, hit her and everything ... Everybody knew about it but they couldn't do anything. They were stealing pigs and hens ... People were gypsies!⁴⁶ (164)

If taken at face value, several bewitchment narratives would indeed point to actually perpetrated criminal acts, rather than "supernatural" causes of bewitchment. In the following interview, the narrator seems to vaguely hint at the livestock which was intended for sale being poisoned. Witchcraft is not mentioned directly, and the informant explicitly denied knowing of any witches, yet the issue cropped up in the conversation after we asked our interlocutor and her husband whether they had ever had any experiences with witches:

I2: They used to poison the livestock ... there were many ...

F: Who poisoned the livestock?

I2: Well, you know, they came at night. This was when you wanted to sell them, and these men came, and in the evening they were still eating, whereas in the morning no more.

F: *And who did that?*

I2: *Well, nobody knew!*

F: *Nobody knew?*

I2: *When the byres were open ... and they entered ... and the livestock didn't eat any more.*

F: *What happened to the livestock then?*

I2: *Well, we had to give them away. And then there were these regrators who got to know [about it] and they came and took them. And they died afterwards. This is how it was ... (69)*

The next narrator is even more direct in pointing to an actual crime: poison is mentioned explicitly in her narrative, yet even if the act is clearly ascribed to the neighbour who allegedly envied her husband, she did not explicitly link the poisoning to witchcraft (even though the envious neighbours were typically understood as witches within the witchcraft discourse):

(...) we just lost a cow. It was here in our pasture, you know? And the cow went out to pasture fine, like every day. But this day she stumbled, she stumbled home. My son ran for the vet. He comes up ... And comes over here, and says: What's up? Well, I told him. He gave her seven injections. Seven hundred thousand, seventy thousand I paid the vet that time. That's what those injections cost. When he left, the cow died. And every day she was healthy, there was never a problem. So afterwards I said that maybe they [the neighbours] placed some poison, right, so that the cow would get it. I know this well. I always said that this wasn't natural, right? The vet said: Bring her down, or I'll bring her myself. That he was going to come up, that we didn't have to do anything, just lead her into the ditch. We led her into the ditch, and then nothing. He didn't give us anything in black and white. He just said to my son: The cow was full of blisters in there, when he looked. There was no paper or anything, right? What it was with that cow I don't know. We had to swallow everything. We just had a cow, nothing else. If she went bravely out to pasture, then she came back dizzy. (66)

In the following three narratives, on the other hand, the narrators, hinting at an actual crime of poisoning, directly blamed witches of committing the crime. In the first, the cows are said to have stopped giving milk after a neighbourhood witch was observed entering a byre and bringing “something with her in a small dish”, which clearly conveys the narrator's conviction that it was an actual substance given to the cows or anointed to them that evoked their subsequent dryness. The second narrative is even more specific in pointing to the actual criminal deed: a witch

was observed “throwing something” into the pigsty which ultimately caused the pigs’ death. The third narrative, moreover, refers to an official statement made by a professional, that is, to the results of the vet’s investigation of the dead pig belonging to her sister, who allegedly confirmed in writing that the pig was being poisoned—and yet the narrator blamed a neighbour who “knew”, that is, a witch, for the misfortune caused by poisoning. In addition, she accused her own neighbour of poisoning her cow and hens, and even eggs.

Oooh, my grandmother told me this: That woman is a witch, that woman mixes something at home [loudly, demonstratively, imitating her]. She goes to the byre and brings something with her in a small dish. Then she goes to their neighbour and afterwards the cows give no more milk. (152)

They used to know, they used to know, oh, how they knew! Our [witch] was one woman, not far from here, she was from K. She came to us, we had a mill, and she brought corn or barley, whatever she had she brought. (...) She actually threw something, we saw her as young children—when she passed by the pigsties, she threw something into the enclosure where we kept the pigs during the summer and three pigs died. (73)

F: *What happened with the pigs?*

I: *They didn’t want to eat. (...) This woman knew too.*

F: *Was it when she visited you [referring to the previous conversation] that you knew that it was she?*

I: *No, no, no. Her daughter [came to visit].*

F: *That one, whom you say also knew?*

I: *Yes, the neighbour did it.*

F: *The neighbour too?*

I: *It happened at my sister’s house.*

F: *Right. And how did her neighbour do that?*

I: *Yeah, well. God knows, well, we don’t know that.*

F: *But how did your sister know that it was the neighbour who did it?*

I: *Yeah, that one must know. Yeah, well, over the winter they threw poison in there, so that the pig died overnight. Well, then when they went to N. [the veterinarian] to have him checked out, he said that he had eaten hunting poison ... This one was healthy, but that one died. Yeah, and that neighbour poisoned my cows.*

F: *This one here, the first one?*

I: *Yes ... she poisoned four of my chickens. Look. She sowed barley over there, her field is behind ours. I went out in the morning to milk, [and] I said to myself, now the barley is poisoned here ... that the chickens shouldn’t peck it. Well,*

and at the beginning I didn't let the chickens out ... But one chicken was standing in front of the property, and pecking an egg. The one she brought. The next morning I found that chicken dead. And I was curious, what was wrong with that egg, I cut into the egg, and the egg was ... you could tell by the liquid (...) She had made a hole so she could blow poison into the egg ... That is so awful! (29)⁴⁷

Thus, if these narratives were taken at their face value, the actual, that is, physical crimes causing misfortune could be assumed to be behind the accusations of bewitchment. However, one must bear in mind that the “facts” presented as the proof of the neighbours’ crime, interpreted as bewitchment within the witchcraft discourse, may have just as well been introduced by the narrators with the intention to substantiate their position of a victim of bewitchment and corroborate the allegation of their neighbour as a witch, or else their acts may have been (mis)interpreted as an attempt of poisoning. The elements in the narratives that might point to the actual physical criminal acts of alleged witches are thus not necessarily also proof of an actual crime having indeed taken place.

Nevertheless, if people wanted to poison their neighbours’ livestock, they could easily obtain poison from the store. As confirmed by the local veterinarian, there were cases of the sudden death of livestock which were clearly poisoned with cyanide, which was an ingredient in a paste aimed against rats—if it was smeared on a piece of bread and given to the neighbours’ livestock to eat, the livestock suffered immediate death. In addition, he confirmed that eggs filled with phosphorus, which hunters used to place in the meadows near the forest and on the slopes of forests in order to poison foxes and other wild animals, were occasionally found and picked up by peasants and intentionally placed on their neighbours’ property to do harm to their domestic animals (cf. 29, p. 187).

Moreover, there were several sorts of poison that were available in nature that people may have been aware of. Bever mentions several plants, such as ergot, datura, henbane, nightshade, and mandrake, that were known and available to early modern people in Europe and could be used for poisoning, and which, applied locally, could have a paralysing effect or trigger neurological disruptions resulting in disorientation and delusions (2008: 8–11). Many of the plants on his list are known in our area too, yet none of our interlocutors ever gave any indication that they may have been used when paralysis, disorientation, or any other illness or the death of a human or an animal, was attributed to bewitchment. However, one possible poison

that people might have used and were probably aware of was salamander and toad skin toxins. Although it was never directly related to poisoning, amphibians did play a role in the witchcraft narratives. Poisoning by toad toxins is primarily problematic for animals—if a toad is placed in a watering dish, for instance, it can emit enough toxin to poison an animal. Paralysis and seizures among humans have also been reported as a result of poisoning by toad toxins (Spoerke 1986; cf. also Harper 1977: 106; Bever 2008: 132). Salamander poison can cause not only weakness, vomiting, and diarrhoea, but also a loss of coordination and paralysis (<http://www.infovets.com/healthycatsinfo/E835.htm#Salamander>; last accessed 26 December 2015) and perhaps one possible explanation for keeping salamanders at home, occasionally attributed to witches, was to extract a toxin from their skin. While salamander poison never appeared in relation to poisoning, it was used as an ingredient in alcoholic beverages with hallucinogenic effects, and one narrator even suggested that it may have served as a home-made remedy against rheumatic diseases:

- I: *Well, that salamander, I was a small girl then and I went to the neighbour. (...) And people were looking through her window saying: Damn witch, she's up to something again! We heard that as small children. I often went to her as a child, to help her and such. There used to be these open-hearth kitchens, and she had a big pot there, such earthenware for keeping fat in it, with handles. She had it on the floor of that open-hearth kitchen and a salamander or how do you call it in it ...*
- F: *In the milk?*
- I: *In the milk, yes. And I was curious as a child and I went and opened that pot [laughs] and looked into it ... [She:] Jesus, child, go away! Leave that alone! And I went away, right? And I still don't know ... Some said it was against rheumatism, that women used to bake on that fat, and fry it on the dry stones and anoint themselves with it. (104)*

The technique of burying or placing a “bewitching” object that regularly appeared in allegations of bewitchment in our region could, in one of its variants, also possibly point to an actual crime. As suggested by one narrator, the placing of the bodily parts of an animal which died of an infectious disease on a neighbour's property could be a way to inflict illness upon the livestock crossing it:

- II: *Well, yes, for bones they also used to say that if a neighbour terribly hated their neighbour ... that they ... [buried a bone on their property]. Well,*

I would say that this was very true, this was malice. That if an animal got ill, especially pigs, that they buried them and put a part of the body on other people's property, right? This is how illness is transmitted. This was real and direct malice. (81)

Moreover, even if strictly speaking not criminal acts, some practices nevertheless had purely natural harmful consequences. The practice of dragging sheets over a neighbour's wheat, for instance, has direct "physical" consequences: wheat that is touched while wet with dew develops mildew, the consequence of which is a failed harvest. While some people may have performed the practice because they believed in its supernatural power, perhaps as an ostensive practice, trusting in its supernatural effect, or merely to test it, others, aware of the pure physical consequences of such an action, may have performed it with a conscious intent to damage their neighbour's crop—without understanding the act as having anything "supernatural" in it. However, even if people believed the practice to "supernaturally" cause devastating effects on the crops, the practice would still, due to natural causes, trigger the very same result as anticipated within the witchcraft discourse: the unsuccessful harvest of the neighbour, and the successful harvest of the practitioner—at least when compared to their neighbour, which, in any case, was the main measure of success in the close-knit communities (cf. Honko 1962: 119–120).

*II: We had a farmhand here, I don't remember him well any more, he came as a young boy and he stayed with us until his death. He went to the holy mass, and when he came back he said: F*** the devil, what did I see! Well, what did you see? Well, that old Pepca dragged a sheet over our wheat. Then my grandmother, well my great-grandmother was already dead at the time, she said: What did she do? I think it was on the Pentecost. [He:] She was collecting loot. [She:] But how? He said: She was dragging white coarse linen over our wheat and poured the dew on her field of wheat! Well, my grandmother said: What good will this do her? Well, he said, you shall see at harvest time! And it was true, she had wonderful wheat while ours was bad. But probably, so people said afterwards, her sheet was really to blame, and not witchcraft, because she did that with the dew. It is not good to go to the wheat while it is dewy, it becomes rusty. That's how it was. Perhaps ... (53)*

Indeed, the "natural" inducement of physical harm may have been occasionally even consciously played upon so as to receive a "supernatural"

connotation and to be understood as bewitchment. To threaten and then subsequently substantiate the threat by secretly causing some misfortune to happen immediately or soon after the threat was uttered, sufficed for beggars to get the food or drink they came for—if not then, the next time for sure. Some narratives indeed indicate that the misfortunes that directly followed a threat may have been physically provoked in some way in order to corroborate the “supernatural” power of their threat and their magic ability.

Well, then, I also know, there was one, Martin they called him, he was also poor ... he was old but still very strong. He went to the house there and said: You had eggs and so, and I am poor. Give me an egg, give me some wheat so that I could bring some home! He said he had an old wife at home. And they didn't want to give him any, they knew him, he was from the same village. They said he had a small vineyard, and what about poverty in that village there ... and they sent him away. And he menaced at them and left. He went across there and it started in the byre, a goat started to yell. She had goats ..., well I am not sure anymore. Her hens were stuck together by their beaks, all together, lying on the floor, it looked like they were all going to die ... There was a total commotion, and they started to call him back: Come back, we will give you everything if you save them! And the goat that had horns, she got stuck inside, on the boards somehow, and she was hanging by the horns, and the hens were lying on the floor, it looked like everything was going to die. So they said, right? But I said [to myself]: He could have been a ruffian and put two or three kernels of corn on a thread. Now if one hen ate it, it didn't go down. And when the other hen ate the other corn, they started to drag each other by the thread, and it didn't go out. But I don't know, I just explained it this way to myself ... As I see nowadays the pigeons that can't save themselves, and they are all mad. When they tie the corn kernels, two kernels together. Then the pigeons try to tear [themselves] away until they die. (107)

Such deliberate malicious acts, the consequences of which were, in the framework of witchcraft discourse, interpreted as the result of a bewitchment, seemed to have been occasionally consciously committed above all by beggars whose alleged supernatural abilities were often the only means to assure them of charity. As Davies wrote, “[t]he beggar witches who played on their reputations needed to maintain their position by seeming to perform such acts of *maleficium*. If they just went around being refused, and were seen to do nothing in response, there would be no motivation to give to them at all. Few people really *wanted* to give charity to a witch, and the only way they could be persuaded to do so was through the implied threat of reprisal by witchcraft” (1999b: 176–177).

Beggar-witches, telling frightening tales of their magic activities and threatening with magical harm in order to obtain food and other charity from the farms they visited, were well known in Europe, and almsgiving seems often to have been motivated not by altruism but above all by anxiety and fear of magical attack (Briggs 2002: 53, 131–133; Stark 2004: 76; 2007: 20–21; Eilola 2006: 38). Neighbour-witches in England, begging from their neighbours, sometimes also consciously conformed to stereotypical characteristics in order to exploit their reputations for begging purposes (cf. Davies 1999b: 175). If their reputation alone did not suffice, they could always elaborate further on their supernatural powers. Hinting at their magical ability or secret knowledge through the intensity of their gaze or strange facial expressions, carrying mysterious-looking pouches and recounting their own feats of sorcery, helped the poor in the late nineteenth-century Finland to receive charity from wealthier peasants (cf. Stark 2004: 75). Tekla Dömötör similarly observed that midwives in Sárretudvari in Hungary gladly relied on and took advantage of their reputation as witches for it helped them gain material profit (1973: 179). Fear of magical knowledge and powers gave people who were thought to possess them a powerful weapon with which they could manipulate others in order to achieve profit or other goals.

Beggars and itinerant workers wandering around the country indeed had an opportunity to acquire knowledge of healing, fortune-telling, and performing some magic. In France, passing strangers, usually tramps (*trimards*), who transmitted knowledge about magic rituals and formulas, were considered quasi-mythical beings who wander about, “poor in cash but rich in secrets” (Favret-Saada 1980: 45). Stark believes that in the nineteenth century the landless poor also provided households with the information on magic and sorcery which they could use against each other (2004: 73). In the nineteenth-century Norway, it was wandering beggars, tramps, and errant outcasts who were most often recognised as witches (Alver and Selberg 1987: 25), and wandering poor figured prominently in witch trials at least in some Habsburg lands (cf. Levack 2006: 157). Beggars wandering around and surviving on charity given to them by farmers, and people who wandered around looking for occasional work as farmhands, certainly used to be common in our area, and some narratives evidently hint at their knowledge of healing and magic:

11: *There came such beggars, you know, poor people. (...) And they said: Give me [something] to eat and to drink. My aunt said: How can I give, I have sick*

children. [The beggar:] Well, what's wrong with them? They were twins, Ana and Peter, they were lying there, almost dying. He said: You give me [something] to eat and to drink, and the children will recover. And then of course, he was eating - but you [to the aunt], quickly put some water to the stove and some absinthe inside and bathe them in this water! And they recovered. (95)

Well I also had another experience. There was a man from Croatia who knew how to tell fortune from the cards. Here we gave him food and such and he stayed in that old house in a small room. Then I was feeding the pigs and they didn't want to eat at all. And I was lamenting. That man knew so much, he was old, about eighty years old at the time. He's got one arm cut off, he only had one arm. He picked fruit for us, he did everything with one arm. So I asked him once: Listen, how can I make the pigs eat? He said: No problem, he said, I shall tell you something and you should do this in the evening. And it was true. My sister and I (...) would bring food to the pigs. We had these old wooden troughs, and we would pour them food from outside. I cannot say what he told me to say. It wasn't much, all I had to say was one sentence. He said: When you throw the food to the pigs, say this and go away, he said, and the next day they might eat better. And so I poured that food into the troughs and said what he told me to. At that moment there came running from that house, it is still there, two pairs of black horses, I saw them, I really saw them, and they were galloping directly toward the byre, you know. And I grabbed that bucket, and my sister ..., and we started to run—God protect us!—and I ran to that room upstairs where he was already lying, it was about eight in the evening, I think, but it was already dark. I said, Jesus, I said, now I don't know, this and this happened, something came running, it sounded like horses galloping. Well, I saw something black, it was as big as horses, and then we started to run with my sister behind the byre, right? But he only turned towards the wall and smiled, and said nothing. (96)

The *assumptions* or *hints* of possible “natural”, physical, criminal acts being the true source of various misfortunes, interpreted within the witchcraft discourse as bewitchment, still do not answer our initial question of whether people who spoke from within the witchcraft discourse believed the acts of bewitchment to be (only) “supernatural”—and thus excluded acts that “naturally” caused them harm from being considered in terms of bewitchment. What we still do not know is whether people who were clearly thinking from within the witchcraft discourse still considered those acts that caused their misfortune, of which they could be absolutely sure that they were in fact physical, natural, criminal acts, to belong to the category of bewitchment, or would they exclude them

from being interpreted from within the witchcraft discourse? Would they, if they had indisputable proof that their neighbour had in fact poisoned their cows' milk, which, as a consequence, would not churn, or milked their cows, which, as a consequence, would not give any milk, if they knew that their animal had died from an injury caused by a villainous neighbour, still understand the criminal acts to be acts of bewitchment and consider the perpetrators witches, or would they, in such a case, rather hold them for what they in fact were, that is, poisoners, thieves, and villains ...?

We have seen that several narrators (inf. 29, p. 187–188; inf. 152, p. 187; inf. 73, p. 187) assumed the poisoning carried out by their neighbours to be the real reason for the subsequent misfortune, and yet more or less explicitly called their neighbours *witches*. However, poisons have not always been understood chemically, but were associated with witchcraft (Bever 2006), and the two notions may have become somewhat blurred. In addition, none of the accused neighbours were actually caught *while* committing the act of poisoning. In other cases (cf. inf. 69, p. 185–186; inf. 66, p. 186), the awareness that the neighbours performed a physical malevolent act, rather than a “supernatural” one, and that they possessed no “supernatural” power, may have been the reason for the narrators' reluctance to call their neighbours “witches”, even though the discussion of their deeds was clearly embedded in the overall discussion on witchcraft.⁴⁸ But what about the narrators who were not only thinking, but also clearly speaking from within the witchcraft discourse, and explicitly called their neighbours witches? Did they distinguish “natural”, physically induced criminal acts, when they were indisputably and unequivocally *proved* as such, from the “supernatural” manners of bewitchment, and exclude them from witchcraft? The following two narratives about surreptitious milking of the neighbour's cow may perhaps bring us closer to the answer:

II: *Here, right here, where I told you about that woman, that Marica, they said [that she was a witch]. She was such a poor woman ... a poor sick lame woman ... (...) And the boys, these were two brothers that were sleeping in the byre, right? I don't know how they managed, I couldn't stand that (...) They told me, they said that this woman came in the night, now she was poor, she had no milk, and there was no shop before to buy milk like today, right? Well if you had [cows] at home, you could milk them and you had milk. Well, right, they said then that she came at night and started to milk the cows and the cow was so calm! Cows are not calm with everybody, you know.⁴⁹ My brother told*

me that. I said, I was laughing, saying: This is not true, this is not true! And he said: Don't say that! He said he wouldn't say it if it were not true: I saw it! She came and started to milk and milk and he said she got about three litres of milk in the pot [imitating him]. He said he was watching that, listening, they [the brothers] were watching. That woman didn't see they were inside, these boys. And then we went, he said, and we—I shall say this informally—pissed in that milk. Then I went and I gave her such lashes on her hands with the cow-whip that she never came back. I believed him that.

F: *So you think that she actually came stealing?*

I1: *That she came to milk and to take milk away.*

I2: *Yes, yes.*

F: *So why was she a witch if she was actually stealing?*

I1: *Well, they said that she behaved in all possible ways, if she really helped herself this way ... how could I know? (15)*

I: *They also said that if the cow did not give milk that witches came milking. But I don't believe in such things.*

F: *Did anyone witness that?*

I: *Yes, they said that they saw ... We had a mute farmhand ... he couldn't hear or talk ... and he slept in the byre. And he once showed with gestures, the way they communicate, he showed that one woman milked the cows when he went to sleep in the evening and that he was scared ... He didn't want to sleep in the byre afterwards. (3)*

Surreptitious milking was suggested by Owen Davies as a possible rationale behind the dryness of cows, which in English folklore is related to witches sucking cows, usually in animal form (1999a: 136). On the basis of the early modern witchcraft trials in Württemberg, Edward Bever likewise assumed that some cases related to an accusation of magical stealing of milk in fact involved theft (2008: 6–7). In both of these narratives a woman apparently indeed came to surreptitiously milk others' cows. Whereas in the second narrative it may not be very clear, the person milking the neighbours' cows in the first narrative can obviously be considered a thief: she was caught *in flagrante*, during the act of stealing milk, and yet, although her act involved nothing “supernatural”, she was called a witch. This would suggest that the act of stealing milk, in spite of being a purely “natural” act (as opposed to “supernatural”), and unequivocally proved as such, was nonetheless understood as witchcraft, and the woman, in spite of having committed a criminal act—a witch.

However, one cannot be sure that the woman in question did not already have a reputation of a witch (and the sentence “she behaved in

all possible ways” might point to it)—in this case this particular incident may not have been crucial for her recognition as a witch. One may assume that not every theft or other malicious physical action was interpreted as bewitchment, and the perpetrator considered a witch. Additional circumstances must have been present for a person who was in fact stealing, poisoning, or performing other criminal offences to be identified as a witch and their acts as witchcraft. The widespread notion of (supernatural) milking being a typical manner of bewitchment by witches is certainly one such background factor that may have linked the actual stealing of milk with witchcraft. As mentioned above, their previous reputation or conformation to the stereotypical image of a witch could be an additional element contributing to the ease by which the association is made between a witch and a person who was actually a thief.

Nevertheless, the origin of misfortune, that is, the question of whether it was induced by a natural or “supernatural” act, seems to have no particular significance for people to consider an act as an act of bewitchment within the framework of witchcraft discourse, at least as long as other circumstances that supported such an interpretation were present. Whether clear criminal acts, even without these conditions fulfilled, were also considered witchcraft is a question to which I can give no definite answer based on the evidence from the interviews. However, since people thinking from within the witchcraft discourse often called their “witches” “envious” or “malicious neighbours”, this additionally contributes to the blurring of the line between criminal offenders and “witches proper”. A fluidity of the boundary between the categories of “natural” and “supernatural” is clearly evident from the following interview:

I1: Older people, for instance, and this is interesting, older people didn't allow anyone to go into their byre to see what kind of livestock they had.

F: Older people?

I: Yeah, others, 'cause they were afraid that they would bewitch them, that was present [here].

F: How could someone bewitch them?

I1: By poisoning them, so that they would get sick or ...

F: But how would they do it?

I1: Well, I would say, using a modern expression: with the psyche. (...)

F: You said with the psyche—what does that mean? That they would for instance look [at something], or that they would have some sort of power?

- I1: Yeah, something like that, yeah, with malice or envy that they could somehow [bewitch], right? That's for instance like hypnotising a person, or an animal.*
- F: And what would happen to the animal then?*
- I1: It could get sick, a cow might not give milk. A cow could, if it was pregnant for instance, it could miscarry, right, and those kinds of things.*
- F: And do you know anybody who has had that type of experience, who has had that happen?*
- I1: Well, that was only people's beliefs. That's what people believed. (38)*

Witchcraft in our region was, therefore, not always only ascribed, as some anthropologists would have it; at least some of the modes of bewitching were at least occasionally indeed also practiced. Moreover, some types of misfortunes seemed likely to have been caused by purely “natural”, physical, criminal acts, rather than “supernatural” ones, yet this did not prevent people, thinking from within the witchcraft discourse from considering them to be caused by bewitchment. For people thinking and talking from within the witchcraft discourse there seems to have been no clear distinction either between “acts possible to perform” and “acts conceived”, or between “natural” and “supernatural” acts—they could all be understood in terms of witchcraft. It is thus primarily psychological mechanisms that helped shape the perception of reality into the perception of bewitchment and these very mechanisms seemed to have been, by some individuals at least, occasionally also consciously manipulated.

PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF BEWITCHMENT

While some actions ascribed to witchcraft can perhaps be understood in terms of an actual performance of a harmful deed, there were other means of aggression, in which no physical inducement of harm can be assumed. How could bewitchment actually work when it did not imply a criminal act of poisoning, stealing, injuring, and the like? We have seen that misfortune was often believed to be a result of witch's looking, speaking, touching, transforming to a toad or sending one, as well as of performing practices which only occasionally may have had a “natural” basis to be able to trigger the ascribed effect. How, for instance, could the sickness of young children and animals be triggered by a look? Or cow's loss of milk by praise? Or the death of a puppy by touch? Or the failure of crops by buried eggs?

Edward Bever explained the harmful effects of a look by scientific studies showing that facial expressions, the eyes in particular, are significant

in nonverbal communication. An angry gaze at another person can trigger a stress response in its recipient, especially, but not necessarily, in cultures which hold a notion that the evil eye can cause harm. Touching and speaking can likewise provoke an undesired consequence on a body of another person: hostility, expressed, for instance, in curses and threats, can cause a physical stress response which can be highly somatic (Bever 2008: 25–27).⁵⁰

In our region, directly hostile verbal communication could sometimes be encountered in narratives about beggars who made threats when they did not receive any alms, as discussed above. In these narratives, however, the effect of the threat on the human body is never mentioned as a consequence of the threat, although the overthrowing of carts loaded with hay (cf. inf. 16, p. 154) could perhaps be understood as a consequence of the effect of the threat on the behaviour of the driver (in case he overheard the communication between the beggar and the mistress of the house against whom the threat was uttered). Instead, their threat usually affected the livestock. The effect that the threat had on the livestock whose owner was being threatened could, according to Bever, still be explained by scientific studies showing that animal health, just like human health, can be highly susceptible to psychosomatic influences, which also include social relationships—even affecting the stockperson’s behaviour can affect the animal’s level of fear (2008: 38) and ultimately lead to livestock diseases, loss of milk, and even death of poultry, pigs, and cattle. If beggars did not physically induce misfortune, one could perhaps explain the consequences of their threat by the fear evoking changes in the behaviour of the people who were being threatened, which could subsequently lead to the misfortune of the household. Yet nothing in the narratives themselves points to such an assumption.

People not only consciously or unconsciously express hostile emotions in their interactions with others, but are, moreover, also culturally predisposed to recognise hostile emotions in others, including in types of verbal expressions which are not necessarily overtly hostile. Although Bever emphasises anger as the emotion to which humans are evolutionarily predisposed to have a bodily reaction, envy, ascribed especially to neighbours, was the emotion which people in our region were most culturally conditioned to fear. Without exception, envy was assumed as underlying any praise, no matter whether the person doing the praising experienced such an emotion or not. This assumption might possibly explain the somatic reaction of an adult to praise, but this could hardly explain why small children and animals, who could not be culturally influenced to understand

praise as an expression of a hidden hostile emotion, were the most usual victims of praise.⁵¹ Following Bever, one could explain the higher vulnerability of children and animals by their higher sensitivity to prosody, gesture, expression, rather than only the semantic meaning of words—their bodily reaction would thus be the result of their visceral reactions to the disjunction between someone’s overtly friendly words and the hostility conveyed through their body language. Or alternatively, that the praise which affected their parents (or owners, when animals were concerned)—who, by recognising negative emotions (envy) in it experienced fear of its harmful consequences, which triggered a stress response in them and, consequently—through their (changed) behaviour, affected the children or domestic animals. Since praising was generally believed to be a forbidden behaviour, one would expect people to refrain from such behaviour if they wanted to maintain good relations with their neighbours. One and one wonders if, based on the general premise of its harmful consequences, those who praised did not in fact consciously manipulate this notion and intentionally praise in hope of triggering harmful consequences for the object of praise, and at the same time favourable for themselves—as clearly understood by the narrator below:

- I: *Some also praised. Oh, how you have beautiful [this], how you have beautiful [that]! And they didn’t praise because they truly meant it. They praised because they were envious. This is the connection, if you know what I mean. And this is again what they referred to as “Witches are walking around”. Or, for instance, this father also said that when the child was crying, crying and crying—[it was] when old women came around and said: Oh, how big you are, how good you are! They didn’t mean it ... If their children were not healthy and such, you know, they would now praise [this one] because they envied them. And then the child had pain in the stomach or got fever from that envy.*
- F: *What about her child, was it better?*
- I: *Yes, like her child got better, because she was praising him out of envy. (...) Well, this is what they said when they said she was bewitching. That this is witchcraft, that’s what people believed. (91)*

Objects found buried in one’s territory could likewise be explained in terms of the psychological effect they had on people: within the witchcraft discourse considered an undeniable proof of a performed bewitchment, the recognition that somebody wished them ill so badly that they made an effort to secretly perform a magic practice aimed against their health and

well-being may have had damaging effect on a person's physical or mental health. Stress triggered by the comprehension of the (assumed) hostility and envy of their neighbours after a person had found a buried object, interpreted as a bewitching object, could potentially lead to depression and subsequent negligence of livestock and land cultivation, ultimately contributing to the illness, low productivity and even death of livestock—the usually reported consequences of this type of bewitchment.

“Sorcery” according to Bever worked through the same psychological mechanisms, whereby an interpersonal conflict usually took place beforehand and the facing of the witch's overt anger, or knowledge via a third party that she had performed a bewitching deed, could suffice to trigger an illness. Moreover, he claims that even if rituals were performed in secret, they could have an effect in subsequent encounters “by intensifying the witch's feelings and expression of anger and creating a certainty of the other's doom which would then be conveyed through nonverbal signs” (2008: 28–29). I cannot judge about the facial expressions of the alleged witches, or subsequent feelings that they may have triggered in their victims, yet the knowledge that a ritual aimed at the identification of a witch had been performed by the alleged victim may have triggered fear in people who transgressed the norms of good social relationships. This fear may have been a reason for the “witch's” repeated visits to the “victim's” home and his attempts at getting something from the master, after having heard that they had consulted an unwitcher in the narrative presented below (cf. inf. 150, p. 273–275)—even though the narrative can, of course, also be understood as the narrator's interpretation of the “witch's” visits in terms of a proof of his bewitchment and the narrator's way to make the case for bewitchment stronger. While the identified witch's subsequent illness in this case was not mentioned, the narrator of the following account clearly understood the pain and hospitalisation of the woman to be a result of a successfully carried out identification ritual in which she was recognised as a witch.

We had a vineyard and we hoed in it and we dug out a cow's horn. And in that horn there was foam, butter, all pressed in there, but nicely smoothed. And then one old woman, she is already dead, she came and we showed her what we found and she said: At noon you bury this, no, not bury—burn this down there. And we really burned it. Well, and a woman came, and we were silent, but we didn't know what this was, right? A week later a woman came and said: You know, she [the witch] was suffering afterwards, she had to go to the hospital.

Then we thought to ourselves ... And the one who has [now] long been dead, she said that they suspected her ... (120)

While physical pain as a consequence of the burning of the horn certainly could not be the reason for the woman's subsequent illness, as claimed by the narrator, the persistent refusal to respond on the part of the members of the community performing the ritual (which is a common behaviour in such cases, although it was not explicitly mentioned) was a reaction that would probably cause a certain amount of psychic stress in many people experiencing such a situation, which could potentially trigger subsequent somatic problems. In a community in which the silence of the villagers bore a clear message—the message that the person had been identified as a witch—the awareness of the social consequences of such identification (broken neighbourhood relationships, ruined reputation, possible ostracism) may have caused even more serious consequences for the person's psycho-physical health. While in the above narrative there is no proof that these two events (the identification ritual and the witch's subsequent illness) were indeed related, and there is no indication about what kind of illness the woman suffered—hence drawing any conclusion would be too hasty—the silence of neighbours following the visit of an unwitcher seems to have led a French farmer, who realised that their ritual was targeted against him, into panic, which had devastating consequences: his farm collapsed soon afterwards, he sold his belongings, and his wife eventually died (Favret-Saada 1980: 161). Favret-Saada also gives another example of the efficacy of magic rituals, substantiated by evidence from psychiatric treatment: the terror of knowing that she was the target of an unwitcher's ritual calculated to cause her death allegedly triggered a paroxysm of anxiety in a woman, which ultimately led to her death. Although there was no medical explanation for her troubles, she was committed to a psychiatric hospital for delirium and paranoia. In the hospital she kept screaming and repeating that she was afraid, refused to eat and manifested many other neurological symptoms. After several months of being in such a state she died of exhaustion (1980: 85–91).

Anthropologists usually assume that “supernatural” attacks were ineffectual when they were performed, and if they were effective, they were only as effective as the victim let them be. In scholarly works, the claims of victims that they suffered misfortune due to an alleged bewitchment have thus been explained as a result of their weakness, fear, and suggestibility, and the researchers mostly focused on the reasons why people thought

they had fallen victims of the attack, usually explaining them on cultural and social grounds. Briggs argues that “[i]n societies where people believe in witchcraft their own fears usually function in this way, so that curses, threats and other expressions of ill-will have genuine power against the suggestible. The crime itself may be imaginary, but the imagination can be an immensely strong force.” People who believe themselves to have been the targets of bewitchment can go into shock resulting in pain or neurosis; the level of anxiety can rise to a traumatic condition in which the normal body functions may collapse (Briggs 2002: 52). The generally acknowledged effectiveness of witchcraft in a community is thus usually considered necessary for the act to be effective: “Maleficium (...) cannot be committed in a social vacuum. To be effective, it must be generally believed to be effective” (Larner 1984: 83). Indeed, the importance of the victim’s belief in the effectiveness of witchcraft for a bewitchment to be effective and for the victim to suffer its effects was occasionally emphasised by our interlocutors themselves (cf. inf. 122, p. 252):

I2: *She did this and she was certain that she could cause harm to someone or something. It only harmed those who believed in it, while over those who didn’t she had no power. But in the past it was more ..., people believed more. Now if somebody said something [about witchcraft], they would say that this is all nonsense. (...)*

F: *Who do you turn to, for instance, if a witch bewitches you? Was there nothing you could do if she wanted to do harm to you so that the chickens wouldn’t ... ?*

I2: *Yeah well, there was nothing else you could do except for not believing in it, right? (71)*

My neighbour explained this to me once, that she found [eggs] buried in the garden and that someone wished her harm. In that way. Now, if, if someone, someone believed in that, it was probably frightening. Me, if I found them, I would laugh at it, right? (...) If someone—this is what they believed—if someone buried eggs somewhere around the house or on your property, then they wished you harm, and, if they were buried, something bad in fact happened. To someone who believed in that, right? (97)

Yet, do the effects of the alleged witchcraft attack on the victim in fact have no explanation other than suggestibility, based on predisposed cultural notions? Bever argues that a person does not have to believe in magic or fear witchcraft in order to experience somatic effects of another person’s hostility (cf. 2008: 20): “(...) while culturally defined symbols could be used to express hostility and culturally defined beliefs could promote

vulnerability to it, neither was critical for the interpersonal effect to occur” (2008: 39). From the narratives recorded during our field research it is not possible to draw any conclusions about whether the cultural background notions were indeed a precondition for the bewitching (and counterwitching) acts to have any effect, yet faith was certainly not an insignificant factor in this regard. Even unwitchers relied on the faith of their clients in order to assure the efficacy of their own séances. According to her grandson, the famous unwitcher Angela H. never forgot to inculcate on her clients before their departure: “You should firmly believe this and go after it and it will help!” (164)

Nevertheless, one should not forget that people who assumed they were bewitched tended to interpret all subsequent, even much later misfortunes as the consequences of the bewitchment. These could be linked to the assumed bewitchment rather freely, adapted so that they confirmed the association and tallied with the allegation. Therefore it may not be the misfortune as such that was triggered by the fear of bewitchment, but its interpretation.⁵² Moreover, bewitchment was often postulated subsequently, after the misfortunes had already occurred, whereby the narratives provided a glue to bind the misfortune with the moment of alleged bewitchment into a succession of events that confirmed the association.

USES OF BEWITCHMENT NARRATIVES

No matter whether a person believed in the reality of witchcraft or not, the witchcraft discourse could be used strategically in everyday communication. While rational discourse could be strategically used in communication with outsiders such as ourselves, the witchcraft discourse could be applied strategically in communication with insiders. As long as witchcraft discourse had enough open support in the region, it constituted the context in which witchcraft narratives were “shared with licence” (cf. Ellis 1988: 66–67) and whose acceptability was governed by convention and “narrative necessity” rather than empirical verification and logical requirement (cf. Bruner 1991: 4–5). Even if bewitchment narratives told from within the witchcraft discourse may have provoked doubt, smiles or laughter, or scepticism among people thinking from without the witchcraft discourse, they were imparted an authority that could not easily be shaken. This enabled people to draw upon and mobilise them to their benefit in everyday life—usually not as calculated and manipulative acts but rather as a strategy based on the habitus (Argyrou 1993: 267–268).

Several narratives can give us a glimpse into the various uses of witchcraft discourse in the region. When a young man suddenly withdrew himself from society and was unable to find or even search for a job—probably suffering depression or a more serious mental illness—ascribing his failure to witchcraft was a convenient explanation. On the one hand, it helped the family cope with the sudden change in their son’s behaviour, and on the other, it offered a convenient explanation of their son’s behaviour to the community at large, which, not acknowledging depression as a serious mental state, would likely proclaim him an idler and disapprove of his behaviour. Moreover, if the son’s behaviour was ascribed to inappropriate upbringing, it could affect the reputation and consequently lower the social position of the family. Ascribing the source of problems to witchcraft thus also gave the family an opportunity to offer a suitable interpretation to the community, which prevented its reputation from being destroyed (cf. Hesz 2007: 30–31).

- II: *Now let me tell you something else. When I was very small, we were husking corn, and we had an early apple-tree and we always went to shake that tree, these were the first fruits. And my cousin was very, very diligent and very smart, and he ran there before me. And he found seven small bundles made of various pieces of cloth on the ground. And he picked them up. That boy stopped working, he shut himself away, and even nowadays there is nothing of him!*
- F: *Did she [the village witch she was referring to before] put them there?*
- II: *She wasn’t there, I have no clue where these small nicely made up bundles that he put in his pocket came from ... (...) He brought them home. [His mother:] Throw them away immediately! His mother was a bit superstitious and she said: Janez, why did you pick them up? He picked them up so that I wouldn’t take them from him. And he picked them up, but—the boy finished school, but he hasn’t done any work, never got a job, he’s on the dole, in short—nothing, he shut himself away ...*
- F: *Did this start immediately after?*
- II: *Immediately afterwards! He was sixteen, or eighteen at the time when he did this. This I strongly believe, that this did him harm, this I strongly believe! (53)*

Keeping in mind that arranged marriages, formed mostly on an economic basis, were prevalent into late twentieth century, it is no wonder that occasionally a person forced into a marriage preferred to escape rather than marry into an unwanted union. The interpretation of the disappearance of a bride

on her wedding day as being the consequence of bewitchment could save the reputation of the woman and her family, and mitigate the humiliation of the bridegroom. Moreover, the bewitchment interpretation also enabled the runaway bride to return without being derided by the community:

- I: *Down in S. this woman said this once. [It happened] at the neighbour's, one of the neighbours was envious or something, and her son was getting married, right, and [they prepared] a wedding. The bride came to the house and the wedding was taking place and everything—and the bride ran off. Well, back then they didn't have those ID cards, right, in Yugoslavia they didn't have them yet, right? And after seven years she returned.*
- F: *And why do you suppose this happened?*
- I: *... Yeah, well, she ran off, right?*
- F: *And [they said] that a witch bewitched her?*
- I: *Yes, because it's evil.*
- F: *And what did she say, where did she go? Where was she for those seven years?*
- F: *Well, she didn't have a clue. (29)*

In case of disagreements between marital partners, the interpretation of marital quarrels as a consequence of bewitchment undoubtedly offered a practical solution, at least temporarily, to the pair's problems—the notion that it was a witch who was trying to separate the couple not only offered an excuse for their problems and behaviour to the family and the community, but could, at least occasionally (as in the first narrative), successfully help them unite against the threat of malevolent powers and redefine their relationship (cf. Argyrou 1993: 264):

- II: *She fought with her husband at home, she threw him out of bed, and she said: The moment I threw him out of bed, a witch in the form of a toad jumped out from the bed [...] She said: You won't [succeed]! And I stabbed her [the toad], she said: I destroyed her, I trampled her! She said: Kaja K. lost her leg at just the same time! [laughs] And they have quarrelled with her about that ever since. (11)*
- F: *What if someone wanted to do harm to a young couple, to do something so that they wouldn't get along, did they know to do that?*
- I: *Yeah, some women knew that. There was a woman here, who just passed away, the one I was talking about that she was a witch. There was a wedding at their neighbour's, and these women knew how to plant something. Either bristles from a hog, or ... some kind of hairs. And she put them in the bed and those two never got on.*

F: *Right on their wedding night she had to put [it] in the bed?*

I: *Yes, yes, yes.*

F: *Where exactly?*

I: *Under the sheet. I heard this, right, my neighbour said: That damned old woman there, who is dying, she did it, that [I didn't get along] with my husband ... Well, she was living at her husband's and she was an only child and then she moved up from his place to her home and she is there now. And she doesn't get along with her mother either: [sighs] That old woman did it, so that they would have no peace. (83)*

If a mother interpreted the unacceptable behaviour of her son towards her as a result of bewitchment, such a redirection of the blame from her son to another person—the witch—helped her accept, and possibly forgive her son for physically abusing her. Moreover, the use of this interpretation in persuading other people that the true source of her son's behaviour lay not in his bad character or her failed parenting, but in a bewitchment caused by a third party, helped her clear his son's as well as her own name:

II: *I knew one [witch]... she lived in that house, she was old... her mother left her... and she lived there, unmarried, she still isn't married. And her son pretty much hated her and beat her and everything. So one day she paid a visit to the fortune-teller. She went there and she [the fortune-teller] told her it was done so that he was behaving badly, that this was done by ... (...) and she gave her some remedy so that this son then started to beat his mother-in-law, and not her anymore. (142)*

The conclusion of the narrative, that is, the son beating his mother-in-law instead of his mother, indicates that she must have suggested to her son that the unwitcher had identified his mother-in-law as the witch. As the unwitchers never pointed the finger at a particular person as the witch, but only offered vague notions about their identity which were completed by the clients, her identity must have been either unconsciously invoked by his mother, or else she had consciously concocted her identity herself, perhaps due to the jealousy she must have felt when her son seemed to prefer his mother-in-law to her. This accusation, however, not only helped redefine the position of her son, and herself, in the community, but also improved her own position in the relationship with her son, even if at the same time it worsened the position of his mother-in-law.

While buried objects have usually been interpreted as a proof of bewitchment aimed against the fertility and production of the domestic

animals or crops of the person on whose property they were buried, the interpretation of the burial of bones as a means of triggering conflict in the community was quite unusual. Such an interpretation of the source of communal conflicts and the “discovery” of the bewitching object as well as the spread of the information about it must have ultimately been the conscious action of a particular individual who deliberately acted towards a resolution of the tensions in the community. The subsequent joint action of the villagers, that is, the burning of the bewitching object that allegedly caused their conflicts, psychologically speaking, undoubtedly bound the inhabitants together and united them in counteracting a common enemy from the outside, that is, the witch, helped them resolve conflicts and re-establish friendly relationships in the community.

Sometimes they bury something [...] that is not visible and then everybody in the parish hates each other. One woman said that in the parish K. all the neighbours were cross with each other. And then someone found those bones and they burned them together and became friends again. (35)

Many narratives that presented misfortune as being a result of witchcraft can also be read as narrative strategies used by people when they transgressed the social norms; in these cases witchcraft was invoked to vindicate their behaviour, justify their actions and redirect or annihilate suspicions of illicit deeds that the community would not sanction. Narratives accusing a woman whom one was supposed to marry of being a witch, for instance, could serve as an excuse for men who wanted to break off an engagement, as the identification of their betrothed as a witch seemed to be a comprehensible and sanctioned reason for the cancellation of a marriage (cf. Devlin 1987: 199). Although no direct indication in the narrative below suggests that the narration was intentionally initiated by the man himself (it might actually hint at the neighbour being the source of the gossip—perhaps the rival in competing for the same man), it nevertheless indicates that narratives identifying a woman as a witch could provide an excuse for a man not to marry a woman he had promised to:

I know that down here, my grandfather told me this, there were two neighbours who didn't have the best relationship. And my grandfather was supposed to marry that woman and [they said] she was a witch. Well, this I can tell you about. That she was a witch and she went to her neighbour's byre and people found her doing some witchcraft there. That she was doing witchcraft. Then my

grandfather said, my grandpa, he said: I shall not take this witch, I shall marry another! And this is how it happened. (79)

Considering that the husbands were younger than the wives in about 27 per cent of marriages, on average almost six years younger (Sok 2003: 141–144), and that the fathers were thus not always that much older than their daughters-in-law, the arrival of a bride into a new (extended) family could have perhaps occasionally led to illicit sexual relationships between the father and daughter-in-law, or triggered sexual violence. The following narrative about a daughter-in-law being a witch who tries to make an attempt on her father-in-law's life clearly transmits his interpretation of the event, even though told by a fellow villager. As nudity rarely appears in the witchcraft narratives in our region, this detail could not be ascribed to the general stereotypical features of witches, and seems to imply the situation in which a rape, or perhaps a consensual sexual relationship between the father and daughter-in-law, was either attempted or indeed took place.

II: He knew that their daughter-in-law was a witch, right, he knew that she can bewitch, and she hated him, and she pushed him in [the water] when he was fishing, when he was drunk, to drown him. But he was so strong that he destroyed that, so that she didn't have power over him anymore. And he kept her there until the dawn. When the sun was rising, she was already naked in front of him. And then she asked him to let her. That is what my mother was telling me that it really happened. (4)

The detail of the nakedness of the daughter-in-law as a proof of her witchcraft could serve as a strategy to offer a suitable explanation to the people who caught them naked together, or, more likely, an answer to the silenced woman's accusation of her father-in-law of an attempted rape which she might have tried to prevent by pushing him into the water. In the latter case, the obviously widespread acknowledgment of the father's version by the fellow villagers seems to reflect the powerlessness of a woman's voice against a man's in the traditional community. The accusation of bewitchment in this case might have thus served as a strategy to interpret the situation in such way as to avert socially damaging consequences (cf. Argyrou 1993: 267; Hesz 2007: 31–32): the reputation of a man accused of rape, or of an adulterous relationship with his daughter-in-law, would have suffered if he did not ascribe the event to her bewitchment. In this way, however, it was “only” the reputation of the woman which was ultimately destroyed.

Not to be successful in domestic work, especially for women who were under strong family and social pressure to work hard, was considered intolerable behaviour and inevitably ruined their social position. When the results of their work were assessed as insufficient, attributing their ineffectiveness to witchcraft seemed a suitable way to explain it, as is evident from the following narratives:

I3: One girl was reaping, without success. Nothing, nothing was ... the more she was hurrying on with the reaping, the less she ended up doing. Well, she went to reap a small parcel for three days. And then she finally noticed the toad. And then I don't know who told her that she should grab it by the leg and stick it into the ground with a stake, to stab it with a stake and stick the toad to the ground. And she did this. In the afternoon, toward the evening. And the next day the neighbour was bound there where she stuck that toad. (125)

Yoy, and they believed that! For instance, if the livestock failed to thrive, yeah, the master said: Well they couldn't, I found a toad in the barn. A toad just went into the barn, but they believed that. There was a witch in the toad. And the witch went into the barn in the form of a toad and bewitched the livestock. (49)

As rumours and gossip are constitutive of, rather than simply reflect social reality, the narratives about other person's bewitchment could be effectively used in competitive situations against other members of the community, especially rivals, to promote and protect an individual's interests, or employed in order to redefine a social hierarchy: lowering the social prestige of another member and strengthening one's own position in the community (cf. Bleek 1976: 527, 540; Gustavsson 1979: 49; Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 175; Stewart and Strathern 2004: 33–35, 56). The following statement explicitly refers to jealousy, rivalry and wounded vanity playing their part in intentionally launched accusations of witchcraft by rejected men, as revenge against the woman who chose another:

F: But in your village there was no one who would say that some woman was a witch?

II: Now, that someone is a witch? No, no, that was in the old days. You know what? I will tell you this. [pauses] If two [men] went to the same woman [to propose], and she decided on the other one, then this one [the rejected man] would say that she was a witch, out of vindictiveness. (108)

Parents too, when dissatisfied with their children's choice of marital partner, could intentionally spread rumours about witchcraft in order to prevent an undesired marriage. In this case, it seems that the usual subjects of these rumours were the mothers of the future brides-to-be, accused of having bewitched their sons so that they would fall in love with their daughters:

There used to be a great difference between a rich farmer and small cottager and if that farmer's son fell in love with a poor girl, they said that her mother bewitched him, that her mother did that, for her daughter to come to a large estate and to have a good life there. And then they said that the old one was a witch. They said that she bewitched. It was often like that. If that boy was firm enough, he married her and they left the house. But it often happened that the family won, that they would have enough to eat. There used to be terrible poverty, terrible poverty! People lived very poorly; they had nothing to eat, to wear, nothing at all. Even if a boy loved a girl very much, he left her and married the one picked by his parents, just that she was rich enough, but in secret he kept visiting that one ... (130)

Interpreting misfortune in terms of witchcraft clearly helped people to explain it, and thus find some consolation and release their tensions. Interpretations within the witchcraft discourse helped people understand and even forgive others' intolerable behaviour, unite them in the struggle against the witch and redefine their relationship. In addition, by explaining physical deformations, which used to be considered a source of dishonour (cf. inf. 53, p. 328–329), and could even lead to a reputation of a village witch (see below), to be a result of bewitchment, one could save one's reputation in the community. But while in all these cases a certain level of belief in the reality of witchcraft was imperative—and one can imagine that the truth of witchcraft reality was readily embraced by people in times of troubles, even if not relied upon when they faced no misfortune—witchcraft discourse could also be employed by people who did not necessarily believe in its reality. As long as witchcraft discourse was prevalent and had enough support in a community, the application of witchcraft discourse could be used strategically for various reasons and with various intentions, not necessarily as a conscious, but rather as an intuitive and spontaneous act. It provided people with a communicative framework within which they could offer an acceptable interpretation of a situation or an action to the public when socially damaging consequences needed

to be averted. The witchcraft discourse could be employed when social norms were transgressed in order for people to save face, not necessarily as a conscious act aimed at achieving an objective. However, the situation could change when the bewitchment narrative did not relate a personal misfortune which affected the narrator or their family but was about gossiping others—in such case, this implied a certain amount of intentionality which could be applied to manipulate public opinion (cf. Hesz 2007: 32).

NOTES

1. Ginzburg argues that the notions about witches' sabbath did not come from above only, but were a compromise between the learned and the popular culture (1984).
2. He lists two additional characteristics that are not important for us at this point: the appearance of a witch figure is not an isolated or unique event—instead, the witch works in a tradition, by inheritance, training, or initiation; and second, a witch can be opposed by counter-magic, by forcing her or him to rescind a spell, or by his or her elimination.
3. Research shows that the bewitcher is only occasionally not identified in which case only a general allusion to an impersonal envy (although originating in the community) and witchcraft is made (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 211; Hesz 2007: 23, 27–28).
4. These were not necessarily always the closest neighbours but usually relatively close nonetheless. Sometimes it was not their farmsteads, but their fields, which were often scattered around that bordered.
5. The same cognitive orientation (“luck”, “economy of fortune”) was recognized by Toivo Vuorela already in 1960 (cf. Honko 1962: 119–120; Schiffmann 1987: 161; Mathisen 1993: 19; Stark 2004: 72; 2007: 20; Eilola 2006: 37).
6. Foster has been criticised by several authors—see, for instance, Kennedy (1966), de Blécourt (1999: 153).
7. The use of the term “superstition” and “belief” when referring to her neighbour's practice and the narrator's statement that they did not pay much attention to her actions could point to the narrator talking from without the witchcraft discourse, or that at least she was not sure whether to take her actions seriously—which could also explain why her neighbour's actions did not affect their relationship. Yet, on the

- other hand, she does talk about witchcraft in reference to her actions and refers to her knowledge of witchcraft (“You definitely have to know something”). In any case, their relationship *preceding* her alleged neighbour’s action was obviously in no way problematic.
8. From the narration it is not quite clear what exactly is the relationship between the woman who allegedly cut the piece of cloth and the man to whom the clothes belonged; presumably this was her husband whom she married after having been forbidden to marry the victim’s son.
 9. She alludes to the experience of getting lost that was typically ascribed to night witches (see Chap. 8).
 10. Eating from a common bowl used to be a customary way of eating in the countryside in the past.
 11. Spitting around oneself and talking badly about another’s animal (or child) was a proper way of behaving when in their presence.
 12. For more on proximity (see Hall 1963, 1968). Hall defines proxemics as “the study of man’s perception and use of space”, which primarily deals with “out-of-awareness distance-setting” (1968: 83–84). Behaviour in relation to the (un)allowed interpersonal distance, i.e. a constellation of sensory inputs, is coded in a particular, culturally specific way: “[...] there is *no* fixed distance-sensing mechanism (or mechanisms) in man that is universal for all cultures. [...] not only are people unable to describe how they set distances, but each ethnic group sets distances in its own way” (Hall 1968: 94).
 13. It also refers to looking and touching, but the transgression of these rules in the narratives usually featured already as a direct *manner* of bewitching, which I discuss in Chapter 4, Modes of Bewitching.
 14. As domestic animals (as well as the wife and the whole household) belonged to the master of the household and were, as Favret-Saada argues, considered a part of the owner’s extended body (1989: 48), the unallowed trespassing of domestic animals may have not only been feared for harming the crops, but perhaps perceived as the trespassing of the neighbour with bewitching intent himself.
 15. By “emic” I refer to the native terms or perspective, whereas by “etic” I refer to terminology established in academic discussion. For further discussion on emic—etic, see Barnard 2004 [1996]: 183.
 16. For a survey of various scholarly interpretations of the evil eye see Maloney, ed. (1976), Dundes, ed. (1981b) and Hauschild (1982).

17. Some researchers claimed that this is a universal “folk belief” (cf. Lykiardopoulus 1981: 222; Spooner 1970: 311; Schoeck 1981), but Dundes pointed out that only 36 per cent of the sample of 186 cultures possessed the evil eye belief (1981a: 259).
18. The same can be observed in other parts of Europe (cf. Spooner 1970: 313; Cutileiro 1971: 275; Dundes, ed. 1981b: 10, 56, 71–72, 83, 88, 93, 132, 216, 263; Lykiardopoulus 1981: 223; de Pina-Cabral 1986: 180; Alver and Selberg 1987: 28; de Blécourt 1999: 206–207; Perdiguero 2004: 141).
19. Although several narratives show that people were sometimes tolerant of their neighbours whom they knew to be burying objects on their property, this might occasionally be due to their own disbelief in the effectiveness of their act, rather than being an indicator of a general tolerance towards people burying objects. Moreover, burying objects on neighbours’ property was always considered an act done from envy with a conscious intent to do harm to others.
20. Dundes explains this reason for a person to be believed to have the evil eye on the basis of envy and the concept of limited good in terms of (bodily) fluids: a child wants a larger quantity of milk than it is entitled to get, given that there is only limited amount of milk (good) available, which means that his greed is sated at the expense of his other siblings.
21. A healing practice carried out against the consequences of the evil eye (and praise)—see below.
22. The fig-gesture was only mentioned as an *apotropaion* used by pregnant women against the dead.
23. Shepherds, who were able to control animals, were often imparted magic abilities in European traditional culture (cf. Mencej 2000: 115–124).
24. The narrator here possibly also refers to (evil) speech, but she is only guessing, and what exactly she meant by her remark is unclear.
25. This interview confirms that the master of the house stands for his property, livestock (as well as his wife, as we shall see later on) included (see below).
26. A couple of years ago eggs found buried in the earth (or in a stack of hay) in Ireland were feared to have been buried there by an evil neighbour with an intent to cause their crops to decay. The countermeasure in such case implied digging the eggs out and placing them on the walls dividing the households (Patricia Lysaght, personal communication, 26 November 2015).

27. The placing of eggs seems somewhat limited in scope (Slovenia, Germany, Ireland, Romania), yet this may be due to the lack of published information on the practice. Buried eggs that were found on the property of my interlocutor's grandmother in Bosnia a couple of years ago were understood as bewitching objects placed there by the neighbours, which led to strained relationships between the families (Dijana G., personal communication, 13 November 2015). My current fieldwork in Bosnia confirms that buried eggs were generally considered bewitching objects, even though the findings may not have been reported as often as they were in our region.
28. Incidentally, Pentecost also features in the narratives as the time of the witches' sabbath.
29. This is the only narrative about gathering dew in which death occurred as a result of the carrying out of the practice.
30. In a few instances the exact mode is not given, as in the following interview:

I: My mother used to tell me that some women went to milk and always had plenty of milk and butter and that, and they took it from all sides while saying something.

F: And how did she take it?

I: Well, just like this, from the plain air. She had such power, yes. And she always had plenty of milk and butter and all this. (65)

31. In his compilation of folklore from Styria, Pajek also published a legend about witches transforming into ducks and geese (1884: 28; cf. also Kelemina 1997: 90), yet in our region we never came across these types of transformations.
32. People sometimes referred to frogs, which, biologically speaking, are another family, however, these two names for the animals were often used interchangeably and upon examination it always turned out that what they had in mind was a toad.
33. The legends about man-bears and werewolves should, on the other hand, according to Alver, be interpreted as a metamorphosis of the *body*. The basic difference between a person sending out the *bug* and the one changing shape or being changed (metamorphosis), per Alver, is that the latter can only be observed in one place, while the former can be observed in two places simultaneously: in his or her own (human) form and in the *bugham*.

34. One could, indeed, hypothesise that some people may have tried to carry it out as an act of ostension (see below).
35. And its male forms.
36. I use the word “sorcery” only when I quote or refer to scholars who used this term. Occasionally, I also use the term magic, especially when referring to practices, not implying any conceptual difference between magic and witchcraft for people thinking from within the discourse.
37. The same holds for people that acquired such a reputation due to reasons other than bewitchment, discussed below (see Chap. 7).
38. My current fieldwork in Bosnia indicates the same, i.e. that there are people who openly admit that they went to see a Muslim cleric (*hodža*) to “return” the bewitchment to the person who had bewitched them beforehand, as a manner of retribution.
39. Curse masses performed by Orthodox priests were also often responses to “worldly” injustices such as theft, conceit, and ruining one’s reputation.
40. In my fieldwork in Bosnia, however, I was told a first-person narrative by a narrator who did not speak from within the witchcraft discourse, did not believe in witchcraft, and did not even know what the act was aimed at, about a case which she witnessed herself, when a neighbour was in fact seen and caught during the act of burying eggs to their garden.
41. The narrator was very fond of her grandmother and therefore their strained relationship could not be the reason for her to talk badly of her.
42. See the Conclusion.
43. Ostension can be defined as “the process by which people act out themes or events found within folk narratives” (Fine 1992: 205), i.e. their “dramatic extension into real life” (Ellis 2003: 41).
44. As early as the end of the nineteenth century, Slovenian folklorist Josip Pajek wrote that “witches could not bewitch, but they were very evil women, who poisoned people and burned their houses” (1884: 18).
45. Sally Hickey also argues that the descriptions of domestic animals’ illness and deaths in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Britain, related to witchcraft, can be linked to the ingestion of harmful plants containing toxic and poisonous chemicals, unwittingly or through excessive hunger (1990). Slovenian folklorist Josip Pajek similarly

claimed that bloody milk which some people in the Styrian countryside at the end of the nineteenth century ascribed to witchcraft was in fact the result of cows eating a certain herb growing in the fields (1884: 27). I was told by the local veterinarian that the poisoning of livestock could indeed occur due to the livestock pasturing on the meadows where horsetail or autumn crocus grow, and that local healers knew to warn owners against pasturing their livestock in such places.

46. The word “gypsy” here is used in a (pejorative) metaphorical sense, connoting a “thief” and a “malicious” person.
47. Although it is not quite clear from this particular fragment that the last deed discussed is ascribed to the neighbour who she held as a witch, this particular narrator, Marica Z., discussed in Chap. 3, *Repertoires*, clearly spoke from within the witchcraft discourse throughout the entire interview, and was deeply immersed in interpreting the world around herself through the lens of witchcraft and perceiving her neighbours as witches (cf. inf. 29, p. 187–188). The poisoned egg she mentions may have indeed been filled with phosphorus and intentionally placed on her farmstead (see below).
48. Such reluctance could be interpreted as a sign of the decay of the witchcraft discourse in our region and the decision not to label their neighbours witches conditioned by the current state of disappearing witchcraft discourse. Yet, calling neighbours whose acts are discussed in the framework of witchcraft discourse envious, evil neighbours, rather than witches, was observed elsewhere too (cf. Favret-Saada 1980: 166; Paul 1993: 111).
49. This detail could either point to the woman being a regular “guest” in their barn, or present a proof of her witchcraft.
50. Bever’s book has been criticised on various grounds, among others for reducing the variety of experiences to the brain functions, that is, the nervous system (Clark 2010: 89); for a lack of combining a neurocognitive approach with cognitive and cultural models (Sørensen 2010: 112); for the impossibility of applying his approach in order to diagnose individual cases long after they occurred (his research was based on testimonials from early modern witchcraft trials) (Clark 2010: 93)—bearing in mind that human brains may have changed over the course of history, and that the trial testimonies do not represent “truthful” reports of the real events, but are narratives, modified

through the complex process of memory and the court clerks' suggestions, as well as torture (Voltmer 2010: 99–101; de Blécourt 2010: 106). De Blécourt also questions how psychological mechanisms could trigger effects in inanimate beings, or else, accusations of witching which did not demand a victim. Moreover, he questions the necessity of elaborate identification, “if bewitchments consisted purely of ‘raw emotional pressure’ or ‘explicit expression of dislike’” (2010: 105). For the author’s reply to the critics see Bever 2010.

51. Bever argues that babies demonstrate an attraction to face patterns within ten minutes of birth and that they exhibit an innate fear of negative faces (2008: 26), yet one can assume that the face of a person praising does not directly reflect negative emotions, in spite of any negative emotions the person who praises might experience.
52. I would like to thank Ágnes Hesz for calling this to my attention.

Social Witchcraft: Countermeasures

Various measures were available to the population of the region in order to prevent a bewitchment in advance, or to cure its consequences. People either carried them out by themselves or else turned to specialists for help. De Pina-Cabral postulates the difference between therapeutic and prophylactic measures by the intervention of the specialist in first case and reliance on individual decisions, having recourse to a store of symbols and practices which were common knowledge, in the latter (1986: 183–184). In our region, however, curative measures were also at least to some extent common knowledge, although the prophylactic and curative measures somewhat overlap and the distinction between them is not always clear. In this chapter, I shall present those measures, preventive as well as curative, which belonged to the common stock of knowledge in the region and that people could draw upon and carry out by themselves when misfortune due to bewitchment was either anticipated or experienced. They were applied especially when the identity of the witch had already been assumed, or even established, or when proof of the bewitchment—an object believed to be a bewitching object, or a toad believed to be related to a witch—was found or observed on one's property.

Even before any concrete misfortune ascribed to bewitchment happened, and even before it was anticipated, people generally tried to protect their households against the ever-present threat of witchcraft. One of the possible general preventive measures was to sprinkle their home,

byre, and pigsty with holy water every morning, and the water taken from the church on the Epiphany was considered to be particularly effective against “the enemy”. To protect their vineyards, fields, and meadows, people sometimes stuck a holly sprinkled with holy water into the ground to symbolically watch over them. In traditional culture, circumambulation too was an important preventive as well as curative device for establishing the protection of the area inside the symbolic boundaries against external dangers (cf. Mencej 2013; cf. also Stewart 1991: 167–168), in particular during the liminal periods of the annual cycle, when the household was especially vulnerable to bewitchment.¹ As Patricia Lysaght writes, “[b]y reaffirming farm and domestic boundaries they served to control that threat which they felt emanated from neighbours, any of whom could have the disposition, and power, to harness the preternatural energy of the dangerous transition period of the boundary festival (...), when the supernatural was felt to intrude through the surface of existence” (1993: 42). Encircling the homestead was also performed after the consequences due to bewitchment were already present.

If they bewitched your pigs, you had to have holy water, and then gather brushwood there, where the water runs. Then dry it and put it at the crossroads. And then walk backwards and dear God [protect you] from that evil spirit. Three times [you had to walk] around the yard [like this] ... (29)

As small children and young animals were considered the most vulnerable targets of evil eye and praise, they were particularly carefully protected: we have seen that people generally did not like their neighbours or anybody else to see a small child or a domestic animal. When a person that was suspicious or already had the reputation of a witch approached, the protection focused on the establishing of barriers between the witch and the expected target of bewitchment: children and small animals, the usual victims of bewitchment, were hidden behind closed doors and people would not let suspicious persons enter the house or the byres to see them, let alone touch them.

II: Well, one woman here, well, she is already dead, people were saying that she was a witch. (...) And I know when I went to see the neighbour and then that woman, her name was Fani—I didn't know her as I had just moved here²—and she came and I talked to her, of course, but that woman [the neighbour] knew her and quickly pushed my daughter inside and closed the

door after her. And that woman, she wanted to go inside: No—you just sit here! And she wouldn't let her go inside at all. And when she left, she said: Don't you know that she is a witch? [laughs] And this was the first time that I heard these words, that a certain woman can bewitch a child with her eyes so that they get pains, that's what she told me, and she neither let her daughter to see her [the witch], nor my daughter go out. (8)

Another preventive measure against bewitchment was not to communicate with a witch in any way: when a person was suspected of dealing with witchcraft, every communication with her was considered dangerous and needed to be thwarted. Looking into a witch's eyes³ or talking to her was discouraged above all. This sort of protection, of course, could only be employed by an adult, as it requires a degree of control over one's behaviour which can hardly be expected from a child.

*I: You must not look anybody in the eyes, since as soon you do ...
 F: You must not?
 I: Indeed. When you do, they have power over you. (29)*

In case there was no way to avoid communication, it had to be kept to a minimum, for instance, by answering as little as possible; in France, for instance, people were only allowed to repeat the last words spoken by the witch (cf. Favret-Saada 1989: 45–46):

Power can also be taken with the eyes. You can talk with a witch but you mustn't look her in the eyes. It is best only to answer with a yes or no if she asks you anything, and not to utter any other word. (...) That you should not exchange any words with a witch was a basic rule, and it was widely known. (164)

As any exchange of an object, a gift, or a loan also meant an instance of communication (cf. Mauss 1954: 58, 61–62ff), any object given to the victim by a witch or lent by the victim to a witch could establish a channel through which the witch could bewitch (cf. Kruse 1951: 42; Schöck 1978: 108; Purkiss 1996: 108). Food given by a suspected witch should, therefore, not be eaten; instead, it should be rejected or thrown away, as we saw above (cf. inf. 166, p. 45–47; inf. 51, p. 156–157). In general, it was best not to exchange anything at all with a person suspected of witchcraft: *Those who knew never gave anything to a person suspected of witchcraft!* (164).

Not every mode of bewitchment had its counterpart in a protective or preventive measure or countermeasure; no such measures were available in case a witch stole a neighbour's yield in crops by gathering dew from their fields, or against a witch allegedly preventing a slaughtered pig from dying by looking at it through a sleeve. Against some types of bewitchment, on the other hand, not one but several countermeasures could be undertaken to annihilate their effect. The following narrative also referred to the use of threat as a countermeasure against bewitchment, relying upon the notion that it is only the witch herself that can undo her own bewitchment:

It may be that some people knew how to do things, perhaps in olden times. But I know about one case that happened not far from here in C. A neighbour was driving fodder home. You know what the fodder on the cart looks like? Before, there were no such trailers. And when he drove from the meadow to the road, all four wheels locked up. He couldn't move an inch. All four wheels stopped. And the cows couldn't move. And he approached him [the witch], he is not alive anymore, he was an old man. His name was Tone. And he [the neighbour] said: Damn you, if you don't release my wheels so that I can drive back home, I will kill you! A storm was approaching. Just like now [gesturing outside]. He said: If the wheels don't start turning this moment I will kill you! This way I will never again need to make any effort to set the wheels back in motion again! Tone said: You go and before you are back to the cart the cart will go on! What the truth is ... I wasn't there. My father said that, he said that this was plain truth, that they were all standing by the cart and it didn't go anywhere. Then he [Tone] said: You go back to the livestock and the cart will go! And he rattled with something as if the wheel would unwind or something. And that man really went back to the cart and the cart went on. The cart went on! What the truth is, what that was, unfortunately, no one knows. (99)

Such overt verbal threats to the witch, as mentioned in this narrative, were seldom, and usually applied in specific circumstances, that is, when they were directed against a person who either had a reputation of a witch in the whole community or was caught in action (cf. inf. 15, p. 194–195). A severe form of verbal violence also occurred in the region in 1938, when a woman was accused of causing hail and threatened with being stoned by the villagers (Svetieva 2001: 154). People usually did not dare to make overt threats unless they knew they had public support in expressing hostility towards a particular person who must have, therefore, been recognised as a witch by more or less the entire community:

We knew about many of these, but you can't tell them, because they do this at night. They only do this at night, never during the day. How can you say to someone: You did this? You can't. You can suspect one, or another ... (56)

Violent threats were occasionally uttered and violent actions occasionally performed as a countermeasure against an abstract “witch”, with no concrete person involved, which could perhaps point to the process of depersonalisation of witchcraft (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 215–216). Even when the witch against whom the threat was aimed was known, because the livestock stopped in front of her house, as in the second narrative, the threat was not uttered directly to her face:

I: *When he [the father] married for the second time, they were driving back home in the evening with horses, the horses started to neigh, and they started to lash them, but they didn't move either forward or backward. One of them knew how to handle this, one man, he has long been dead already, and he took a knife ... they used to have these wooden carts ... and he cut a wheel with the knife, he just cut it through and it went on.*

F: *And what did your father say, why the cart didn't go on?*

I: *That the witches were to be blamed.*

F: *And why did it help to cut it with a knife?*

I: *Well, I wouldn't know. This is to defeat her. (2)*

Our neighbour had mares. In the past people didn't drive like nowadays, with cars and trains, before they used to drive things with horses to Z. Usually they would arrive down here to R. or Z. in Croatia. These are the names of the villages. And there the horses didn't want to move any more. They stopped there. They were just getting up and across, they nearly killed him [the neighbour]. He whipped them three times, when they had those horse-whips that cracked if you ... He cracked it three times and said: You damned woman, move away from my path, I will go on! Leave me alone until I go my own way! He was carting potatoes, turnips, carrots, and meat, and wine in barrels, and all such things. And even nowadays they say that there is a witch in this house. (99)

Apart from the woman who was indeed given a heavy beating when caught during the act of stealing milk from her neighbour's cows in the night (see inf. 15, p. 194–195; cf. also Stark 2004: 80; 2007: 23–24), the following was one of the very few cases of physical violence I have ever heard of during field research:

I3: Once one [witch] showed up at someone's house and carried him here and there.⁴ He said: If you have power at night, you don't have it during the day! And he went over her during the day. During the day a witch has no power. And he went over her, that is, he beat her, because at night she ... Yes. He beat her. And he died six months later, and the woman was limping, because he did some harm to her leg. But she soon recovered, whereas the man died in six months. (125)

While reports of physical violence against suspected witches, such as beatings, killings, and burning of houses, have occasionally cropped up in various places in Europe long after the end of witch-trials (cf. Kruse 1951: 69–98; Tokarev 1957: 30; Henningsen 1982: 132; 1989: 104; Devlin 1987: 113–118; Davies 1999a: 110–111; Freytag 2004: 29; Mitchell 2004), this was, to my knowledge at least, rather exceptional in our region. This is perhaps partly due to the fact that it is a Catholic region, with a wider range of countermeasures available to the inhabitants than in the Protestant areas (cf. de Blécourt and Davies 2004b: 4), yet reports from other Catholic countries nevertheless include cases of violent behaviour against alleged witches (cf. Schiffmann 1987: 151–152, 157–159). Moreover, (verbal) violence should not be understood as a matter of prescribed behaviour one was to adopt when confronted with bewitchment in our region. Other measures, not only threats, could be applied in case the livestock was believed to have been stopped due to a bewitchment, for instance, by politely asking the alleged witch to move from the window, as we saw above (cf. inf. 30, p. 150–151). The instances of violent (re)actions seem to be rather a result of a spontaneous outburst of rage against a person believed to be guilty of bewitchment, applied, if at all, when one was recognised as a witch by the entire community or was guilty of a severe violation of social norms. Gijswijt-Hofstra's observation that it seems likely that “taking the law violently in one's own hands represented a last resort, after self-medication, counter-magic and/or consulting healers or unwitching specialists—insofar as these were available—had all come to nothing” (1999: 183; cf. de Blécourt and Davies 2004b: 3–4), cannot be confirmed in our region: violent actions of any sort occurred extremely seldom, and when they did, they were never preceded by any other type of countermeasure.

There are three main manners of bewitching against which countermeasures, belonging to the common repertoire of knowledge in the region, could be applied by people themselves. These were burying bewitching

objects; the sending of or transforming into a toad to suckle neighbours' cows; and bewitching by evil eye and/or praise. While witchcraft is usually chosen among the culturally available explanations for misfortunes once they have already occurred, and this is when the countermeasures are usually applied, in case the bewitching object was found buried or the toad was observed on the farmstead, these were carried out even when there was not (yet) necessarily any sign of misfortune: the evidence that bewitchment had been performed sufficed to trigger the uncoiling of the entire process of counteraction.

DROWNING SPELLS

No such manners as amulets, gestures, or items with apotropaic quality (such as salt, red thread, nails, horseshoes, horns, a piece of yew, candle, etc.), known in most cultures where the fear of the evil eye is present, were ever used as preventive measures against bewitchment by the evil eye in our region. When this could not be prevented in advance by not allowing the envious neighbour to see and praise the objects particularly vulnerable to this manner of bewitching, the only possible manner to counteract it was to cure it when the bewitchment had already started to take effect. The usual curative technique applied when a person was considered bewitched by an evil eye and/or praise in the region was called "drowning spells". A few narratives will give an idea about how the technique was carried out in our region:

There is another case from here. My mother-in-law's aunt lived up here. You can still see her house amidst the trees ... and they always had plenty of pigs, you know ... and if my mother-in-law had, for instance, a pig with small piglets she would never let her in the pigsty. And if that aunt managed to somehow come inside: pigs who were healthy and fine before would just be stuck flat on their back like this [shows]. And then she went and took pieces of charcoal, red-hot, and ... she had water in a pot and she dropped in as many pieces of charcoal as there were piglets. She was doing that under the chimney. (92)

Spells, they said spells. And I had a small child, I didn't believe that at all, not at all. (...) But I will tell you how it happened. The child had, he had intestinal worms, I guess. He was about nine months old, you know, and nothing helped. Now of course, we couldn't go to the doctor, as there was no ... Buses only drove during the day, nobody had a car then, there was no phone ... I made teas, I didn't know what else to do. Then I was at my sister's, down in B., and their

mother, she was very credulous, I mean everything ... in witches, everything ... [She]: The child has had a spell cast on him! Now who has ever seen something like this? [She:] He has got spells! You have to drown the spells! But how, I have never ... Then she showed me. I had to take some water [laughs], a cup of water and some fire from the stove, and they said I have to put four pieces of charcoal, burning, burning pieces of charcoal inside. I put the pieces of charcoal inside and it started to sputter, the water started to rustle as if it would boil from those coals. Then they said that these pieces of charcoal, they were four, I had to throw them each over my shoulder. And under the pressure I had to do that. That was near the kitchen. I threw each piece of charcoal into another corner. Then she says: Now give this water to the child to drink. And miracle of all miracles! – I gave that water to the child to drink—having believed nothing, and I still don't believe in spells—and the child was immediately cured! No tea helped him, whereas this had. And I explain this to myself that the pieces of charcoal must have secreted something, while they were melting in the water, when the water sputtered and heated from them, and I believe that coals were curative, that the child (...) They said: You see, you see that it was true! The child had no fever any more. (47)

II: Well, those old women they held as witches. (...) This was in the past when people didn't dare show small piglets or chickens and so on. They didn't dare show them to every woman. They became bewitched. And then the old women threw pieces of charcoal into the water. They had to repeat it until they stopped sinking. I believe it had to be an odd number. Seven, three or something. They had an iron, a long one, and it was turned a bit upwards, with these women dragging pieces of charcoal into the water. They had a pot filled with water and they dragged pieces of charcoal into the water, three or seven, for instance, the number had to be odd. When those coals started to come up, they stopped. Then they anointed or sprinkled the pigs or chickens with the water. They said it helped. They repeated this two three times, two, three days. (148)

I: I do not know about witches, I only know that we had a baby and my sister was crying, she had stomach pain as my mother had no more milk, she drank [cow] milk but even that was scarce and thick so the baby was crying. And I already knew that—my parents left her with me as they had to go to work—and so I was throwing those pieces of charcoal that we always had in the stove, it had to be good wood to give charcoal, and you had to throw three, five or seven in the water so that it sputtered and smoked and I threw them over my shoulder. For the child to stop crying. [laughter]

F: And did it help?

I: Yes, she stopped and fell asleep. Now I don't know whether it was due to this or because she was crying for such a long time and fell asleep afterwards. (77)

- F: *Have you ever heard about spells?*
 II: *Indeed, I heard about that too.*
 F: *What have you heard?*
 II: *That must be beech firewood, and before it burns, one can get pieces of charcoal and then these pieces of charcoal must be put into a small pot, or [one puts] a candle—whatever there is—into the water and if it sinks, then it is witchcraft, while if they float, it isn't. It isn't bewitched or how would I say.*
 F: *And in what circumstances would people drown spells?*
 II: *Well, when someone came and pigs were fine and they would very much praise them: How beautiful they are, how beautiful they are! And suddenly something came and they wouldn't want to eat any more. And then they were drowning those spells, as they say. (111)*

Although the details of the procedure somewhat varied, the common core of the treatment basically implies (1) throwing pieces of charcoal into a bowl or a glass of water; (2) after a while (usually when they are extinguished or stop sinking) taking them out of the water; and (3) throwing them away (over one's shoulder or head). Upon completing this procedure, the body of the victim was sometimes washed or sprinkled with the rest of water, or the water was drunk.

The references to the procedure appear in many collections of folklore narratives recorded in various parts of Slovenia in the twentieth century (Möderndorfer 1964: 338, 353; Piskernik 1964: 311; Dražumerič and Terseglav 1987: 229; Kebe 1988: 51; Dolgan 1992: 258; Tome Marinac 1993: 214; Zajc–Jarc 1993: 36), but the first report on the ritual performed in the territory of present-day Slovenia, more precisely in Slovenian Istria, appeared as early as the first half of the seventeenth century: “If a peasant gets ill and does not recover quickly, a fairy or a beautiful woman is blamed and called upon, and it is believed that they burned him when he treaded on their foot. Therefore they send a belt or a shoe to some old women, who look at this shoe or belt first, and then start throwing pieces of charcoal into the water, surmising about the origin of the illness; when they have named them all, they throw the pieces of charcoal into the water and the one that rustled the most, they say that it caused the illness” (Tomassini 1993: 49; cf. Lipovec Čebrown 2008: 113). Tomassini, describing the practice, referred to the procedure as being carried out when a person had fallen victim to a supernatural agent (“a fairy or a beautiful woman”), not a witch⁵—in all other aspects, however, the description of the procedure more or less matches the procedure performed in our region.

Ethnographic records of traditional healing in fact prove that the technique, although with slight differences, is an ancient one, and was widespread. References to the procedure have been recorded, for instance, in Croatia (Valjavec 1890: 247–248), Montenegro, Bulgaria, Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine (Moszyński 1967: 392), Macedonia (Obrembski 2001: 73–74), Greece (Hardie 1981: 115–121; Lykiardopoulos 1981: 228–229), Romania (Murgoci 1981: 128), and Hungary (Róheim 1981: 214–215), and the procedure was also known among the Jews (Brav 1981: 53). Since the ritual procedure of drowning spells turns out to be almost identical in its basic structure in many places of Europe, it must imply an underlying logic that informed its performance independently of each particular culture that may have moulded its specific details. So how can we make sense of the logic of the procedure?

Spells, considered to be the consequence of a witch's gaze at and/or, at the same time, of her praise of the victim, were traditionally conceived as something that penetrated the body of the victim through his or her "damaged" spots, and the task of the healer was to chase the spells out of the patient's body (cf. Radenković 1984: 141). The therapeutic procedures of traditional healers on bewitched patients, studied in Slovenian Istria in the twentieth century, thus typically focused on taking the spell that had previously been put into the body of a patient out of their body (Lipovec Čebren 2008: 134–139). Based on these notions, the glass of water used in the procedure can be considered a metaphorical representation of the victim's body, which is well in accordance with traditional conceptualisations of the body as consisting of liquid substances (Onians 1954: 200–228ff; Dundes 1981: 266; Walker Bynum 1990: 212; Purkiss 1996: 119). The pieces of burning charcoal thrown into water may thus be understood as mimicking the spells believed to have penetrated the body, and the procedure of taking them out of water as a metaphor of their extraction from the victim's body: only when they are completely removed from the body is the body cured. A variant of the procedure that requires the coals to be dragged into water until they stopped sinking to the bottom, that is, until they start floating on the surface (and are not *in* the water any more), points at the same notion, namely that the body is bewitched as long as there are spells in it. Moreover, when the ritual is used in order to identify the witch responsible for casting a spell on a victim, the procedure additionally supports the suggested interpretation: when the names of the possible perpetrators are associated with particular

pieces of charcoal, the one that sinks to the bottom of the water is the one that is identified as the witch.

Tomassini's report on the procedure emphasises its aim in the identification of the source of an illness (as is also the case in some other records of the ritual),⁶ while in our region the aim of the procedure was mostly in *curing* the bewitchment caused by the evil eye and praise; however, the boundaries between the diagnosis and cure are somewhat blurred (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 194), and the identification of the origin of misfortune is often deemed inevitable if one wanted to counteract the malevolent power. Moreover, not only can the source of misfortune be diagnosed by the procedure, but the name of the witch responsible for it can also be determined on the basis of the ritual, as mentioned already. De Blécourt only found a few instances testifying that the ritual also served to identify the witch,⁷ and concluded that the identification was not a necessary part of the ritual (de Blécourt 1999: 195). Yet it seems that the reason for the witch being so seldom identified by the procedure was not a result of the victim's lack of interest in disclosing her identity, but due to the fact—judging from our field research at least—that this particular procedure was often, though not always, applied immediately after the suspected person looked at and/or praised the subject, whereupon misfortune followed. The identity of the witch in these cases was thus usually no secret and the identification not needed.

ERADICATION OF BEWITCHING OBJECTS

When an object that was believed to have been put there with the intent to bewitch was found buried in the field, in the garden, in the barn, in the byre, or around the house, collective knowledge of measures aimed at prevention of misfortune from happening was available to the victim. Tradition offered detailed instructions about how to either only destroy or remove the bewitching object buried by the witch, or how to perform a ritual that at the same time revealed the identity of the witch and resulted in her ultimate loss of power. When first, the buried objects, usually eggs, had to be dug out and thrown away, crushed, buried in the manure pile, on the boundary of the territory, on a path or at a crossroads, or thrown or buried on the property of the neighbour who they thought had buried it on their property, as we have seen above. A few narrators only also mentioned that the buried egg should not be moved

or broken, and only one that it should be buried even deeper into the ground.

F: *And what happens with those eggs, if someone finds them?*

I: *I don't know ... they broke them, that's all. Crushed them then and there ... (117)*

F: *And what did you do with the eggs then?*

I: *Smashed them. [laughs] (104)*

F: *And what do you have to do then so that the eggs don't harm you?*

I: *Destroy [them].*

F: *And how? Is there some special way? How do you destroy them?*

I: *You toss it as far as you can with a hoe, so that it breaks. Never hold it in your hands. With the hoe, and throw it as far as possible, so that it breaks, so that it is destroyed. (56)*

F: *What did you have to do with those eggs?*

I: *Well, as if they were harmful. That's the main thing, that was the basic idea. A witch's eggs are harmful, because they were probably placed with the intent to, what do I know, do harm to someone.*

F: *What would they do with them?*

I: *Throw them out.*

F: *Where?*

I: *On the manure pile. (108)*

F: *And what did you do with those eggs?*

I: *Well, nothing. We threw them away. (118)*

I: *They said that, that you shouldn't break eggs. That that witchcraft would spread to people.*

F: *What did they do with the eggs then? Did they burn them?*

I: *Supposedly they just left them where they were. Maybe some wild animal ate them. A fox at night, perhaps, or something like that. (97)*

F: *What about eggs, did you ever hear that they placed them?*

I: *Ah, that too, yeah ... in the fields. Yes, they did, that I know, that too. At our home a lot of them were placed up there, here I don't know. Here there weren't any, but up there, at our home. Yeah, in how many places we found those eggs up there, well ... when we were ploughing and that, well, we found them. Yeah, God knows why they placed them, that was also some sort of witchcraft. Why would they go bury eggs in the fields, why?*

F: *Why was that, I mean, what did they want [to accomplish] with that? What did you think when you found a buried egg?*

- I: *Well, nothing, a malicious person did that there, so that God knows, if you broke the egg, God knows what could happen, just that when we found them like that, I just uncovered them. Then we carried them inside but we also didn't break them.*
- F: *Oh, you weren't allowed to break those eggs?*
- I: *Yeah, they say that you're not allowed to break them.*
- F: *What if you break them, what [happens]...?*
- I: *Well, they say that then you have this power at your house, so that some harm is always being done.*
- F: *But not out there in the field or with the crops?*
- I: *No, at the house. At the house [so] that someone does someone harm, that after that things are not as they should be. Yeah, all sorts of those things used to happen. Yeah, as I said, all sorts. (...) (60)*
- I: *Yeah, that also... that happened too, right, when we did something in the fields and such, that they [found] eggs and then they said that they, that after that the chickens would not lay in that house, because they had, well, planted them and such.*
- F: *What were those eggs like?*
- I: *Well, normal.*
- F: *Hen's eggs?*
- I: *Yeah, normal hen's eggs. When for example we were ploughing in the vineyard ... and you turned over, and you turned over [the soil], you turned it over and these eggs would roll out. Or when we ploughed the field and you dug them out, normal eggs. Just that you weren't allowed to break them, right?*
- F: *Aha. Because if you broke them, what would happen then ...?*
- I: *Well, I don't know, that that person would be harmed, which would be, which was intended by that, right? So you have to leave [them] alone, right, so that the one who did it does not have power, that their wishes are not fulfilled, right? (72)*
- F: *And how did you have to deal with eggs if you found them?*
- II: *Well, nothing. You buried them deep in the ground, right? So that they wouldn't be on the surface, right? If they were [buried] too shallow. (111)*

When the buried egg or other object was removed or destroyed (or alternatively: not broken), the bewitching power would stop (or not even start) emanating from the egg, yet the witch who had buried the object in the first place still retained her power to continue to do evil in the future and one could never be sure about when and where she would strike again. The identification of the witch, therefore, was crucial. Only the identification of the witch under the precise execution of the

prescribed ritual could at the same time also annihilate her further power to bewitch.⁸

The most usual manner to identify the witch was to burn the bewitching egg. The burning often had to be carried out under precise instruction, whereupon the witch was expected to approach in haste due to the pain she was suffering while the egg was being burned. The first person to show up was, therefore, identified as the witch (cf. Davies 1999b: 207; de Blécourt 2000: 301).

I1: When I was still at home, no hen was hatching. A hen was sitting but when the eggs were supposed to start hatching, they just started to break. The hen got totally crazy. Then my mother went to her mother and she gave her the eggs and she said that they all hatched alright. And she gave her the eggs and the hen [back] and again nothing hatched in our house. There where we had fields, where we were growing potatoes, we found nests of eggs buried in three different places, fresh eggs. Under the potatoes. When we dug the earth up, we found eggs under our potatoes. (...) Before we were throwing them away, but then my grandfather said: You know what? Take the nest to the crossroads and burn it. And I said: When? In the evening. You shall see that the witch will come. (...) He said you shouldn't talk with them when they come! And I really burned the egg, and they started to break and I waited for a while and suddenly I saw an old man approaching ... And I just ran back home, I didn't even look at who he was! (150)

Even when the identity of the witch was already known or was more or less firmly suspected by the victims even before the buried object was found, the ritual still had to be carried out in order to deprive the witch of her power:

- I: We found them in our field. In two fields we found buried eggs. Not deep. Just like this, some earth placed above so that you didn't notice. And this caused that on that field the chickens didn't hatch out of the eggs. Yes, this is what they prevented. They prevented this. The one that did this is already dead, she died long ago. Long ago ...*
- F: So you knew who she was?*
- I: Yes, we knew exactly who did it.*
- F: Was she from the same village?*
- I: Yes, on the border with the other village. Up there [shows]. There where we have the field, up there. We have a field and we often found eggs there.*
- F: What kind of eggs were they?*
- I: Hen's eggs.*

- F: *Not rotten?*
- I: *White, white, white, totally healthy. It cracked so loudly as it was lying in the ground, it dries up due to the sun and it cracks when you hit it.*
- F: *And what did you do with these eggs?*
- I: *Well, we either buried them deeper to the ground or threw them out. Actually we should have burned them but we didn't, we didn't remember. We should have burned them.*
- F: *What would happen if you burned them?*
- I: *We would save ourselves! Yes, we would save ourselves, it would be better. In the other village it was the same. In many households there were eggs buried in the ground. You see, this I forgot to tell.*
- F: *When you burn the egg, does anything happen to the witch?*
- I: *Yes, she isn't ... she can't ... I mean she doesn't have such power any more, the person that did that. Yes, that one has died already. I knew exactly who did it. One woman from the village R., her name was Nada. Nada was her name. But she has been dead for a long time now. Now we have peace, we have peace now. (135)*

The procedure of burning a buried object relied on the principles of sympathetic magic: since the egg belonged to the witch and had been in contact with her, she was still connected with it even though no longer in physical contact with it (cf. Frazer 1974: 14–16 ff; Petzoldt 1999: 6–7; Mauss 1972). While the egg that the witch buried in the ground was burning, the witch would feel a burning sensation in her own body and would, therefore, hurry to the spot where the procedure took place in order to relieve herself of pain—and by doing so, reveal her true identity. Moreover, identification of the witch through the procedure of burning the bewitching object (egg) she was in contact with was a way to hurt its owner through an “analogous injury” (cf. Pócs 1999: 116). The consequences of the procedure—the witch suffering, experiencing serious pain, or becoming sick—thus at the same time implied retaliation:

Well, once I remember, we were almost sued. And it was at the crossroad and about that woman they were also telling that she knew. They said that she was malicious, that she was burying all these things. And then they lit a fire to the pile they made at the crossroad and that I don't remember how it goes, I think it had to be done before sunrise. And she came and asked: What are you doing? Why are you torturing me? And she came to that fire where they were burning [the buried object], you know. (33)

- I1: *Well, just for those, for those eggs they said, they say that if you find an egg buried in the ground, you take it out, then you take it on one of those paths, to the crossroads, like you said ... But right to that crossroads, and my sister-in-law said, she said: Nothing else will do, right, she said, those eggs have to be taken to the crossroads, then a whole pile of that, how do you say, that brushwood ...*
- I2: *... you have to burn it, so that then you will know who placed it, that they will come by. I have no idea if that woman ever did that, I do not know if she did.*
- F: *But if that person came by ...*
- I1: *Yes, then that person was guilty ...*
- F: *What did you have to say to that person who came by?*
- I1: *Nothing.*
- I2: *Who knows?*
- I1: *Nothing! You lit a bonfire there, they say, so that it burned the heart of that person so that they would come past that bonfire in order to apologise ... The one who ... lit the bonfire, they did not have to stay there with their friends, they could go far away, and then see who the person was. (15)*

A few records, describing the practice of burning aimed at the identification of the witch that was not being carried out on the buried object (or a toad, as we shall see later), but on the chain of the bewitched cow, rely on the same notion. Since the witch must have been in contact with the cow, the manipulation of an object “belonging” to the cow, that is, the chain with which it was fastened in the byre, would ultimately cause the witch to suffer:

- I1: *[This] one neighbour was leading his herd past another neighbour's place to water. After that the cows never had milk. There was none, and there was none, and there was none. And after that they said that he had to put the chain from one of the cows, right, into the fire and with that ... to blow, well, that was like a bellows, an, an upright wooden and you could put your fist inside and blow hard, so that it was, that it was completely hot [the fire], and supposedly that witch would be totally burned.*
- I2: *But after that that witch was still in that house, where they were [unintelligible]. But it was said that when she says Good day, you shouldn't say anything in reply.*
- I1: *God forbid [that you] reply, otherwise you would save her!*
- F: *You mustn't reply?*
- I2: *Then you would save her.*
- I1: *Yes.*
- I2: *[They said] that that woman's cheeks were totally burned, when they melted ... that chain. (59)*

- I: *Witches could come to the byre at night, and bewitch, so that the livestock did not thrive, and cows [could] not get pregnant.*
- F: *How could they do that?*
- I: *Well, only they knew. Nobody knew how. But if you wanted to counteract these witches, when a cow was bewitched, one had to throw the chain of the bewitched cow into the stove, and into the iron pot, they used to have these iron pots for cooking, and put the chain into it and then beat the chain hard with a stake. As that chain was burning, so the witch was smarting and had pain. That's how they revenged her.*
- F: *Did she die?*
- I: *No, but she usually came the next day, or the day after, all burned and scabby.*
- F: *So it was visible on her?*
- I: *It was visible and she was calling Good morning or anything so that somebody would answer. And usually everybody would just shut themselves inside the house and wouldn't respond. She was calling because if the master of the house, or anybody from the house, responded, she would keep her power. If no one responded, she suffered.*
- F: *So she would suffer, but would she keep her power?*
- I: *Of course, of course. But she suffered, she surely suffered. Otherwise she wouldn't. And usually they would shut themselves inside the house and then a woman came whom they never thought was a witch, but she came and she was identified as a witch. They said she was a witch because she came to that signal. That she was a witch. And maybe she didn't even know anything. (130)*

In the instructions for the procedure, the liminal aspect is often particularly emphasised. Eggs were said to have to be burned at physical or symbolic spatial boundaries, for instance at the boundary of one's property or at a crossroad (cf. Puhvel 1976). When an exact location of burning was not given, the burning sometimes had to be done on brushwood gathered from several (usually nine) different brooks, which too bears a liminal connotation. In contrast to the liminal points of life (birth, weddings), or those of the annual and lunar cycles, when people and households seemed particularly vulnerable to witches' attacks, the countermeasures favoured liminality in the *daily* cycle: the buried object sometimes had to be burned precisely at noon or before dawn, that is, at the liminal time points which represent ruptures, openings to otherworldly forces in the daily cycle (cf. de Pina-Cabral 1986: 179, 185; Tolstaja 1995: 30). The preference of the liminal points in the daily cycle, and not those of the annual or lunar cycle, is only understandable in light of the necessity to counteract the bewitchment as soon as possible after it had been discovered; waiting for the right day of the year or the right

moon phase would simply take too long. Nevertheless, in traditional conceptualisations of time, the different time cycles (annual, lunar, daily, and life) mirror each other, and the liminal points of one cycle equal those of another (cf. Tolstaja 1995: 27–29), and can thus easily be substituted for each other.

They had this habit ... When they found, for instance, what they used to place [on others' property] They had to go to the crossroads [to burn it]. A crossroads like this one [shows]. (...) When they found something, they had to burn it precisely at noon, and if that person came by, you should neither greet them nor look at them. And then you saw, for instance, in a half an hour, [that] this person started to suffer. For instance like illness, they started to writhe with pain, terribly. They couldn't breathe. And then you knew where their power comes from so that they can do this. (120)

- F: *When one didn't know who caused their misfortune, could they somehow find out who the witch was that did them harm?*
- I: *Yes, they said that you have to gather brushwood from nine waters, and gather cobwebs from nine corners and everything (...) And then you have to burn it [the buried object], and that person [the witch] starts to suffocate at home and arrives at the spot where this is being burned, and says something. But those who know must not respond to her, no matter what they were asked. One has to have the power to resist, even if that person tries to persuade them to speak. Those who know will not speak to them. This is how they find out that it was they who did the harm. (83)*

As emphasised in several descriptions of the procedure, in order for the ritual to be effective, that is, for the witch to lose her power, it was crucial not to communicate with the person arriving on the spot where the countermeasure was being carried out. If you failed to follow instructions regarding silence during the procedure, the procedure was for nought—even if the witch was identified, and the bewitching object annihilated, the witch's power was not destroyed: the witch was “saved”, as people said, meaning that the perpetrator retained her power for further bewitchments.

- I: *Yes, I know, when I was at home ... and we found eggs in there, right, ... when we were digging corn ... we were planting corn and our neighbour was planting corn ... and then ours was completely red, red right through, right, that was not good. And then we found eggs and I ... there were several*

tough guys there, right, and they ... She said: Now nobody say anything, right? [loudly, imitating her]. She found an egg. Zora, right? ... And then she went and gathered what the water carried here and that brushwood and all ... and she gathered it and put it on those eggs and burned them. She said: Now if someone comes by ... nobody can answer! [loudly, commandingly, imitating her]... What will happen otherwise? they asked ... You will, you will see! [Remain] completely quiet, when she will most want you to speak, be quiet! We will see which one does that! [imitating her] And it was true. She [the witch] comes: Well what's all this, what's this, what now [speaking quickly], what are you doing, what are you doing? [imitating her]... Now [there was] one woman ... she was already a widow ... and she spoke ... and she saved her. She [Zora] said: If you hadn't rescued her, she would be frying here, just like those ... eggs fry. Now we know exactly that it was she who did it.

F: *How would she fry?*

I: *Well ... she would burn ... in that fire. She would just be [caught] inside ... she wouldn't be able to get away from the fire ... the one that was burning.*

F: *What did you call those women who placed eggs?*

I: *... They said they were witches.*

F: *Why does that witch come if you start to burn a fire?*

I: *Well, 'cause it burns her. It burns her, it roasts her [loudly], but she hurried out to us in the field [repeating]: What's this, what's this? [imitating her, quickly]*

F: *How long did it take before she came?*

I: *... It hadn't burned up yet, [and] she was already there.*

I: *... What are you doing, what are you doing...? [imitating her, quickly]. Immediately, amongst all those tough guys she came there. What's this, what's this, what's this? She kept repeating: What's this? [imitating her] ... She [Zora] said that while she was burning, she said that everyone should be quiet ... that nobody should utter a word ... And then one woman she spoke out. Yoy, how she was scolded! (16)*

II: *You have to go to the crossroad to burn that on the stuff that the water brought from somewhere. Then she [the witch] will pass by when you burn this and if you talk to her, you will fail. You mustn't say anything. That's what I heard. That's what my mother told me. (28)*

The first person that showed up was therefore identified as the witch that buried the object, and thus found responsible for the misfortunes that befell the victim. If the procedure was to be carried out successfully, it was crucial for the victim (and all those present) to remain silent, no matter how the alleged witch tried to extort a communication—only this way one could hope to destroy the witch's power once and for all.

ANNIHILATION OF A TOAD-WITCH

The usual countermeasure against a toad related to a witch was aimed at its immediate destruction. The most common ways of destroying it were burning it, stabbing it with a sharp object (such as a dung-fork, a knife, or a stake, whereby the toad was left dying on top of it), more rarely also in other ways, such as putting a cigarette into its mouth or pouring boiling oil into it; only once was it said that the toad has to be shot. As a toad was sometimes understood as a human witch transformed, stabbing it may be understood in terms of an action that results in a change in the body's boundaries, putting the form of the object in question.⁹ The practice of stabbing toads with a stake, a knife, or a dung-fork¹⁰ can therefore be understood as causing a rupture between the two forms of the witch, her human and animal form, and thus preventing her metamorphosis (cf. de Pina-Cabral 1986: 108, 113).

- F: *What about frogs? Did you have any beliefs about frogs?*
 I1: *Frogs?*
 I2: *Ohhh, when old people said that they throw you, right, when they jump. That they are just plain bad luck. But that's nothing.*
 F: *They brought bad luck?*
 I2: *Yes.*
 I1: *Yes, if there was one near the house, right, if it walked around the house, that there was bad luck and all ...*
 F: *And what did they do with them?*
 I2: *They brought them to some crossroads, and put them in the fire.*
 I1: *Yeah. You have to impale them on a stake, and then lift them up.*
 I2: *No, burn them. Burn them.*
 I1: *Yeah, and burn them, yes, of course. Or, well, put them to the ground, and ...*
 F: *Put them?*
 I1: *Those toads that were (...) Impale them completely, and then put it on another's property, so that they are dying for a long time, right, that they die up there.*
 F: *And why was it necessary to do that?*
 I2: *Well, that's just like that.*
 I1: *Yeah, some people said that you get them out of the house by [doing] that, so that there is no more that. (63)*
- I1: *Yes, you see, this too. A toad, that the witch turns into a toad, this also [happened]. And well, I didn't live through it myself, nor see it, but they said that there were, I don't know where, far away, people so superstitious*

that they impaled a toad to the byre door. To the door! As if to say: now we have destroyed the witch that harmed our livestock. (108)

- I: *Or down there, where the neighbour was, right? She was ninety-nine years old, right, when she died, right? And then at our house ... on the fifth day after her death ... those toads were jumping here! And those big ones! And then my husband said ... I went out there, he said: Don't you see that they're out there? I said: What do you know if it's safe to stab it here, maybe it's better to just leave it and perhaps it'll go away. And then he said, yeah: I just want to, damn it, stab it! (...) And then we thought that now something will not be okay here. I said, God knows, I said, some witch must have her fingers in this here. And then he left, and said, yeah, I'm going to stab it! I said: There is no need, just leave it alone! And then he left it alone, and afterwards everything was alright.*
- F: *But what do you think, did a witch turn herself into that ... toad or something?*
- I: *Yes, yes.*
- F: *Or that she just sent it?*
- I: *Hmm ... some bad luck could [be visited upon] the house or something like that if he impaled them, right? Yeah, it's best to leave them alone.*
- F: *And those toads were witches?*
- I: *Yes, of course ... she sent them.*
- F: *She sent them, you think?*
- I: *Yes, that woman that was bewitching and everything. (60)*

Both of the main ways of destroying a toad, burning and stabbing, not only annihilated the bewitchment, incorporated in the animal itself but also allowed for the identification of the witch related to the toad. Just as the witch who had buried a bewitching object was recognised by her arrival at the spot where the burning of that object took place, or sometimes by the burns on their face or body, the witch who sent a toad or transformed into one was also recognised either by arriving at the spot where the toad was being tortured, or identified subsequently by the burns on her (human) face or body, in case the toad was being burned (or a cigarette put into its mouth), or in case the toad was being stabbed by a hole in the apron or an injury on her body. The narratives often particularly stress the simultaneity (at the same moment, from that moment on, from that day on ...) of the injury to the animal and the injury or other consequences of the human body or the clothes of the person who was allegedly linked to the toad: if the toad was stabbed, the woman was believed to be injured at the same moment on the same part of the body where the toad was being injured, or else, got a hole in her apron; if the

toad was burned, the woman's body was supposed to be burned at the same moment (cf. also inf. 11, p. 205).

- I: *Yes, this one I can also tell. There was a neighbour here, she has long been dead. She lived in the centre of the village, alone. And of course she ... My father told me [how to do] this. Every morning a toad comes to me (...). Here she was again, at the threshold. What the devil should I do with her? My father told me so: Be quiet, light the fire, burn the toad! You must not utter a word! The next morning you will see the woman who is the toad all bound up. And true, she was all bandaged as she was all burned. This is what my father told me.*
- F: *So you burned the toad and the woman was burned the next day?*
- I: *Yes, the woman that was changed into a toad. Like my father told me. (...). He said: You will see the next day, you will see her all bandaged! And I, indeed, saw her.*
- F: *And she actually changed into a toad?*
- I: *That's what they said, that she changes. But you are not allowed to talk while you are burning her. (116)*
- I: *There was one woman there, when I had not yet moved [here], this is what they told me, they were there in the field, where that big house is, and then that sister of [the] husband sold it, she was maybe seventy, seventy-three [when] she died. She said that there was one [woman] who did this. There was also another witch up there on the right, she was also a witch. And she was an old woman, I did not know her, she died before that. And she came to the field to tell them something, and then she came and I don't know if it was the husband or his brother, they had that toad [laughs]. They had it and they gave it a cigarette, they held it and put the cigarette in, into that beak [laughs]. And then that woman came and supposedly she was all burned around the mouth. She was all scabby around the mouth, like that toad. They all said that she knew to do things, and that she was punished afterwards because she did [things].*
- F: *Were you afraid of her?*
- I: *Yes, we are always afraid of such, such creatures. But they say that it is useful as it hunts the mice and eats the snakes. They said that. (104)*
- I: *In the previous century, well, at the beginning of this century they said that the frog had some meaning, that a witch was behind [it]. That they stabbed them.*
- F: *What did they do?*
- I: *They impaled them on stakes. They impaled them on stakes, when they saw them, I don't know. And that when the toad was suffering, that woman came to save her [laughs], how it was, I don't know. I never saw this, and also what I heard ...*

- F: *And how was the toad related to the witch?*
 I: *How should I know how they had this ... I don't know.*
 F: *Who were these women?*
 I: *These were mostly old women.*
 F: *Did they hold them for witches?*
 I: *Yes, they recognised them. They said that those women who had toads had a hole in their apron. (40)*
- II: *Some said that they impaled the toad on the stake, that they are witches and I don't know what (...)*
 F: *What did they say? Did the witch change into a toad or ...?*
 I: *I don't know...*
 I2: *Yes, that's how they said.*
 II: *I heard about this several times, and I saw them impaled on the stakes.*
 I2: *Yes.*
 F: *And why did you have to impale them on a stake?*
 II: *How could I know? So that she suffered, that woman linked to this [toad], that she revealed herself, yes, this is how it was, that she revealed herself. That she did something bad to her neighbour or something like that.*
 F: *How did she reveal herself?*
 II: *Well, she comes to apologize or she comes to the house, this I don't know, I can't say. (41)*

Like the narratives describing the procedure of burning eggs, the narratives about a destruction of a toad also emphasise the importance of silence at the crucial moment, that is, when the witch arrives at the spot where the toad is being tortured, for the ritual to be effective:

- I: *They said that before—that young lady who was here before me, she says that her mother said, basically they used to believe this, right, that she said that there was a woman up there who was a witch.*
 F: *Here in the village?*
 I: *Yes, yes, a little farther down, that there was a witch, whose cow didn't have any milk, and then this one fellow asked about it, and they said that he had to put a frog, that toad that they had there, right? That that toad was always walking in front of the byre, and that one said that you had to impale the frog on a pitchfork, and put boiling fat in it. And then they did that, so that witch would come, and that they all had to be quiet when she came, that they were not allowed to speak. And then, they actually did that, and that woman did come, right, and that she called and asked: Open up, open up! But there were small children, right, and they started to cry, and then that mother answered and said: What do you want? But that she [the witch] didn't answer, she just ran away, right.*

- F: *And afterwards, then afterwards it was all right? What would have happened if she hadn't spoken?*
- I: *That something would happen to her [the witch], right? In those days that was very troublesome, that's how those beliefs were, right? Some of them still [believe] today, but here there were old people, and yet nobody believed in any of that. No. They said that's just like that, right? (39)*

While the animals that witches were believed to be able to turn into in Europe varied widely, the shooting, burning, and stabbing of the animals representing the witch, whereupon the human witch suffers injuries, are constant motifs of European legends about the witch stealing milk or otherwise doing harm (cf. Thompson motif G 275.12, Witch in the form of an animal is injured and killed as a result of the injury to the animal; ML 3055 The witch that was hurt—cf. ní Dhuibhne 1993: 77; af Klintberg 2010: 295, P20). They often exhibit a common structure: the animal is hurt (while being observed during the harmful action); it manages to escape; an injured woman is found in the place where the animal found shelter; the woman is recognised as being the (hurt) animal by her injury. This type of legend has been recorded in many places in Europe from the twelfth up into the twentieth century (Kruse 1951: 19–38; Đorđević 1953: 11; Dömötör 1973: 185; ní Dhuibhne 1993: 77–78; Rey-Henningsen 1996: 145–147; Davies 1999a: 139, 1999b: 190), yet ethnographic records indicate that the identification of a witch through hurting an animal was not a matter of tales only, but that even at the end of the twentieth century in some places, not only in our region, actions against animals believed to be transformed witches were in fact carried out: a farmer from Poland whose cows did not give enough milk thus crushed a toad, in spite of the request of a woman passing by at the same moment to spare its life; the next day the woman allegedly took ill, her back blackened and in a couple of months she was dead (Schiffmann 1987: 159, cf. also 151).

NOTES

1. Witches were often particularly feared in the liminal periods of the annual and lunar cycle, when trespassing was considered especially dangerous and neighbours especially unwelcome (cf. Lysaght 1993: 38; Tolstaja 1995: 35). The danger of witchcraft related to liminal periods in the annual cycle, however, was not particularly emphasised in our region.

2. The narrator married into a family from northwestern Slovenia.
3. Favret-Saada, on the contrary, notes that in France a person was not allowed to lower their eyes when looking at a witch (cf. 1989: 45–46). This manner of protection seems to rely on the exhibition of greater personal power which was quite exceptional in our region (cf. inf. 71, p. 51).
4. The narrator is obviously referring to a nighttime encounter with witches.
5. This could perhaps support the argument that while previously the agency of ambivalent supernatural beings provided an explanation of illnesses and misfortune, these were later on integrated into the institution of witchcraft and replaced by a social figure of a witch, an evil person in the community (cf. Pócs 1989: 8–9, 27–28).
6. In seventeenth-century Scotland, a similar ritual was used for the identification of the source of bewitchment (Henderson and Cowan 2001: 93–94). In Norway, a technique called the “stone bath” in most elements resembles the one performed in our region (except for that there it was stones, not pieces of charcoal, that were heated and thrown into water) (cf. Mathisen 1993: 24).
7. The names of the suspected witches were written on pieces of charcoal and dropped into the water one by one—the person whose name was written on the piece that sank was identified as the witch.
8. Research shows that the bewitcher is occasionally not identified and only a general allusion to an impersonal envy (originating in the community) and witchcraft is made, yet, as de Blécourt warns, this may also be a result of superficial research (1999: 211; cf. Hesz 2007: 23, 27–28; cf. Chap. 3).
9. The violation of the taboos on impaling and cutting on certain days of the annual cycle in Alto Minho was believed to damage household products that were thought to be in a vulnerable state of metamorphosis or of morphological change. The same action, however, was considered positive when it arrested the process of an unwished for metamorphosis and free the shape-shifter (a werewolf) from the state of enchantment (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 108; cf. also Vaz da Silva 2003: 344).
10. Metal, of course, is also a well-known *apotropaion* against the supernatural in magic practices.

Social Witchcraft: Specialists

ADDRESSING THE SPECIALISTS

When a child or an animal was believed to fall victim to the evil eye and/or praise, the witch was usually known; when not, at least the origin of the misfortune (evil eye, praise) could be assumed and a healing procedure available by tradition. When people assumed that they had been bewitched because they found a bewitching object or noticed a toad related to a witch on their property, they would also generally know how to deal with it—they could resort to common knowledge of countermeasures in the region in order to counteract the bewitchment and/or identify the witch through manipulation of the object or the animal. The bewitchment in these cases took material form, and as such it could be confronted and the witch behind it identified. When, however, the origin of misfortunes that befell them remained unknown, when the bewitchment was intangible and the witch unidentifiable, people would generally turn to a specialist for help.

Sometimes, the first option they would try when misfortune befell livestock was addressing a *healer*. According to the local veterinarian,¹ there was at least one animal healer in every village. These were mostly men, as dealing with livestock demanded physical power. They usually helped with digestion problems, flatulence and constipation of the livestock, in births, and in case the livestock was poisoned, and gave advice on where the livestock should not graze due to poisonous herbs. There

was also a healer who specialised in healing dislocations and curing snake bites by using incantations and applying special lard directly onto the affected parts of the body, and one who cured bovine mastitis and snake bites by applying lard or oil into which a living adder or scorpion had been placed. In a part of the region where the practice of drowning spells was not commonly known, a certain woman specialised in performing the ritual on those who were thought to have fallen victim of the evil eye or excessive praise. There were also at least two specialists who cured parasitic diseases among children by performing a ritual called “the shaving of worms”, and another healer who specialised in curing warts. Healers were only rarely mentioned in the context of witchcraft, however—presumably witchcraft was not yet suspected at the time they turned to them.

Another option was to call on a *physician*, or in the case of animal disease, a *veterinarian*. However, people would not readily do this. Even in the 1960s, when the state began to cover peasants’ medical expenses, doctors were still very rare in the region and stationed in a few towns in the valley, far from most of the inhabitants living in the hills. At least until the 1970s, when public and private transport became more available, they were also very difficult to reach, as already discussed above. Veterinary services, on the other hand, have always been charged for and represented a major expense for a normal family budget. Veterinarians² were thus called above all by proprietors of large estates, with large amounts of livestock, whereas peasants with an average farm of two (to four) hectares would think twice before deciding to seek the advice of a veterinarian; when they did, it was often already too late.³

II: ‘Cause you know how it was, for instance, livestock diseases, if they were [sick], who called a veterinarian?! There were local healers in the villages who, one might say, were very good at dealing with a lot of things, certain things. But there were diseases that were not treatable, and in those days it was: This [animal] was bewitched. Right? When there was, I mean, when you didn’t have any other way out, to set things right, there was witchcraft. (108)

F: Did they [witches] have other ways to do harm, besides harming the pigs?

I: [They did harm to] livestock ... yeah, probably to people too. Yes, certainly, if they begrudged you something, they would take revenge on you in some way, right? Or, if perhaps some misfortune occurred, then people might [say]: You know, she bewitched them, or something like that, right? They, maybe they would suspect someone, right, that they ... did harm to that person, right? Well, old people used to explain in that way, right, these kinds of things, these kinds of unusual things, right?

F: *What kinds of misfortune could happen?*

I: *Well, either someone ... would have an accident while doing some kind of work, or the livestock, when in the old days there were no veterinarians and no doctors, right, it was the people themselves who did most of the healing, right, whatever someone ..., I mean some teas for the children, or those old women exchanged [knowledge about home remedies] amongst one another. Well, you know, I did this and it helped, and I did that and ..., and here they didn't go to the doctor for every little thing. But then, if something unusual happened in some village, right, and then they assumed that it was some kind of witchcraft or for instance with the livestock, that they ... died off or something like that, or with some cow while she was calving and such, and then they assumed, right ... that that was witchcraft, right, or that someone wanted to do something bad to you and in that way, right? (72)*

Several narrators suggest that veterinarians, when called, occasionally at least took part in the local witchcraft discourse,⁴ but one can assume that their advice may have been adapted to fit within the witchcraft discourse.

I: *Now she is working on me so that the milk does not sour. That it does not sour.*

F: *How does she do that?*

I: *Well, what do I know, how she does it. There was a vet there. He has passed away. I said, how is it that my milk doesn't want to sour? And he said: That's witchcraft. The veterinarian said [that]. He said: Take some of your neighbour's sour milk and add it to your milk. It's completely simple, right? I got [some] and it soured. Now it again often happens to me that it doesn't sour. But they have sold their cow. (29)*

I: *Our pigs were in ill health every year, every year they were ill. Then he [the veterinarian] said: Something's wrong in your byre. Why is there nothing wrong in other byres? He said: Something is put here, it is inside. He said: Evil people put something under a threshold, in a pigsty ...*

F: *Did you find the object?*

I: *No, we didn't. He just said so.*

F: *The veterinarian told you so?*

I: *Yes. But what can I do now? He said: Call the priest! He shall bless the pigsties and the byre! Then I went ... He [the priest] was in K. Then he [the husband] went to fetch him and he came and blessed inside the pigsty, in front of the pigsty, everywhere. Then I told him: Every year we have had bad luck with pigs. The costs are also high. Then he said: Why didn't you tell me, I would have done it earlier. From that day on, when he came to bless, no pigs got ill anymore.*

None! This is a holy truth! He said: Why didn't you tell me earlier? I said: The vet told me that I needed to call you and that you would be able to help.

F: *And you have had no problems since?*

I: *No, no.*

F: *What about other neighbours, did their pigs also get ill?*

I: *They did, but then the priest always blessed the houses ... every year he blessed the house ... all the byres, pigsties, everything. They were healthy then. (56)*

As the above narrative suggests, seeking help from a priest, yet another “specialist” that people could turn to, may have sometimes been done at a veterinarian’s suggestion. Turning to priests, or monks, often of another religion, in seeking help from bewitchment, was often reported in other parts of Europe (Favret-Saada 1980: 57; Schöck 1978: 98–99, 143; de Pina-Cabral 1986: 194, 201–202; de Blécourt 1999: 154, 185, 2004: 96; Pócs 2004; Hesz 2007: 25). While priests seemed to have been willing to “magically” protect the household by praying and performing a blessing not only as a preventive measure in the form of a yearly blessing but also when a misfortune ascribed to witchcraft had already occurred (cf. Favret-Saada 1980: 6–8; de Pina-Cabral 1986: 194; Paul 1993: 115), in our region they seemed to have never actively and willingly participated in the unwitching process as such. On the one hand, they were members of the educated elite in the region and despised the local “superstitions”, and on the other, priests were not readily called by everyone—they were often looked upon with suspicion and regarded as ambivalent figures, so much so that they occasionally ended up being identified as the witches themselves.

UNWITCHERS

When misfortune occurred and bewitchment was suspected in its origin, especially when no bewitching object or a toad was found to be destroyed or removed, people would, as a rule, turn for help to magic specialists, so-called *šlogars* (fortune-tellers),⁵ whose main task was to “unwitch” the bewitchment. While the significant role that unwitchers played in rural communities in twentieth and twenty-first century European rural witchcraft has already been researched and several sources do offer insight into their role and methods (Kruse 1951; Schöck 1978; Favret-Saada 1980, 1989; Sebald 1984; de Pina-Cabral 1986; Henningsen 1989; Stark 2007; Davies 1999a, b, 2003; de Blécourt 1994, 1999, 2004; Tangherlini 2000; Kõiva 2014: 159–182), unwitchers are still sometimes disregarded in witchcraft

research. After Favret-Saada in 1980 expressed her anger at French ethnologists for not having included unwitchers in their fieldwork questionnaires (1980: 233), in 2007 Laura Stark still complained that “what is often missing from the later historical record of European witchcraft and magic (...) is more detailed information regarding witches and magic specialists” (2007: 7). While traditional unwitchers had more or less disappeared from English society by the 1940s (Davies 2003: 187), the data indicates that in some other places in Europe at least some traditional cunning folk continued to practice even in the second half of the twentieth century. In Alto Minho in Portugal, there is information on practicing unwitchers from the end of 1960s (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 191), in France from the beginning of the 1970s (Favret-Saada 1980), in Germany they were obviously active at least until the 1970s (Kruse 1951; Schöck 1978), and in Italy at least up until the 1980s (Magliocco 2004: 163)⁶—although these few examples do not necessarily give reliable information on the general scope of their activity in a particular country, or in Europe in general. In our region, however, traditional cunning folk seem to have been active right up until the end of the 1970s. This is the time when the last member of the most prominent unwitching family H. ceased practicing; in addition, there are occasional references of people visiting fortune-tellers who provided unwitching services as late as the end of the 1990s.

Apart from unwitching, the fortune-tellers in our region offered a wide range of services: telling fortunes, healing, giving advice about home remedies, locating stolen objects, identifying thieves, performing love magic, predicting outcomes at court, conjuring up “good luck” for the household, and sometimes, it seems, even visiting bad magic on others at the request of clients. In this respect, they were typical representatives of European cunning folk, who offered a similar range of services (cf. de Blécourt 1994: 299; Davies 2003: 163). In nineteenth-century Somerset, these multifaceted practitioners performed as witch-doctors, herbalists, astrologers, and fortune-tellers, but the neutralising and prevention of witchcraft was their most important and lucrative practice (Davies 1999a: 27). In northern Portugal, they primarily healed and divined, but they could also work as midwives (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 190, 192). Kruse writes that German *Hexenbanner* (unwitchers) were also called healers, clairvoyants, or charmers (*Gesundbeter*), and the *Weise Frauen* (wise women) usually also predicted the future from cards (1951: 39). In southwestern Germany, five out of 28 unwitchers also practiced healing (Schöck 1978: 139–141). In Franconia, those skilled

in *Anfangen* who performed unwitching and “countercursing” at the same time practiced healing, herbalism, midwifery, chanting, counseling, and “traces of the oracle” (Sebald 1984: 127–128, 136). Danish *klogefolk* (cunning folk) were able to cure illness, find lost things, identify thieves and witches, and remove curses (Tangherlini 2000: 280–281). The Finnish *tietäjä* (lit. “one who knows”) was a seer, a sorcerer with shaman-like features, who could cure illness, retrieve stolen property, and perform *lempi*-bathing rituals on young women in order to increase their sex appeal, but above all, performed “countersorcery” (Stark 2004: 77–78, 2007: 8, 13). Here are a few examples referring to love magic, magic to separate couples, healing and fortune-telling services of the fortune-tellers in our region:

I2: *Somewhere, somewhere there were witches, that they [said] were good, well, well [while in our village] most of them were, I mean, so it was told, they were wicked. Well, either they bewitched people, or they, what do I know ... They were going around ... Well, sometimes there were also better [witches], right, and boys and girls went to them if they could not get [a partner], if they could not marry, and the witch gave them some kind of powder, right? Then you had to straw that powder or you ate it, right, and ... the witch [an unwitcher] helped. Then she was good, right?*

F: *And she actually helped?*

I2: *She helped. They say that it helped. Now me, I didn't use it, but some people say that it helped, right? (...) Well, that for love it sometimes helped, and sometimes it didn't, right? Now, before, when people got married, it was different. The parents chose the bride, right, now that only happens in films, but that's how it was. That's how it was then, right? Well, then the parents usually wanted their daughter, right, or their son to get married, right, and they went to her, right, in order to get a bride, right? Or the other way round, right, if two people liked each other, but there was something in between, that the parents weren't [satisfied], they went [to visit her], that's how it was around here in the old days. That's what they said, right, now, I wasn't there, but, well, there was something to it, right? (6)*

Well, down there in L. there was one, a fortune-teller [referring to Jan H.], you had to go over the hills, who told fortunes and everything. He told a fortune for my mother on a handkerchief, but she said that it wasn't her handkerchief. She said that he told the fortune on the handkerchief, and that he said that she would be widowed after having three children, and that she would live

a long life, and it's true she is still alive, and she was widowed after having three children after the Second World War, so it all came to pass just like he said. And he also knew medicines. If someone was sick, he brought water in, right, human, right, and he correctly determined what [the problem] was, and they prescribed medicines. So he knew this. He knew these things and he destroyed them. (40)

II: *My godmother told me, when her son [was dating] the daughter of a woman who knew how to bewitch, right? And then her husband said: Hey, it won't be according to him, he is only eighteen, right? He said: He won't have this [girl], according to him, he is only eighteen, right? He said: He won't have this [girl], we will forbid it! His wife said: But how will you forbid it if you see that you cannot forbid it, it can't be done. And then she went to that woman, because he made her go to her so much, that she went to see one that was a witch [the unwitcher]. She went to her and she gave her some powder that had to be thrown on the fire, right, at night and then use it as incense, right? When they would come to defend, as it would burn them, right, she was not allowed to speak. She said that she was so scared that she just ran out and put it there, [she had] such fear that she would never go [there] again and she never did, and it didn't matter if he became the bridegroom! But they didn't speak, nobody said anything, they never spoke [while performing the ritual]. They had to throw that powder into the fire to burn, right? (4)*

Some people say that they went from the village ... to a fortune-teller there [referring to the H. family], that's what my neighbour told me. And one woman, one woman wanted to make it so that two people got divorced, and they did afterwards ... Then that woman came, while she was sewing, and she had so much power that she came and she cut off a little bit of hair. That woman who knew [the unwitcher] taught her how to do it. And blimey if it weren't so afterwards! She wanted him to leave her [his wife], that man, and take her instead. And they split up. The children were already grown. Yeah, there's power in that, but ... (83)

Nevertheless, fortune-tellers were, above all, sought for their unwitching services in case of misfortune. Misfortunes that caused people to pay a visit to a fortune-teller were particularly those of longer duration, occurring repeatedly, and interfering with various areas of life, but not necessarily—some people also decided to visit them immediately after a misfortune had occurred and bewitchment was suspected. The misfortunes mostly involved animals, while human illness as the reason to visit an unwitcher

was only mentioned once. In the past, however, as mentioned above, illness of people seems to have been an equally strong motivation to consult fortune-tellers as that of livestock.

They used to know, they used to know, oh, how they knew! (...) When she came to the house ... she bewitched something so that everything went wrong. When my mother set hens, a toad died among the eggs or all the chickens [died] or there was something wrong with the livestock, or she did something in the house (...) and three pigs died. Something was wrong. Then my mother went to see the fortune-teller. (73; cf. also below, p. 283)

My mother told me that in a certain house they had sick pigs, year after year. Then that mistress of the house went to see the fortune-teller. (72)

II: Here we went to consult someone near L. [referring to Jan H.]. Pigs kept dying and dying. Now for those who firmly believe it to be true, it is true. If you don't believe, it doesn't come true. And this is the very truth! Yes, yes. So he [the husband] went there and [the fortune-teller] said: Look under the floor, you have bones there, under the floor, under the byre. And a knife is inside, he said. That you should take out, he said.

F: The fortune-teller said that?

II: Yes. So he went home and checked it and it was true. And he took it out and everything was okay. (122)

II: There was an evil woman down here. All the time [our] livestock was dying. As soon as we got a cow, it started to become pale, and eventually it died, pigs too ... everything died. What is that, why is that? The vet didn't help but a bit. It was she who bewitched the pigs. Then, she said, she took a piece of her clothes, and went to such a witch [a fortune-teller] (...) (53).

II: [A witch was] an ordinary woman, who worked during the day, she went everywhere, but at night she could conjure all sorts of things if she had some power in her. She could conjure things, perhaps some disease, so that you became ill, or whatever. In the old days there were many of them. [They could harm] livestock, so that the livestock would not be healthy, and the pigs were such that they suddenly didn't want to eat. Before they were eating, like a wolf, and then all of a sudden nothing! You know this [turns to his wife], when they, something was placed somewhere, when the pigs had their snouts tied. (...) Yeah, well, they had their snouts tied, but she didn't know, the housewife. She went to that [unwitcher] to ask for help, for medicines ...

I2: That was at my grandmother's, yes ...

- I1: *And she said that they couldn't eat, when they had their snouts tied. (...)*
 I2: *They just sniffed around the trough, but none of them ate a thing. They just stood there and looked. And then, wait, who said that they had [their snouts] tied?*
 I1: *That woman, that unwitcher. She said that she asked for medicines, because the pigs were not eating—as if I went to the doctor for myself.*
 I2: *Yeah, they went to Croatia, to one of those who understood that.*
 I1: *There were men and women there who knew to perform unwitching. (...) They were like our doctors, and they told you, and gave you medicines, when you told them what was wrong. (50)*

In addition, there were other, seldom stated reasons for seeking advice from the fortune-teller, like getting rid of moths.

- F: *What could witches harm?*
 I: *They mostly caused harm to livestock. To livestock, and also when they had meal moths, and I don't know what all. It used to be said that down there in L. one was like that [referring to Jan H.]. And that that master went there to L., and that he [the fortune-teller] said that he had to get some kind of cloth from some neighbours. And then burn it and then smoke it with them, and the moths would leave. Whether the moths left or not, I don't know. That's just what they said.*
 F: *And did that man in L. figure out who the witch was?*
 I: *No, no, he just said to do that against that thing that she had bewitched and there would be no more. And apparently they did that and there really were no more moths.*
 F: *There really were no more?*
 I: *Well, that's what they said, right, what do I know about how those old people were, I don't know, I don't know what they believed, and about how well it worked for them, I don't know. It's hard to say. (39)*

TYPES OF UNWITCHERS

Sedentary Unwitchers

The most important category of unwitchers to whom people turned in times of misfortune were sedentary fortune-tellers. Usually, the unfortunate person would visit them, but occasionally, on request, they were also willing to visit clients at home; the much more usual practice, however, was giving clients an audience. Residential permanency was certainly a factor that was helpful in attracting customers (cf. Davies 1999a: 30), as people

always knew where to go and what to expect, and in times of misfortunes did not need to wait and hope for a travelling unwitcher to stop by.

In the time of the witchcraft crisis, the inhabitants from the area of our study occasionally turned to minor unwitching specialists scattered around the region. Those living close to the border with Croatia also turned to at least two specialists living and operating in Croatia. Most often, however, they would choose to seek help from a particular fortune-telling family whose members were throughout the twentieth century by far the best-known and most prominent unwitching experts over a wide area. I shall call this particular fortune-telling family the H. family. Most of the data about the family comes from first- or second-hand narratives about the consultations, referring to the period from the end of the First World War up until the end of the 1970s, that is, mainly covering the working lives of the last two practicing members of the family. In addition, I also had the opportunity to conduct several interviews with the grandson of the last two practitioners, Ivan H., who, having spent most of his childhood (from birth to age six, and again from his twelfth birthday onwards) with his grandmother, and witnessed her practicing, was able to shed additional light on the services provided by the fortune tellers and on the unwitching process itself. A large part of this chapter is thus based on the information about this particular family, being as it was by far the most important unwitching family for the inhabitants of the region under research.

The H. Family

The first of the family members to engage in this particular profession was *Una H.*, who was born in the nineteenth century (the year of her birth is unknown). She started practicing in the first years of the twentieth century and continued to do so until 1931, that is, almost until her death in 1932. Her popularity reached its peak immediately after the First World War, when she received a great many clients: allegedly there was not a day without at least one client coming for a consultation, and I was told that even priests came to seek her services. This was the time when there were scarcely any medical practitioners in the region, as they had all been mobilised into the army, and *Una H.* was often called upon to provide medical assistance to the region's inhabitants. This was also the time when soldiers, ill and exhausted, were returning from the war and pulmonary tuberculosis, the "disease of the poor", was very common in was very common in the region; in addition, in 1918–1919, epidemics of Spanish flu ravaged the area. Her services were also very much sought after for the treatment of dysentery, which

raged throughout the area in 1905–1906 and again around 1927 (cf. Pertl 1984: 610).

According to her great-grandson Ivan H., Una was a clairvoyant and possessed innate “bioenergy”. She helped deliver children as a lay midwife and also had knowledge of medicinal herbs. In order to improve her knowledge of herbalism, she regularly visited specialists at fairs, to which they were often invited (cf. Pertl 1984: 605), and thus learned to make herbal teas effective at fighting various illnesses and skin diseases. A large part of her practice consisted of providing medical treatment in the broadest sense of the word, curing people and livestock in much the same proportion. In the period before and after the First World War, skin diseases, like scabies, were commonplace among the inhabitants, probably due to the poor living conditions, poor hygiene, and insufficient and inadequate nutrition. To cure people of scabies, she bathed them with a special herbal tea consisting of absinthe, oak bark and some additional herbs.⁷ Occasionally, she would even keep children suffering from scabies at her place for a week or two to be able to regularly bathe their sores with tea and powder them with finely sifted and pulverized chamomile. In addition, she was successful in curing livestock diseases. Her great-grandson Ivan H. particularly emphasized that the key to her success was that she provided her clients with instructions on hygiene.

Nevertheless, in order to be as successful in healing as she was, mere knowledge of herbalism and her alleged bioenergy would probably not suffice. One of the crucial factors to her success in healing was a relationship with Jewish pharmacists in Zagreb, Croatia, some 60 kilometres away, a connection which she established with the help of her daughter who had been married there. They regularly provided her with the aspirin and other medicines which were at the time extremely rare and effective.⁸ In addition, she was also on good terms with the monks⁹ from the nearby monastery, who in exchange for wild berries, mostly strawberries and bilberries, provided her with herbal teas against various diseases.

Yet, her knowledge of herbalism and healing were not the only skills that helped her gain such a widespread reputation, a reputation she enjoyed both during and after her lifetime. It was above all her occult knowledge that made her such a powerful figure in the eyes of the inhabitants. When people engaged her to locate stolen items, primarily livestock (horses, oxen and cows), which were rare and expensive at the time, she could tell them whether the thief was close or far away and whether it was a man or a woman. She also performed a ritual of assuring “good luck” to the household, in order to prevent wealth from “running away”. In addition, she performed love magic for both men

and women: a person had to mix three drops of blood from their left thumb with a tincture she kept at home and then secretly slip one drop of the mixture into the wine or tea of the object of their affections, and this would make their beloved fall in love with them. Her main practice, however, was fortune-telling, closely related to unwitching, the primary reason for people to turn to her.

When Una H. stopped working in 1931, her son *Jan H.*, born in 1897, took over the profession and practiced it until his internment in Germany, where he died in 1943. He too was a widely known practitioner, his popularity being no less than his mother's. According to his grandson, he inherited some of his mother's abilities and learned her skills: he practiced healing, and was especially successful in curing pneumonia and fever by wrapping children in sauerkraut; he also provided customers with herbal teas, aspirin, and other medicines. He maintained the contacts established by his mother with the Jewish pharmacists in Zagreb and the nearby monks, and on top of this cultivated a relationship with a pharmacist in a nearby town who also provided him with medicines. He continued to provide most of the other magic services that his mother had provided to her clients; nevertheless, like his mother before him, his renown for fortune-telling and unwitching outstripped that for his healing abilities.

After his death, the family business was continued by Jan's widow *Angela H.*, born in 1899. While she, according to her grandson, did not possess the innate ability that her husband and mother-in-law were said to have had, she nevertheless managed to successfully practice the profession from her return from a German concentration camp after the Second World War right up until the end of the 1970s (she died in 1984). According to her grandson, she was particularly busy in the 1950s and 1960s, after which the visits gradually diminished and stopped by the end of the 1970s. He estimated that she received on average five, and later two to three customers a week, and more frequently on Sundays and holidays. Occasionally, on request, she would also visit clients at their homes. Angela H. only rarely healed people and was mostly consulted over livestock diseases—probably because at the time of her practice, physicians were already more readily available than before the war, even though still seldom visited; in addition, no more epidemics ravaged the region. After the Second World War, under the socialist regime, the monks were expelled from the monastery, thus that relationship broke down, yet she maintained contact with the pharmacist from the nearby town, who after the war, when the availability of medicines was limited, provided her with medicine under the counter.

Her medical advice in the case of livestock applied to many conditions: if cows were not giving milk, she would advise the owners to feed them eggs; when cows gave birth or had diarrhoea, she would suggest giving them tea made of flax seed for purification. If pigs or hares had no appetite, she assumed it was erysipelas and swine fever which she considered a consequence of poor hygiene. In such cases, she ordered her clients to thoroughly clean and air the pigsties, repaint them with lime or move them to a new site, while the pigs were to be washed in water in which oak bark and absinthe had been boiled. When hens had lice, she also suggested repainting and disinfecting the henhouses with lime and smudging them with burning pine bark, which probably functioned as a disinfectant. In addition, she performed a ritual for “luck”,¹⁰ assuring money and prosperity in the household and love magic. Apart from that, she would also often give useful practical advice about good lawyers, priests that could be trusted, where to apply for social security and similar—information that she received from various customers and passed on. Above all, however, like Una and Jan, she was known for advising in matters of witchcraft, and she too, like her husband, features in the narratives recorded in our region exclusively as an unwitcher. The unwitching, however, was closely intertwined with the healing and fortune-telling.

Itinerant Unwitchers

Apart from sedentary unwitchers, there was another group of unwitchers, itinerant fortune-tellers who, frequenting fairs and wandering from house to house, offered their services to the inhabitants of the region. The scope of their practice was much more narrow than that of their sedentary counterparts: they performed fortune-telling, in particular to explain the origin of misfortunes that befell the farmstead, which they uniformly identified as witchcraft, and performed an immediate unwitching. Most of them came from Croatia and many of them were Roma who enjoyed a reputation of possessing supernatural knowledge (cf. Kruse 1951: 47). In several interviews our interlocutors told us about their services:

Usually they would call witches such poor women, who had no home and were poorly dressed. They always carried something with them in such big scarves, plaids, they had a cat or a dog, or sometimes a guinea-pig ... they walked around and offered to tell fortunes ... Well, how will you, a witch, tell fortunes, right? Well, they had cards with them and they laid the cards out and sometimes they told fortunes. (169)

- I: *Yes, they were coming around here too. Once I was so very ill that I couldn't lift a cup, this was when I was about fifty years old. One woman came by and said: It will be better, it will be better! Another one, however, came to our house and said that there is a bone buried behind the byre and that I would die in three days and two hours.*
- F: *So she actually wanted you to ...?*
- I: *... to frighten me so that she could get something. That my husband would pay that it wouldn't happen like this, that I would profit [laugh].*
- F: *Did you check if there was a bone buried?*
- I: *No, no, nothing, my husband just chased her away.*
- F: *Did you know her?*
- I: *Not at all. They were walking around. Unknown women. (139)*

Yeah, and down here, there was, you know, a Gypsy. He said: How much will you give me, he said, and I'll fix it so that you will have nice livestock in the byre, and that everything will go well for you. Now I can see that your livestock is poorly. Someone is envious of it, and I know about a medicine that can [fix] that. And then he [the master] promised him a little something. He said: Now bring me a drill. And he went into the byre on the threshold, and he drilled. He drilled nearly as deep as the threshold was high. And he poured something in [into the hole], and with another peg he hit it, and sprinkled something on it. He [the master] said: I looked at that. But I didn't know whether to laugh at him, or to drive him away or what. He said: Now look! Now I have driven it away, that evil spirit, I drove it away. (...) (63)

- F: *What about fortune-tellers?*
- I: *There were also plenty of them. They went from house to house.*
- F: *They go around here?*
- I: *Not anymore. They used to.*
- F: *And did they tell fortunes with coffee, or [read] palms, or cards?*
- I: *They used all kinds of fortune-telling. About diseases, how healthy you will be, and such things. They told about all that. Just, when they, they were not accurate. Those [who predict the future on television] are [accurate], that is so. (56)*
- I1: *That's like those women who use beans to tell fortunes.*
- I2: *Yes. Or coffee.*
- I1: *One of them already passed away, it's been a couple of years now since she died, [and she said that] a Croatian woman came up here, she came here over the bridge, and she said: I will throw beans for you, right, I will tell how it will be for you.*
- I2: *And she guessed a lot.*

- I1: *She told one woman's fortune, and then she said: Throw [them] for me too. [I said:] Tell me how I am going to get my money, otherwise I will not let you tell me my fortune! We were joking like this. But she really did guess a lot.*
- I2: *Yes, yes she did.*
- I1: *And if it was something unpleasant, that [there would be] arguing, such things she foretold, and she said, be of good cheer (...) and she foretold exactly, and she looked at those beans.*
- I2: *The kind of beans that you plant.*
- I1: *Whole beans. How she [knew], I don't know, perhaps she had some kind of power, that's got something to do with witchcraft, maybe something she learned from her people (...) (95)*

However, the itinerant fortune-tellers who told fortunes and also performed some unwitching, mostly to gain some additional means of survival, played only a rather minor role in the everyday life of the community compared with the role of their sedentary counterparts. People sometimes even feared being seen talking to them—due to their reputation as being conversant with the ways of magic, consulting them immediately aroused suspicions that the individual wanted to bewitch their neighbours.

GENDER

We have seen that two of the most important unwitchers from the H. family were female, and one was male. People turning to unwitchers in Croatia could also choose between a male and a female specialist. The itinerant fortune-tellers were men and women alike. The sample is far too small to draw any conclusions about the prevalent gender of unwitching specialists, but judging from our research, gender was not significant, and there seemed to be no particular gender bias among cunning folk: while witches proper were predominantly women, these were men as well as women. Research into witchcraft elsewhere in Europe has shown a similar pattern—while not gender specific, the ratio of men to women, when speaking about unwitchers, in comparison with the gender structure of witches proper, often drastically increases on the male side. Men formed the greater proportion of cunning folk in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Holland and Saarland, while in Cologne, it was women who were in the majority. In seventeenth-century Holland, women prevailed in the cities and men in the countryside (de Blécourt 1994: 301). The most popular unwitching specialists in the northeastern provinces of the Netherlands

in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries were predominantly men (de Blécourt 1989, 1990, in Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 112). In nineteenth-century Somerset, England, two-thirds of cunning folk were men (Davies 1999a: 29). Most Finnish *tietäjäs* consisted of male heads of households, although some were also women, particularly in the northern parts of the country (Stark 2004: 77; 2007: 13). In the twentieth century, in the Alto Minho region of Portugal, unwitchers could be men or women (de Pina-Cabral 1986). In the Spanish province of La Coruña, people more often turned to “wise men” than to “wise women”¹¹ for advice (Rey-Henningsen 1994: 200). The majority of unwitchers in southern Germany in the twentieth century were men (Schöck 1978: 141), whereas the healers in Franconia, who also performed unwitching, on the other hand, were almost always women (Sebald 1984: 128).

ORIGIN OF KNOWLEDGE

The Latin noun *divinationis* “the gift of prophecy, divination” (from the verb *divinare*, “to foretell, prophesy, forebode, divine the future”) is closely related to the adjective *divinus-a-um*, “belonging or relating to a deity, divine” (Tedlock 2001: 189), which refers to the supernatural knowledge of the diviner, i.e. the fortune-teller. In our region though, none of the specialists ever referred to the supernatural as the source of their knowledge. Their knowledge did not stem from any supernatural contacts, as was claimed by soothsayers in many places in Western Europe (cf. Mathisen 1993: 23–25; Aðalsteinsson 1996: 52; Henderson and Cowan 2001: 36–64; Davies 2003: 70; Stark 2007: 7, 10) as well as Eastern, especially in the Balkans (Pócs 1999: 122; Čiča 2002: 83–92; Petreska 2008: 26–33). Their birth was also not marked by any sign which would single them out from the community by indicating their predestination for the role of magic specialists, for instance, with a caul, with an additional body part, a breech birth (Belmont 1971; Klaniczay 1990: 139–140; Ginzburg 1992: 155, 160–168; Plotnikova 1999; Pócs 1999: 32–34, 109, 125, 129–131; Stark 2007: 10), by being born on certain significant (liminal) days in an annual or lunar cycle, or being born as the third, fifth, seventh, or ninth child, usually of the same sex (cf. Seeman 1960: 106–109; Vaz da Silva 2003: 344–345). No initiation, or ritual transmission of power, has ever been mentioned, nor did the transfer of knowledge require any special occasion or place which would point to some sort of initiation procedure¹² (cf. Radenković 1996a: 17–18; Petreska 2008: 27, 33).

The fortune-tellers in our region were, therefore, practitioners of the so-called inductive or rational form of divination (cf. Daxemüller 1999: 719; Tedlock 2001: 189–190), that is, they had learned the skills in order to become professional practitioners. Thus although according to her great-grandson, Una was born with special abilities that distinguished her from other people, she only started practicing as a cunning woman when, during her imprisonment lasting for a few weeks around 1900, she met a cunning man who taught her all about telling fortunes from the cards (which he had with him in the prison, sewn into his clothes) and unwitching. Later she also learned how to predict futures by laying out beans, from another cunning person whom she had met at a fair in a nearby town. Her magic knowledge was, therefore, based on information and skills she had learned from other specialists.

The most clearly defined route by which one could enter the business, however, was through family succession, as Davies (1999a: 30) observed for the cunning folk of Somerset. When a family member specialised in unwitching, their practice could be observed and witnessed by other members of the family, who could smoothly take over the profession upon the death of the practitioner (cf. Davies 2003: 72; de Blécourt 2004: 97). This is also how the business continued within the H. family: Una's son Jan learned the profession from his mother, and Jan's wife Angela learned it from him. Even if Angela was not born with any of the special abilities ascribed to Una H. and to a lesser extent to Jan H., her husband's family's reputation obviously sufficed to keep the family profession going long after their death, and Angela's reputation was not much that less than that of her husband. Family background was obviously an important factor in imparting authority and assuring the reputation of every further successor of the family business, as well as for maintaining a customer base for the succeeding generation.

TECHNIQUES

Fortune-telling as practiced by the members of the H. family, as well as other specialists in the region, was primarily achieved through the reading of *Gipsy cards*. Una also *read beans* (fava beans or corn kernels), an ancient technique practised in Central and southeastern Europe, particularly in the Balkans (cf. Moszyński 1967: 379–382; Pócs 1999: 145–147). By the time of our research, this practice had largely disappeared; we met just one woman who occasionally told fortunes by reading beans—she was Croatian, and had learned the skill while living in Serbia.

During her séances, Una H. and, as it seems, Jan H. too (see inf. 63, p. 280) used a certain *book*. This would imply that she was able to read and write, but the truth was that she was illiterate—a fact that is demonstrated by her use of a small cross (an x) as a signature on official documents. The book was thus a prop, book. This the aim of which was to impress her clients, and as such it was an important element of her séances. At a time when literacy among the rural population was extremely rare, her alleged ability to read must have made an enormous impression on her illiterate peasant customers.

What kind of a book she possessed is not quite clear. According to her descendant, it was a book on herbalism, but he admitted to never actually seeing it. However, all the stories circulating about “the Book” gave it a significance and power which a book on ‘mere’ herbalism would not merit: these stories referred to the book as a mysterious source of magical power in their owner’s possession. The use of a book, usually an impressive one—large, of seeming antiquity, ornamental, mysterious, and written in unknown, incomprehensible languages—was indeed often an important factor which helped European cunning folk establish trust in their customers (cf. Davies 1999a: 37, 2003: 119). Legends about cunning folk having learned their wisdom from a the book and being in possession of such a book were well-known throughout Europe. The Finnish tietäjä used a “black Bible”, which was said to contain black pages with white print, as well as parts of animals and human skulls (Stark 2007: 10). Some of the Norwegian magic practitioners were believed to possess the secret Black Book of Magic obtained through contact with evil powers (Mathisen 1993: 20–21). The German unwitchers and wise women were thought to have learned their craft from *Das 6. und 7. Buch Moses*, *Das Romanus Büchlein*, and *Geheimnisse der Nigromantiae*, and made use of these books during their séances (Kruse 1951: 40). A Cypriot *maghos* (diviner) claimed to have learned prayers from a very old book called *Solomoniki*, written by the “Wise Solomon” (Argyrou 1993: 260). The source of knowledge of white witches in Alto Minho, Portugal, was the Book of St. Cyprian (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 192), and so on (on magic books see Davies 2009; Doering-Manteuffel 2014). The most widely known magic book in the region of our research was called *Kolomonov žegen*, and those who possessed it often gained the reputation of a witch. Although several narratives referred to the family owning the magic book, the name of this particular book was never explicitly mentioned in relation to the

H. family. The following narrative, obviously referring to Jan H., typically assigns his magical power and knowledge to the magic book he was believed to have in his possession:

II: *I shall tell you something. My husband's parents have bought some land here, at B. And they told my husband to rear cattle there. They were not employed as they had a farmstead. And that master, from whom they bought the land, he came down here once. Otherwise he played the accordion, he made accordions. He also knew how to patchpots and so (...). But once he [the narrator's husband] saw a book on the table. He picked it up, my husband, since he was bored. He had finished working by then. He would visit him [Jan H.] occasionally, to learn how to patch pots from him. He was making some shelves and tidying up something and he held the book and started turning pages. At that moment he [Jan H.] grabbed the book out of his hands and said: You are not allowed to do this! You should never read this book as you don't know how to do it! If you read it, something might appear and you could die of fear. You read something in it and you don't know what's inside, you know. Then he said: Now you sit there. And he read something and then he said: Now look under the table. He [the narrator's husband] said: There was an ugly black dog and he glared daggers and bared his teeth. He said he completely froze, he felt totally heavy. Then he [Jan H.] started reading again and after a while said: Now, look again. If there was something there before, there was nothing there anymore! He said: I showed you that—if you were alone at home, you could have died of fear.*

F: *And what does that dog mean?*

II: *Well, like a devil image.¹³*

F: *The devil?*

II: *Yes, of course. He showed him that so that he would never read the book by himself. He told him: Marko, never read the book if you don't know how to read it!*

F: *And he [Jan H.] knew how to read it?*

II: *Of course, that book is for them. They had that ... They don't have the book any more.¹⁴ Otherwise it was strictly forbidden by the Church.*

F: *But why did he have this book?*

II: *Well, there was ... But I never noticed him doing anything bad. They played ... but indeed, he did not pray. He always used to say: Why should I thank God [before lunch], it was the mother who cooked it, not God! [laughs] This is how it was and that is true. He was not a pious man but at least he had peace.*

F: *Could one learn how to do witchcraft from this book?*

II: *Of course, you could learn. That's what these books were for. (150)*

Although the impact that the Book made on the clients was helpful, it was not the only factor that helped a fortune-teller to make an impression on their customers. As Davies writes, they would also often impress their clients by greeting them with the words: “I know what you be come for”, even before the clients had uttered a word. It seems that they sometimes in fact resorted to cheating to acquire information on their customers before they gave them an audience. Some had assistants who mingled among clients in the waiting room and then passed information on the clients’ problems to the unwitchers before the séance took place, or they eavesdropped through a hole in the wall in the waiting room (Davies 1999a: 38–39; cf. also Kruse 1951: 64–65; de Blécourt 1999: 187). Laura Stark assumes that the uncovering of the identities of thieves and perpetrators of bad magic made by *tietäjä* was probably often drawn from knowledge obtained through the gossip of neighbours, or were educated guesses based on general knowledge of local enmities, individuals’ vices, personal habits, and so forth. Distance from their customers did not prevent *tietäjä* finding out about their clients, as they could get information from landless itinerant labourers and beggars who regularly wandered into neighbouring parishes and supplied them information on others’ personal affairs, which they exchanged for food and drink, especially coffee (2007: 18–19).

None of these underhanded practices could be confirmed in case of the H. family. There was no assistant employed and no waiting room available; if several customers came at the same time, which was not common, they waited outside the house. The region the family covered was so large that it would have been next to impossible to acquire information on most of their distant clients, coming as many did even from various parts of Croatia. Still, Una’s husband’s and son’s profession, that is, playing accordion at weddings, fairs and wine shops could have provided a good opportunity to overhear rumours and acquire news about people living in the vicinity, as these were occasions when people tended to exchange news and gossip about others. Nevertheless, the following narrative about an unwitcher from the neighbouring town, told by Ivan H., testifies that unwitchers, when they were requested to pay a visit at client’s home, at least occasionally availed themselves of the opportunity to inquire about the situation from the neighbours before arriving at a client’s home:

That happened at our neighbour’s house. I will tell you. This is exploitation of naiveté and of neighbours on bad terms with each other. The mother of the neighbour (...) was on bad terms with my grandmother. Her son had a child

with my aunt. (...) They claimed it was not his child and they brought charges but they lost in the court so he had to financially support the child. (...) So they were wondering why this happened to them and came to the conclusion that it must have been witchcraft. So they decided to call a woman. I know who she was, I even have a picture of her. That woman came up the hill here, where there used to be a path. She came first to our house and inquired for a while about what happened. Then she went back down to the road and up again to their house [so that the neighbours didn't see that she had stopped at their house first]. They welcomed her as if she were a queen. She said: The one who comes first is to be blamed. And then a man came down from the village, a very small man from R., and then they blamed him, that it was his fault. But how could that be his fault? They said: He was watching when he [the son] was making the child and didn't tell [anyone] about it! [loud laughter] What she said was just a story, it had nothing to do with the reality. That woman was a sort of a fortune-teller, but nothing special. They just wanted to mess my grandmother about. People were doing such things from pure wickedness and ignorance. We, the next generation, we are already normal. (164)

RESIDENCE

The H. family actually lived outside the region of our study; officially they were even resident in another county. However, their services not only covered the region under research but a much wider area. The scope of their influence expanded over a radius of about 50 kilometres: the clients came from regions in eastern and southern Croatia, and from towns in Slovenia to the west and northwest of their village. At the time when public transport was rare or even non-existent, a 50-kilometre journey would have taken them up to eleven or twelve hours on foot. Moreover, the H. family's house is located on the top of a hill just across the river that divides two counties. Crossing the river by boat (the bridge was built only at the end of the 1970s), followed by a steep walk to the top of the slope necessary to reach their house, located outside the village and surrounded by forest, would have added a mystical dimension to the journey resembling, as it did traditional mythical paths to the otherworld (cf. Dinzelbacher 1986: 78) and pilgrimages in many cultures. The other two important practitioners referred to more than once by our interviewees lived in another republic altogether, that is, in neighbouring Croatia—meaning that the boundary between the region from which clients came and their location was not only geographical (the river dividing two republics), but also political and linguistic.

In any case, when witchcraft was suspected, people never consulted an unwitcher from the same community even if there was a practicing unwitcher there. While the East Frisian situation around 1900 demonstrates that people did not choose an unwitcher from outside their territory (de Blécourt 1999: 203–204), it has generally been much more customary to seek help from an unwitching specialist beyond the boundaries of one's own community, outside the network of one's own acquaintances (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 184, 188), a practice often observed by researchers of witchcraft, for instance in France (cf. Favret-Saada 1980: 20, 43, 57), England (Purkiss 1996: 120; Davies 1999a: 27; 2003: 113), and Germany (cf. Schöck 1978: 133–135). Even when not distant in geographical terms, cunning folk were often outsiders of some sort: they could be distinct by their eccentricity, by adhering to a different religion, by acting differently, dressing in a peculiar way, by being a stranger and similar (de Blécourt 1994: 298, 1999: 184–185), or, in the case of the itinerant Gypsy fortune-tellers in our region, by being ethnically and culturally distinct.

While the research tends to confirm that people usually chose an unwitcher from outside their own community, there is a question as to whether the decision was entirely in their hands, or whether it lay primarily in the hands of the unwitchers themselves, and the members of the community only reacted accordingly. One can surmise that the unwitchers' exclusion of members of their own community from their clientele was of mutual benefit. While the clients would probably fear of being exposed if they disclosed their secrets and suspicions to a person living in the same community, any unsuccessfully resolved conflict or unfulfilled prediction could damage an unwitcher's reputation and would probably ruin their relationship with the members of their own community. At any rate, neither Jan nor Angela H. wanted to give consultations to people living in the vicinity, friends, relatives, or acquaintances. The fact that on several occasions, from various people, living in various places, I heard mentioned the very same exact size of geographic area from within which they would not accept clients, i.e. a radius of 5 kilometres, suggests that this information was spread by them in order to discourage people from within this distance from seeking consultations. The following story, told by her grandson, relates an instance when Angela went against her own rules, the outcome of which, indeed, turned out to be damaging:

- I: *People from the village came to ask Angela what to do when the livestock got ill, but only in the evening, as they were ashamed. (...) Those close to her did not come, and even if they came, she would not accept them. She would not tell them anything, except some small things about the livestock, to displace something or so. She didn't want anything to do with them, here in the vicinity. Because they were so mean. I told you before. I shall tell you a very good example. We have no forest of our own here, to get firewood. That man who lived about half an hour by walk from here, he was alright ... [He explains that she helped him and demanded two to three m² of firewood in exchange.] And you know what happened? This firewood never came. So Angela went down to his house to inquire about it. That man was not at home, but his wife was. She said that she wouldn't give the firewood and she also said something to Angela that you ought not to say. So Angela said that the devil should take her together with that firewood and their cows. (...) That's how it was, you know. Let that bitch go to hell!*
- F: *But those living further away were no less mean, were they?*
- I: *No, but she was not in contact with them, so it didn't matter. (164)*

Thus villagers from the same and neighbouring villages and even their own grandson would rather visit another fortune-teller, working in a nearby town, when advice on a misfortune was sought. Even when her fellow villagers did occasionally visit her, they did so in secret, after dusk, as mentioned in the above narrative. In such cases, Jan and Angela H. would as a rule only provide them with at most some basic advice on hygiene and home remedies; they would never touch upon matters of fortune-telling or unwitching. Clients coming from elsewhere, on the other hand, did not seem to try to hide the purpose of their journey, as researchers in some places observed (cf. de Pina-Cabral 1986: 190–191; de Blécourt 1999: 184; Hesz 2007: 31).¹⁵ As many of the narratives about visits to fortune-tellers were second-hand narratives, those who consulted fortunetellers must have shared the outcome of their consultations with others at some point. In addition, when asked about visits to the unwitcher, people would sometimes name the unwitcher to whom allegedly “they went from every house” (cf. 63, p. 279–280). they would also sometimes set out on a journey in pairs, with a friend. Letting others know about the cunning folk's ascertainment of witchcraft was a significant, if not a crucial part of the unwitching process, necessary for the completion of the process involving the victim and the unwitcher (cf. inf. 150, p. 273–275), and consequently the witch. The spread of information about the visit to the unwitcher and their undertaking of certain measures occasionally seemed

necessary, as it transmitted a warning and a form of social pressure upon the perpetrator, i.e. the witch (cf. Davies 2003: 97; Stark 2007: 15–19). On the other hand, when the sedentary unwitchers visited clients at home, their arrival was made known to their acquaintances only and kept hidden from other villagers. This could suggest that the consultations were only revealed publicly after witchcraft had been confirmed by an unwitcher, and not before or during the process.

PAYMENT

The H. family's business was so successful that Una H. was able to make a good living from it, supporting all of her six children (two died at a young age) with her earnings, even after her husband had died; she even bought a plot of land for each of them. For her son, the practice provided him with a part-time job in addition to his other professions, that is, building stoves and playing, repairing, and making accordions¹⁶—the skills he learned from his father, who was also a stove-maker, as well as an accordion player and maker. According to his grandson, he spent approximately one-third of his time on each of these professions, but this is probably just an approximate estimation as he died before Ivan H. was born. Angela obviously did not earn as much as her mother-in-law: although she received a very small pension as a victim of fascism after the Second World War, she, in spite of her additional work as an unwitcher, nevertheless had to work as a hired labourer on others' farmsteads almost right up until her death in order to be able to earn enough for a living.

Cunning folk were never supposed to charge for their services—this reluctance to charge seems to be a traditional trait of rural¹⁷ magic specialists (cf. de Pina-Cabral 1986: 193–195; Petreska 2008: 28) and probably owes much to the traditional notions about the supernatural origin of the knowledge and abilities of the specialists who were seen merely as mediators between people and higher powers (even though fortune-tellers in our research region never claimed their knowledge originated in the supernatural). On the other hand, not charging for the consultation gave fortune-tellers security in case of a customer's dissatisfaction, as they could never reproach them for not getting what they paid for.¹⁸ Payment to the unwitchers was thus not fixed, but clients were nevertheless expected to give something in return, and unwitchers readily accepted what was given to them (cf. Sebald 1984: 135–136; de Pina-Cabral 1986: 195). Indeed, customers who gave more were valued more—thus Croatian clients were more gladly

received by Angela than Slovenians as they proved to be more generous. This is how Ivan H. replied to the question of payment to her grandmother:

Payment? Everybody knew, even in Una's time, that this shouldn't be charged. However, what was being given freely, that you could take, and plenty needed to be given, that should also be clear! [laughs] (164)

Sometimes they paid with money—this was certainly necessary when they were given aspirin or other medicine provided by pharmacists. Usually, however, people would pay for the service with some food, such as flour, eggs, lard, smoked meat and similar, but the type and quantity of the gift depended on the client's resources. If they were poor, the cheapest sort of flour and the smallest quantity sufficed, as Angela's grandson remembers:

Oh, people were so poor, I tell you, there are plenty of poor stories ... everyone with their own troubles, you have no idea, all sorts of troubles ... There was an old woman, she was so good, and she came two to three times a year. She didn't pay much, she just brought something, something small. Usually she would just bring half a kilo, one kilo of corn flour. She was so poor! Her son died in the war, she had nothing ... except for a cow and a piglet and some hens ... (164)

PUBLICITY

When few people could read, oral narratives were the most important method for cunning folk to spread their reputation. That Una H. gained such a widespread reputation in Croatia was mostly thanks to her daughter. She married a man who came from western Croatia, but she lived with him in Zagreb and she diligently promoted her mother's abilities in both places: customers thus came to Una from Zagreb as well as from the western Croatian region where her daughter's husband was born.

It is also very likely that the unwitchers themselves encouraged and even actively participated in the transmission of narratives about their supernatural abilities, the magic of their book, and terrifying occurrences during séances (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 186, 2004: 97). Moreover, by spreading stories that added to their prestige while at the same time casting a negative light on their business rivals, they could intentionally lower or even ruin the reputation of competing cunning folk, and, as a consequence, eliminate their rivals from the market and expand their customer base (cf. Tangherlini 2000: 287–295). While the H. family had no real competition

in matters of unwitching in most of the region we researched (except the eastern part of the research area that borders Croatia, where people tended to visit unwitchers in the nearby Croatian villages), there seems to have been some latent rivalry for clients with the unwitcher operating in the M. valley, farther to the northwest. From Angela's grandson, I heard two narratives about this particular cunning man who set him in contact with evil forces, underlined his ill-will and wickedness, while at the same time emphasising the overall positive and just intentions and behaviour of his grandparents. Although profoundly sceptical of priests and the Church in general, Angela's grandson repeatedly emphasised that his grandmother used holy water in her practice, that she advised people to pray and to go on pilgrimages and that she would immediately chase away anybody who came to ask her to bewitch others or to conjure up wealth.

F: I also heard that your grandfather showed the person who did harm in the water.

I: No, no, I never heard that. I doubt that, I never heard that. That story with the mirror happened elsewhere. This folk here [his family], they didn't do bad things. With the mirror one does bad things, you have to know that! This happened somewhere in the M. valley, and the people who came here said that they could barely escape that man. They visited him out of curiosity, but he was a real witch. At least two, three who came here, said that. It was terrible. He had a mirror and he lit a fire, and poured something into it and he knew some tricks to burn the fire. They peed themselves from fright. Then they escaped. They ran away. He probably threw some alcohol on the fire, this is an old trick. He was a bad guy, plenty has been told about him, he was a very bad person. But that Jan would show the witch in the mirror, this I hear for the first time ... (164)

F: Have you ever heard anything about the toads?

I: No, no, this is witchcraft! That man from the M. valley had plenty of toads. This is not good work, remember that! Not good work.

F: Why do you associate toads with witchcraft?

I: Because that man had plenty of toads. This is not good work. I don't know what he did with them, I only heard what people who came here told me. Those people also came here to ask to get something, they asked Angela to conjure up money and everything, but Angela quickly chased such people away. (164)

Whether the narratives about the other cunning man, Angela's potential rival, had (also) been spread, or perhaps even invented by her and could be thus understood as an intentional and purposeful transmission of negative publicity, as a consequence of rivalry for clients, is hard to tell

retrospectively. Yet, the geographic areas of their influence did, indeed, overlap—and in the above narratives, the same clients are obviously said to visit both unwitchers—which could, perhaps, suggest such a conclusion.

AMBIVALENCE

The above narrative, as well as many others about unwitchers in which the narrators called the unwitcher a “witch”, reveal that the appellations “witch” and “unwitcher” can easily be conflated and that a person that obviously performed as an unwitcher was occasionally called a witch by the narrators:

- I1: What did you call someone who was against witches?*
F: They were called a witch [coperjak].¹⁹ (34)

Referring to cunning folk, people would also often use the same expressions as when talking about village witches, for instance, the typical idiom that “they know”:

- I1: Well, I don't know. They were witches who had power. What they did—they set things up for you, they gave things to the animals so that they were sick later, or to people so that they weren't [well] ... That was set up. Then they would search [for an unwitcher]: Yes, there's someone who knows. (50)*

This somewhat blurred distinction between the two opposite person-ages in the typical witchcraft triangle “a victim—a witch—an unwitcher” constantly crops up in witchcraft research. In many languages, the same word actually denotes both a person who publicly declared they practiced magic (an unwitcher) as well as a person who is believed to harm others by witchcraft (a witch proper)(de Blécourt 1999: 148). In Galicia, Spain, for example, people cannot exactly tell what the word *meiga* denotes, as it has various connotations. If the word is translated into Spanish, it translates as *bruja* (witch proper), but in the Galician countryside it means a “holy woman” and a “wise woman”, whom people go to when they are in trouble. The word *bruxa* (from the Spanish *bruja*), on the other hand, is usually used to denote a witch proper (Rey-Henningsen 1994: 200). *Bruxa* also has several meanings in the Alto Minho region in northern Portugal: the word can refer to a witch in the sense of “a woman who has supernatural or magical powers and knowledge, which are usually acquired through

a pact with the devil or with lesser evil spirits". On the other hand, when people say that they "went to a *bruxa*", they are referring to a person who has supernatural powers and is capable of neutralising the effects of a spell and sometimes to counter the attack. This person can be a fortune-teller, an unwitcher, a healer, a medium, an exorcist, or a priest. Although people might fear them, they do not see them as witches in the true sense of the word. The fact is, writes de Pina-Cabral, that there is a difference between a witch proper and a "white witch" (unwitcher), but it is unclear. Sometimes, when people try to explain the difference between the two, they call the first a *feiticeira* ("a person who does *feitício*", i.e. "sorcery") and the later a *bruxa*. However, the two words can also be used synonymously, but the first always refers to a woman and has a more heinous connotation (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 189–190).

Slavic languages display the same ambiguity: the terms stemming from the same root word can mean either a witch proper or an unwitcher. In southern Slavic languages, the most commonly used words for a witch proper, *v(j)eštica*, actually derives from the proto-Slavic root **věst'a* ("skilful, wise, experienced") which points to the attributes of the unwitcher. The old Slovenian word *vešča* from the same root in its original sense meant a "wise woman, witch, fortune-teller" (or a moth); however, already in the early modern period in demonological treatises linked to sabbatical witchcraft, it indicated a witch proper (*die Hexe*) (Tratnik Volasko and Košir 1995: 154–155). On the other hand, the Russian *veščún* and the Ukrainian *viščún*, deriving from the same root, denote a fortune-teller, a cunning person (cf. Bezljaj 2005: 305; Plotnikova 2004: 221). The Polish words *wiedźma* and *małdra* are connected with knowledge (*wiedza*), the gift of seeing (*widzieć*), and wisdom (*małdrość*), but the word *wiedźma* connotes a witch proper, while *małdra* is generally used for healers, who are occasionally also called *znachor* ("one who knows [about sickness]") (cf. Moszyński 1967: 95; Schiffman 1987: 148–149).

An ambivalent attitude towards a cunning person has often been noticed in European witchcraft—knowledge can be powerful and beneficent but also dangerous. If one has the power to unwitch, one can use the same power to bewitch; if one can do good, one can also do evil (Mathisen 1993: 19). While some authors, like Sebald in reference to Franconian healers (who also performed unwitching), emphasised their elevated and indisputably positive status within a community: "Those skilled in *Anfangen* are highly esteemed, come from families known for honest work and Christian faith (...). The healer (...) is never tainted by ambivalence. Her image clearly is one of helpfulness and piety, and her

healing procedures are compatible with Christian principles” (Sebald 1984: 128–129), other scholars often observed that the reputation of unwitchers was clearly marked by ambiguity and that the line between a witch and an unwitcher is not quite as clear as Sebald suggested. In fact, in his article, Sebald admitted that his grandmother was a healer, that is, a “white witch” (1984: 126), and one wonders whether his family background may have affected his judgement, or affect the way the villagers talked to him about “white witches”.

White witches in Alto Minho were also believed to be able to use their powers in an antisocial fashion, to attack and influence their neighbours; the means used by white witches for protection could also be used for causing evil, and the personality of a white witch was regarded as a sign of the “existence of the evil, death dealing, antisocial forces in the midst of human society” (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 190–191). Scandinavian cunning men were similarly believed to be able to cure as well as to bewitch, and Hungarian countryside “wizards” were skilled in white as well as black magic (de Blécourt 1999: 187). While in Denmark people generally differentiated between malicious and beneficent intent, they also generally believed that people who could do good could also do bad, and the dividing line between the two was blurred (Tangherlini 2000: 284, 196). In Poland, the same person was believed to be able to use magic benevolently or malevolently (Schiffmann 1987: 148). In Macedonia, the distinction between a woman performing harmful magic (*madjesnica*), and a healer or a charmer (*bajačka*, *iscelitelka*, *kušačka*) is also not clear—one and the same person can both cast a spell and break it (Petreska 2008: 28). Knowledge of or access to supernatural power has always been considered potentially dangerous: people who are able to defeat a witch’s bewitchment are just as well able to perform it, and as such they were respected, but also feared. Reports on double actions of unwitchers are common in our research region:

II: When I came to the house [married into the family] it was done that they would not have luck with pigs. They had lent some money but when they were going to rebuild the pigsties they needed it back and their [neighbours’ son] had to sell a gold watch to pay them back. And his father then did that they wouldn’t have any luck with pigs for ten years. And when I came, they were beautiful at first but they all died soon after. The mother said: This was done. Go to the fortune-teller! And I went to K. to my brother and I was very scared. There were no cars then, just bicycles. I went by bike and stayed there for a couple of weeks. I had time and there was one fortune-teller there. And I met one woman and asked her if she thought this fortune-teller knew such things.

She said: You shouldn't tell her [what your problem was] and we will see if she knows anything or not. And I took off my wedding ring—I didn't believe, I didn't believe. I went there just like that, out of curiosity. Really I didn't [believe]. And I went there but I couldn't really understand what she [the fortune-teller] was talking about. She gave me cards and she was looking at them. I was married, but she didn't know that. She asked me if I was married, if I am I should cut the cards with the left or [was it] with the right hand? And I did just the opposite. I didn't know what she told me to do. I didn't understand. Just the opposite! She is throwing those cards and nothing came out correctly. And I thought to myself—you are talking nonsense, old woman, I didn't come for that. Nothing is correct, nothing is correct. But I am married! [She:] Right then, but I told you to cut the cards with the other hand!²⁰ And I cut the cards with the other hand, and then she immediately knew that we have a sick calf in the byre and that our pigs are ill and that we had lent some money. She saw everything. And she said it was done for seven years. Now I told her what I wanted from her. And she put me to a room and she mixed some remedies and gave me that. Some tea or something. And I should give this to the pigs when back home. And I left and she told me that I would come back. I said that I never would but she said: You will see, you will come, and gladly! I thought I would never come again. In addition, I was pregnant, the woman could do something to me. After a week I come home, I go to the calves and there was no more milk. She did that, right? Because I didn't tell her correctly immediately, and she said I was testing her. Then my mother [-in-law] said I should go back to her immediately. Yes, there was no more milk. I said: I won't go, I won't go. Then the sister went who was younger and was still at home. The sister and the neighbour, they went together. And they brought her sausages, and eggs and who knows what! And she told her that there was no more milk, that she has done it. And she said that she wouldn't allow to be tested. Yes, this was the old woman. I couldn't foresee that. And she said we should bring holy water from three different parishes and I don't know how many candles, I've forgotten that already, and to bring it back to her the next time. And she mixed it and poured it into three different bottles—one we should bury by the pigs, one in front of the byre, and one on [another's] land. If the one who did that stepped on it, everything of theirs would die. And we should do that in the night, at midnight, the father and the sister. They should be there at midnight and stay there until the ringing of the Angelus bell, and bury it at the time of the ringing. Otherwise our pigs would be dying for the next seven years. And the next day we were not allowed to give anything to anybody. [She:] If anyone comes to the house you should not give [them] anything, not even a cigarette! I told this to everybody, to the neighbours, right? That no one should come to ask for anything, to borrow anything. And everyone knew. In the morning, at seven, when I was working in the vineyard, there comes Tone, my aunt's husband, and I say

to him: How come you are so early? He comes here and asks for yeast: Franci, give me some yeast! [He said] that he needed yeast. And he [the father-in-law, Franci] told him: No, not today, I told everyone that we won't be lending anything today, we are not allowed to give anything out today. [Tone:] Why not? Then at least give me a cigarette! Give me a cigarette! [Franci:] You know very well that we are not allowed to give anything away. You heard very well that we shouldn't. And he [Tone] was angry and went away. But my aunt didn't send him for the yeast. Something was hurting him, that, he did this. And in the evening he came back drunk. And he came together with Bogo to our house, and said that they wanted something to drink. That they had to come to us. Something was pulling him. And we were sitting there by the side, we were not allowed to give him any drink. And we told him that in advance! The father [-in-law] said: But why did you come today, when you know that we are not allowed to give you anything? Come tomorrow and you will get anything you wish! [Tone:] What did you say? I shall show you a witch! Put a chain on the fire and you will see a witch smouldering! [Franci:] Doesn't matter, what matters is that you won't get anything from us today! Then I went to my aunt the next day and told her everything and she said: But who sent him, who sent him? And after that he didn't come to visit for a month, he was so angry that we didn't give him anything that day. (150)

- I1: There was a woman who stole rosemary from our house, and there were plenty other things. So, his father [pointing to her son sitting near her] went to Croatia, there was a man who knew. So he came down there and he told him: It is your neighbour who does that. Then he gave him something, and he had to be at home before sunset. He gave him some firewood and told him to burn that when he is back home. He said: That woman, your neighbour, she will have all blistered hands. And she really did.*
- I2: The next day she would have blisters on her hand, the woman that stole that.*
- I1: And you know what that man, there in Croatia, also did? He made it that the cow gave no more milk, he milked it.*
- I2: She gave blood instead of milk. (34)*

Occasionally, unwitchers were even asked to undo their own bewitchment which they had performed on the client (de Blécourt 1999: 187), as we have seen in the above narrative (cf. 150). Such a role of an unwitcher relates to the notion that bewitchment could be remedied only by those who placed it in the first place, which implies that the same person fulfils both roles: the role of the malefactor as well as that of the healer, the unwitcher (de Blécourt 1999: 187–188; Pócs 1999: 107–119). Nevertheless, in spite of the ambiguity of the figure of the

unwitcher and the somewhat blurred boundary between the witch and the unwitcher, there is a basic difference between the two as regards their ability to unwitch: while a witch was believed to be able to lift only their own bewitchment, the unwitcher's ability to disenchant was much broader—they could not only unwitch their own bewitchments but also those placed by others (de Blécourt 1994: 297; cf. Sebald 1984: 127, 135; Pócs 1999: 107–108). In addition, while a “witch” would never (or only exceptionally) admit their involvement in witchcraft, a fortune-teller publicly declared their service, accepted customers, and received compensation for their job.

It seems that people occasionally also turned to unwitchers with a request to bewitch others (cf. p. 269), and that at least some of them not only assisted in identifying the witch and lifting their own bewitchment but also, on request, indeed performed ritual bewitching. The following narration referring to the funeral of the unwitcher Jan H. in Germany during the Second World War may indicate the ambiguous service the unwitcher provided his customers with. In addition, it attaches the generally held notions about “unnatural” circumstances at funerals of those engaged in magic to the unwitcher in question.

I: *Up there on the hill was the H. family and during the war they were driven away. And the old people used to visit for a long time. And their son went to Germany during the war, his mother and father were there. After the war he [referring to the Jan H.'s son] came back to Slovenia. I used to spin a lot there where I lived and for that man too, I knitted socks and a pullover and he said that he can still do many things. But he said that he was so shattered when his father was buried in Germany. When his coffin was being put in the grave, there arose such a terrible storm that the priest could not read what he was supposed to. There was such a terrible storm that priest closed the book and squeezed it together and just prayed like that. When the funeral was over, the priest asked if there were any relatives present at the funeral. He said he was. The priest asked him what he was to the deceased and he told him he was his son. Then the priest asked him what he [his father] was by profession. He said he told him.*

F: *What did he say?*

I: *He said he [Jan H.] believed in such things and also helped people. He said: one week they asked for good, the next week they asked for bad. He said that he also knew a lot, but this shattered him so much that he would never do either good or bad to anyone. (36)*

The research in our region thus partly concurs with Muchembled, who argues that in the French countryside of the early modern period the difference between white and black witchcraft was merely a construction of the elite and had no roots among the rural population, for whom all forms of magic were fundamentally ambiguous. Muchembled also argues that “[a] person who was feared in his or her own village as a witch could be consulted by outsiders as an unwitching specialist” (1979, 1985, in Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999: 127; Tangherlini 2000: 284). Indeed, the perception of the same person alters dramatically whether considered from the insiders’ perspective, that is, from the members of the same community, or from the perspective of the outsiders. The attitude of people towards Angela H., as disclosed from the interviews (1) with her clients who came from another region to that of her village; (2) with people from her own village and the villages located in the vicinity; and (3) with her grandson, clearly differed. While in the interviews with clients who came from the region of our research Angela H. featured as an effective unwitcher and played an overall positive (albeit feared) role in the combat against witches (in spite of their awareness that she could also do bad), her status in the village where she lived and in the surrounding villages was quite the opposite. Local people, although aware of her profession as a fortune-teller, usually took her for a witch and warned against her, and her children, when small, were regularly scolded for being the witch’s children: *What did people think of her here? Oh, many things, also bad things. They called her a fortune-teller, a witch. They said: Leave her alone! They didn’t want to have anything to do with her. They warned that one had to be careful how to behave toward her. They didn’t have any contact with her and were cautious in the relationship toward her*—were some of typical answers of my interlocutors living in the vicinity of her home to my inquiry about their attitude towards her.

The narratives of her co-villagers and those living in the neighbouring villages also underline features that typically pertain to witches proper, more precisely, to stereotypical village witches: in them she was depicted as looking dreadful, dishevelled, limping, blind in one eye, of having a strange, sharp look, and of being asocial and inquisitive.²¹ One narrative frequently recounted by her co-villagers and by the inhabitants of the nearby villages, still very much in circulation, particularly emphasised her power to bewitch. The narrative is about a curse that she allegedly placed on a hunter (or three hunters, in another variant) as revenge for having killed her dog(s). When she realised that her dog(s) had been shot by

the hunter(s), she was said to have cursed him (them), saying: “Just like he (they) died, so you too will die!” As the rumour goes, the hunter(s) had a motorcycle accident and died that same year (alternatively: before her death).²² Although she maintained a good relationship with at least some of her neighbours who, like her, did not live in the village centre, but more on the periphery (and were thus probably less involved in the village gossip and had fewer contacts with their relatives living in the centre, with whom they had strained relationships), the prevalent reputation she had in her own and in the surrounding villages, located on the same hill as her home village, was that of a witch. On the other hand, the reputation she had outside this territory was that of an extremely powerful unwitcher. Her grandson confirmed that he was aware of both of her reputations.

Thus Muchembled’s claim that a person feared in their own village as a witch could be consulted by outsiders as an unwitching specialist is, to some extent, confirmed in the case of the unwitcher in question: her reputation obviously crucially depended on the distance of the narrators’ place of residence from her domicile. However, despite the fact that the unwitcher’s power to (possibly) pursue antisocial aims was feared so much in the community where she lived that she equalled witches proper in this respect, and that while maintaining a positive reputation amidst people living some distance away, amidst her own neighbours she acquired the reputation of a witch mostly due to her unwitching activity,²³ the difference between the witch and the unwitcher was still acknowledged. Moreover, while the reputation of a witch can easily become attached to an unwitcher, the opposite was not possible: people would never mistake a (village) witch for an unwitcher, and a person with the reputation of a (village) witch never acquired the reputation of an unwitcher, unless she in fact practiced unwitching.

PROCEDURE

Once a person decided to consult a fortune-teller due to misfortunes that befell them, they must have already had a very strong suspicion that the ultimate source of their misfortunes was witchcraft. The confirmation of their assumptions by a fortune-teller was, therefore, expected, and even hoped for, as the cause of their misfortunes thus became tangible. By recognizing it they were taking the first step on the road to recovery. Moreover, the confirmation was the only answer that would have justified

their making the journey to see the fortune-teller, given that it would often take them an entire day to walk there and back again. A confirmation of their suspicions was also necessary to justify the escape from domestic duties in the eyes of other family members.²⁴ Especially if they were facing doubts regarding their suspicions about the cause of their misfortunes among their family members, the confirmation by the fortune-teller that they were true was a prerequisite for coming back home victorious and silencing those that did not share their opinion in the first place.

Surely the risk of not receiving the expected answer when paying a visit to the fortune-teller was not high, as the fortune-tellers always confirmed suspicions of witchcraft as being the true origin of their misfortunes. Talking about his great-grandmother, Una H., Ivan H. confirmed that those who visited her anticipated the bewitchment to be the source of their misfortune in advance, and were seldom, if ever, disappointed by her answer²⁵:

She would say whether it was only a misfortune as such or if somebody was doing evil. Usually she would assume that somebody had done them harm. Those who came to visit her had already told her themselves that somebody had harmed them. But their secrets went to the grave with her; she would never tell [who was to blame]. (164)

The confirmation of bewitchment as the cause of misfortunes was a *conditio sine qua non* for any further treatment. This did not need to be stated explicitly, as an implicit confirmation was a rationale underlying any further procedures. However, on occasion, explicit declarations of witchcraft seem to have been made, or at least the victim stated publicly that the confirmation of bewitchment had been stated explicitly (cf. inf. 29, p. 62).

And so the pigs were pining away, and they died. Then (...) a fortune-teller said to my father that this was done by the neighbour ... A close neighbour. (29)

- I: *In our village there was a family, they were older and younger, right, but they didn't get along all that well, the old ones and the young. And before they had a large property, and the older ones also had a cow, a pig, and all that. And at that house nothing ever thrived, no livestock. And then what do I know, they went there where there was this H. [referring to Jan H.]. Have you never heard of that man who knew how to tell fortunes? Who knew how to tell fortunes with cards? And that he said there that it was, how should I say, bewitched. That it didn't thrive.*
- F: *And did they ever figure out why it didn't thrive?*

- I: *Well, it did, just the livestock didn't thrive. The cow they had never had any milk nor a real calf or anything, and that was ... And then they went to see that fortune-teller. And that he really told them how [it was, that] it was bewitched. (78)*
- II: *Down there they went to L. [referring to Jan H.], there was that witch, who told [people] if there was a neighbour or someone [who did harm], he told [their fortune]. This person is your greatest [enemy], be most afraid of this person! He did that for you, right, if you had no luck with your livestock or if something else was not okay.*
- F: *Did your family also go to him to ask who had done things to them?*
- I2: *Ah, they went from every house!*
- II: *They went from every house here, yes.*
- F: *And he also did witchcraft?*
- II: *He had, he had a book, and when he looked inside it, he told it exactly.*
- F: *But did he also do bad things to people?*
- I2: *Oh no, he only told fortunes.*
- F: *He just told fortunes?*
- II: *He only told fortunes.*
- F: *But he also knew how to heal things that were bewitched?*
- II: *[He said:] That person, avoid that person, he is your greatest enemy, leave that person completely alone! (63)*

The diagnoses offered by fortune-tellers were, therefore, as a rule based on an assumption of bewitchment. Once the cause of the misfortunes had been confirmed, directly or indirectly, further steps needed to be taken in order for the misfortune to end and the normal state to be restored. When a misfortune was related to the health of people or livestock, one immediate step that fortune-tellers who had knowledge of healing or herbalism took was to cure the illness through various methods and means. As already mentioned above, according to their (great-)grandson, the members of the H. family certainly gave advice and knew to prepare many home remedies, such as herbal teas to cure dysentery and various skin ailments (rashes, scabies, wounds), sauerkraut to “draw illnesses out” of the body, special lard for curing swine diseases, and so on. In the case of livestock disease, they would often give advice related to hygiene and prevention of the spread of infection, suggesting various measures, for instance, a thorough cleaning of the byres, pigsties and henhouses, repainting them with lime, or moving the livestock to another place, suggesting an egg diet in case cows were not giving milk, and similar.

Following these prescribed measures must certainly have contributed to improved conditions in which cattle, pigs, and chickens were being bred, and therefore, as a consequence, to the improvement of their health and productivity. However, all these measures, although aimed at curing diseases of people or livestock, were never communicated simply as medical instructions or lectures about hygiene and proper nutrition. Getting a lecture about how to treat livestock was not what a client would expect from a fortune-teller. Moreover, advice about hygiene and general handling of domestic animals would probably even have offended them, as it would insinuate that they were unable to do their job properly and had to face the fact that they were not good enough farmers, and that it was basically their fault that the livestock got ill. This was exactly what they had come to the fortune-teller to hear a contradiction of. Various strategies, therefore, had to be employed to avoid the insinuation that the fortune-teller might possibly find the clients responsible for their own misfortunes. First, when the advice or medicine was given, it had to be prescribed together with precise instructions about behaviour, wrapped in a shroud of mystery, which the clients had to follow even though they couldn't understand the meaning of them. If the clients did not obey the instructions to the letter, it would be their fault if the treatment was not successful—for fortune-tellers this probably also provided a potential escape route in case the outcome was not as expected. When people were given medicine, for instance, they had to take one spoonful on the first day, two on the second day, three on the third day, and so on, up to the seventh day, when they had to start counting backwards so that they could stop taking it after the 13th day. When the health of the livestock was endangered, they were often given some sort of white powder that they were told to burn in the stove and incense in the byres or around the farmyard (cf. also Kruse 1951: 43).

- I: *Yeah, yeah, there was this woman up there, I would say near L. [referring to Angela H.], who knew this, who was against these [witches]. Yes, against the [witch] she gave either medicines or she herself came to the house if someone went to ask her, right, and she gave medicines against [it], right?*
- F: *And did you go to her?*
- I: *Yes. When there was this woman, now she is gone, she is no more ...*
- F: *What did she give or say?*
- I: *Well, what she gave, I can't really say ... [laughs uncomfortably]*

- F: *But did she give you anything, or what did it look like?*
 I: *Well, she told [fortunes].*
 F: *What did she say?*
 I: *And she gave [things] as well, but now I don't know what kinds of things they were, what she gave, some kind of powder she gave, that you burned and incensed with it.*
 F: *You burned it?*
 I: *Yes.*
 F: *Where did you have to burn it?*
 I: *Well, there where it was [bewitched], if for example it was in the byre or in the pig shed, right, you incensed with that [stuff] there, right, but no one should see you [do it], right?*
 F: *And what happened then?*
 I: *Well, afterwards it got better, right? [laughs]*
 F: *What was it burned with?*
 I: *Well, I don't know what it was, some powder that you put on the fire, right, and it burned, right, [laughs] you know, how would you say, like in church burn when they incense ... (2)*

It is hard to tell with certainty whether this was some traditional medicine, possibly a sort of disinfectant, or just a placebo, nevertheless, the instructions were often accompanied by additional requests: they had to put fire on a plate onto which they subsequently poured the powder *three times*; dig *three crosses* into the ground with a chisel, *away from their body* (“God protect if you did it toward yourself!”) (cf. inf. 36, p. 297–298) and pour the powder into them; they had to perform the task *at dusk*; or burn the powder they received *in secret*. When they were given brushwood to burn, the exact timing for performing the procedure was also given: they had to burn it *just before sunset*. The ritual execution of the practice, following it in all its tiniest details, carried with it a clear message they were in fact waging a battle with mysterious enemies from outside who wished them ill. This redirected their own doubts in their ability to maintain their households, as well as the doubts of their relatives and the community about their ability, towards a conviction that it was not them who were to be blamed for their loss and misfortunes due to their lack of care for hygiene, feeding the animals and similar, but a mysterious, hidden enemy.

Furthermore, medicine or advice was often prescribed together with instructions about rituals that relied on traditional knowledge about symbolic protection of property from the world outside, like walking around the byres or the whole property, which implicitly points to a threat coming

from *outside* the boundaries of their own household against which one had to protect oneself.

My folk went to Croatia, in former Yugoslavia, you know, there was a woman there who knew everything. She told us that our closest neighbour had buried something here inside. Then they had to go to the church to get those old ropes, and walk around the pigsty with the ropes and incense from the church. They lit the incense on fire and walked around the pigsty with it. (63)

The redirection of the blame for the cause of the misfortunes to a third party from the outside is evident from the following narration, where the reason for the hens dying seems to be their inappropriate handling by the mistress of the house, and the fortune-teller obviously suggested that her daughter should take over the domestic task. However, this “declaration” of the mistress’s inability as a housewife was carefully veiled: by giving instructions about the protection of the property through circumambulation and other rituals, the fortune-teller actually pointed at those outside the household as the perpetrators, and relieved the mistress of the responsibility.

- I: *The fortune-teller helped us, she saved us. She told us: You should do like this and you shall be spared! And truly, mother was not allowed to set the hens on the eggs to hatch afterwards. She used to keep chickens at home ... But then I took over and everything was fine afterwards. No hens died any more.*
- F: *But how could she prevent the hens from dying?*
- I: *She gave us some powder ...*
- F: *What kind of powder?*
- I: *White powder.*
- F: *What kind?*
- I: *I don't know, all I know is that it was white powder in a small white box. I remember it clearly from when my mother brought it back home. She said: Just pour that powder around the pigsty. Afterwards everything was fine. (73)*

Often, however, the fortune-teller explicitly stated that somebody had buried a bewitching object in their farmstead and directed the treatment directly towards its discovery, removal, and/or destruction. Usually, instructions were given to the clients of what to search for and where, whereby the patient alone would take on the task of finding and removing the object. They would usually suggest that their clients search for bones, and occasionally also bread, eggs, and in one case a knife, buried in their

farmyard, usually in the byre, under a threshold, in a pigsty, and similar (cf. Kruse 1951: 48; Bever 2008: 222). The object needed to be taken out and removed, and sometimes additional instructions were given that it had to be burned or brought to the boundary with a neighbouring farm. Obviously, in a place such as a farmyard, with a tradition of annual pig-slaughtering, and dogs carrying around the remains of meat with bones and bread, one could hardly expect some forgotten bones or bread not to be lying around. On the other hand, burying objects in neighbours' farmyards was certainly not always only an ascribed deed, but also a practiced one, as discussed above. At any rate, fortune-tellers did not risk much if they predicted the finding of a buried object—eventually some would certainly be found somewhere in the farmyard.

The pigs kept getting sick so she went to a fortune-teller and said: What is it that the pigs keep being ill, they are always getting ill? And she [the unwitcher] said to her: There is a neighbour, she did that to you, she said, you need to look by the pigsties or under the threshold, there the bones are buried, pig bones. When you find these bones, dig them up and put them on the border between you and that woman. (43)

- I: *I heard about the pigs. That was also down in B., where they found the bread buried behind the pigsty. And that afterwards the pigs died, and they also went there, and that he also said to them ...*
- F: *Where did they go?*
- I: *Then they went to him [referring to Jan H.] and he said precisely: You have bread buried behind the pigsty. And they went to dig it out and they found the bread. They got rid of that bread, I don't know how, they burned it or something, and the pigs were not [sick] anymore.*
- F: *And who was supposed to have buried the bread?*
- I: *Well, they didn't know. They only suspected this woman, I don't know ...*
- F: *And why was that bread supposed to be harmful?*
- I: *I don't know, I don't know what that was, why. How it was done ...*
- F: *And then when they dug it out the livestock was okay?*
- I: *Yes, they dug it out, and it was okay. (40)*

II: She [the unwitcher] said that right in front of the pigsty we have a pig's head buried. That if we dig, we would find it. But we didn't. That when we were doing the pigsty, digging a ditch, he [the witch] buried the pig's head in it. And that he did that so that it would last for seven years so that the pigs would not thrive. (150)

When it came to itinerant fortune-tellers, immediate effect seemed necessary in order to satisfy the client: the performance of the discovery of a bewitching object and its destruction was a prerequisite for the fortune-teller to get their payment directly. Obviously, a powerful performance employing some conjuring tricks made a great impression on some householders:

11: He told me how one day he saw a man loafing at the crossroad and thought to himself: Why is he loitering there? Then the man [said]: You are unhappy! Come on, he [the master] said, how can you tell me I'm unhappy? How would you know, you didn't see anything! Indeed, you are, he [the man] said. (...) He [the master] said: I was lucky to have bought some wine and tobacco. I still had about six hundred dinars,²⁶ that was quite a lot of money, right? Enough to buy a small cow. Then we had to, of course (...) give him all the money we had, put all of it on the table, everything we had. He put it there, but his mother didn't. [The man:] Put the money on the table! he said. Then the old lady started whimpering. He said: You have it but don't want to give it! The woman started crying, but he insisted: All of it! Alright, all of it. Then he took off his shirt, took a pair of scissors in his hands and said: Well, you see [that I have nothing hidden in the sleeves] ... He then headed to her bedroom and slit the pillow and the feathers inside. And he said: You see me, I have nothing. And he took a ball out. A ball of mud. Inside that ball there was everything! Feathers, horsehair ... such things. He took it out, whatever it was, and cut it with an axe. He took the money and left. He said: I still had one pig in the pigsty, but it was so small ... four hundred kilos it weighed later! He said: And chickens, a courtyard full of them! If he came again a year later, he would get twice as much as he did! (27)

The discovery of the object of bewitchment was, on the one hand, important as an indisputable proof of intentional bewitchment by a third party, and on the other, it provided a materialization of the bewitchment and allowed for its actual destruction and thus the annihilation of the source of the misfortune itself. Such a visual destruction must undoubtedly have had a very strong psychological effect on the victim, as it provided a proof that the source of all the misfortunes could cause them no more harm. This was, however, the only case I came across where the fortune-teller took on the task of destruction of the bewitching object by himself, and it is not insignificant that this was an itinerant fortune-teller. His position of being in the farmyard of another person, without an established reputation that would shelter him from unsatisfied customer, was a

much more vulnerable one than that of well-known sedentary specialists. If he had suggested that an object had been buried he would have had to show it to the master or else wait until it was found. Thus the easiest and safest method for an itinerant fortune-teller was to conjure up an object on the spot, prove their mastery of magical abilities and get the reward. If the person in whose household the object was found later discovered his trick, or if it was declared a fraud by neighbours, and they wanted their money back or even threatened him with violence, he would already have been far away.²⁷

All of the unwitchers' instructions and measures discussed so far were more or less aimed at dealing with bewitching objects and their consequences, and providing protection against bewitchment from the outside, rather than directly pointing at the witch herself. However, while symbolic boundaries could have been established and the objects causing the misfortunes successfully removed or destroyed, one could never be sure that the person who had caused harm would not repeat the deed and strike again. Therefore, the ultimate prevention of further bewitchments demanded the *identification* of the witch and the overcoming or destruction of her power (cf. Kruse 1951: 31; Favret-Saada 1980: 74ff; Mathisen 1993: 20). Indeed, fortune-tellers' instructions about where to find buried objects and what to do with them often additionally implied the identification of the person who had supposedly buried them in order to do harm—that is, the witch. The narrative below confirms the underlying conviction that the removal of the bewitching object alone does not suffice for the elimination of the bewitchment, and that to achieve this purpose once and for all one had to disclose the identity of the witch who was responsible for the bewitchment in the first place, to confront her and deprive her of her power.

My mother used to tell me that in a certain family the pigs were getting sick all the time, year after year. And that woman once paid a visit to a fortune-teller. And he told her that she would find an object buried under the threshold of the byre, an object, you know. And when you removed that object, a woman or a man would come along and you shouldn't speak a word with her. And he [the unwitcher] said: If you spoke with that person—I can't remember whether a woman or man—this would do you no good. If, however, you didn't speak with her, this and this would happen. And it was true. And I know exactly that a person from a village came there and talked and talked but that farm woman didn't want to listen to her at all and just went away. That woman [the witch] was very upset, as she had to leave without success. And from that time on everything was fine, the pigs were always healthy. As if something had been planted. (72)

Just as the instructions about how to handle the buried objects were based on the notion that the witch is still connected with the object they had put to the neighbour's territory, and that by digging the object up and removing it, or else by treating it in another way, such as burning it, the witch is hurt and hurries to the spot to be relieved from the pain, whereby the first person showing up was identified as the witch responsible for the misfortunes that befell the victim, fortune-tellers too based their identification prescriptions on the same notion, i.e. that the first person to turn up during or after the performance of the ritual²⁸ would prove to be the witch (cf. also Sebald 1984: 127; de Blécourt 1994: 298).

The strong interdiction against any communication or exchanging any objects in that moment, which we heard time and time again in the conversations with our interlocutors, is necessary, as communication would mean the opening up of what the unwitcher, by giving instructions, was trying to clench or close—as Favret-Saada explains: “Why must one avoid any contact with the witch just at that moment (not touch him, not talk to him, not let him enter the house)? In order to let the metaphorical contact established by the ritual have its full effect. For any material contact would mean communicating, therefore opening up what the metaphorical contact took great pains to clench (*‘encrouillé’*)”²⁹ (1980: 74; cf. also Kruse 1951: 42–43).

When somebody had no luck with livestock, with pigs, you know, they would go to the witches, those that knew, the fortune-tellers or what do you call them, to ask about the reason for their misfortune. And that fortune-teller advised them to take thatch from the roofs and brushwood from the streams in three different parishes, to make a pile at the crossroad and burn it and eventually that woman who caused you harm will approach, and you ought not to talk with her, even if she wanted you to talk with her. And that helped a lot. (98)

II: *Well, in the old days they said that there were witches. And there were other ways, ways against [them], that you had to get some medicine from that witch, and you got some of those things, that you placed them, some of those things, and that it went away afterwards. The witches bewitched livestock for example, so that the pigs didn't want to eat or something, they weren't right after that. Well, then they knew that, and they went [to see the unwitcher]. There in Croatia there was one such person, who had those medicines against it. He gave things that they would put them, and then that person who had bewitched them walked around, because it tortured them, to save themselves, by tempting them so that those medicines wouldn't help.*

F: *Where they were walking around?*

- II: *They went around, and called, and looked for ways that they would answer them, and then those medicines wouldn't help anymore. And then they [the victims] hid themselves so that they [witches] couldn't find them, that they would not speak with that person and then they would lose that [bewitchment] which they had cooked up for those people. They said that they could also make people lame.*
- F: *How, what did they do?*
- II: *Well, I don't know. These were witches who had their power. What did they do? They placed things on your property, so that you ... gave the livestock things so that they became sick, or to people, so that they, that they were not ... This was placed. And then they searched again: Yeah, there's one there who knows. And you had to bring them something, something of yours, some objects, some of your rags, so that they had something in your clothes, that they found in them some medicine against [it], and then brought that home and placed there. And that would help, but you were not allowed to come in contact with them, when they came around to search on purpose, to speak with you, otherwise it wouldn't help at all.*
- F: *So then you were not allowed to speak with them?*
- II: *No, with that person who came asking for help, not at all. And that would somehow torture them, because if they didn't win, it [the bewitchment] would fall apart. That thing would heal it, whether it were a person, an animal, that's how it was. But that was many years ago, when I was young, and those are people I overheard when they were talking: And here was something, and there was something, this was placed here, and that was placed there. So that that thing somehow worked at that time, I don't know, nowadays nobody believes in that anymore. (50)*

Well, that was in that village, my mother-in-law's brother [said] that the cow had [milk], and then for several days it had no milk. And then they went there somewhere in L. [referring to Jan H.], there they, I don't know, some witch doctor or something was there. And they went to him, and he said: Now when you get home, I don't know what they had to ... They saw that there was some milk strewn under the trees, and the cow had no more milk, none. And that woman did that to you, he [the unwitcher] said. And now he got something, what do I know what he got, and that woman [the witch] came to the window that evening, and cried for help: Open up, and so forth, that she was in trouble and all that. But on the first evening his mother was still ... she didn't take it seriously, and she answered, right? And therefore it did not help. And then they went again and she cried again one evening and she screamed for help at some late hour and then they defeated her [obviously by not answering], and after that the cow had milk. [laughs] (40)

- I2: *What do you think, what she told me! When she went to the wedding, what do I know, I only heard this. When that young woman went to the wedding, she had forty knots in her underskirt, around and around, from underneath. Who saw that, I do not know. That she had, like a witch, that she had that power, that nobody could do anything to her. And that woman then had children and all, and then she came to my grandmother and said, oh, what nice pigs you have, she said. [The grandmother:] Yes, quite. They had them inside a fence, they used to have them outside. And she praised them so, what nice pigs they are, right, and then they stopped eating. And a toad came up to the threshold.*
- I1: *Every toad was a witch.*
- I2: *It wanted to come inside my grandmother's hallway. It was in the image of a witch. It came to the threshold, but my grandmother kicked it aside, and then it came another time, and they went into the byre for a pitchfork, a manure fork, and they impaled it, stabbed it, and set up upright in the manure. That's what I heard. And then that woman came, that witch: Good day, good day. She shouldn't have at all [answered] good day, that woman. Yeah, you shouldn't say anything to her, as it weighed on her, because she had a connection with those witches.*
- I1: *It tortured her, it was as if you impaled an old woman on the pitchfork, that toad was in the image of an old crone.*
- I2: *Mama didn't say a word, and then she [the witch] left unhappy. They didn't say a thing, [because] they remembered that there was something wrong.*
- I1: *She came looking for help, because it tortured her, because that toad was impaled on that pitchfork, and it hurt so much that it tortured her, but if they answered that woman, there would have been nothing [good] from that. But if you are quiet, then what that crone had cooked up did not help her.*
- I2: *When mama went to Croatia [to consult the unwitcher], I don't know. During the time, maybe, when the pigs weren't eating. And that animal [a toad] came inside and they impaled it and then that woman came, and left unhappy. And honestly I tell you that after that the pigs ate.*
- I1: *Yeah, she had to bring something from that [sick] livestock, some bristles. Well, and on the basis of that the witch told [her] what to do, and afterwards it was good. You have to bring some item from the person, so that she [the unwitcher] can determine what to do from it. Therefore she [the grandmother] had to bring a couple of bristles from that sick sow, so that she could use it to figure out what she should do, so that it would help. And then he³⁰ said that she had to impale the toad on a pitchfork, and set it into the manure pile so that the toad was in the air, and wait until the witch who fixed it came to see if she could [find] somebody who would answer her, so that afterwards there wouldn't be anything from that. If you remained silent, then she was destroyed, and nothing could help her. And the pigs ate normally after that.*

- I2: *If someone came, one mustn't say anything.*
 I1: *You mustn't say anything in reply.*
 F: *Was the witch injured, was she in pain?*
 I1: *Well what do I know, how it tortured her, something must have tortured her, because she was ... Every toad was that witch. To this day I can't stand the sight of them if they come into the house. Well you know they sometimes come here, shuffling along, they want to come in, but I throw them down in the bushes. Every [toad] is a witch!*
 F: *Could witches turn themselves into anything else, or just into toads?*
 I1: *I don't know that. I do know this, that every one of those toads was a witch. I couldn't stand the sight of them, to this day I can't stand the sight of them anywhere! (50)*

As friends or neighbours were more likely to visit or come by than people living in the other parts of the village or strangers, the identified witches were often close friends and good neighbours whose friendship was probably over once and for all once the identification took place, as some narratives clearly reflect:

I1: *I can tell you about a case that my granny told me about. There was J. living near L. [referring to Jan H.]. A man, like a fortune-teller or a witch. And he knew all kinds of things. And women went to see him if pigs were ill ... And he gave them lard to grease the pigs. Then they decided to pay him a visit together—my grandmother and such naive women, you know, a friend of hers with whom she was very friendly. And he gave each of them a basket with lard, some kind of lard, I am not sure. And then it was said that the first person to come along will prove to be the witch [that caused] the pigs to be sick or other illnesses. And my grandmother lost her basket, you know. So she ran to her friend early in the morning to ask her to share some lard with her before she used it all. But that woman just chased her away. You are the witch! Be off with you! Yes, they had been very friendly and everything, and then she chased her away saying: He told us the first person to come by! People used to be naive, very naive. (67)*

The above story could probably be considered amusing if it did not describe a real experience of a broken friendship happening in real life. In many identification stories, one can actually witness the moments when breaches in close relationships occurred. In the community where the code of prescribed behaviour towards suspected witches (interdiction against talking or exchanging any object with the witch) was well known to everybody, people must have immediately recognized the verdict that

was being laid upon them (cf. Favret-Saada 1989: 46). In these narratives, which, *nota bene*, were always narrated from the perspective of the alleged victim and never ever from that of the accused, the witch's attempt to extort an exchange of conversation or to borrow an object (cf. af Klintberg 2010: 251, M 54) from the victim, interpreted by a victim as their attempt to keep the power over them, one could recognize a desperate attempt of the accused parties to avert the silent accusation they were facing, and their despair and suffering when they realized this was in vain.

There was a miller here (...) Well, he was saying: Good Lord, witches! We sometimes talked with him. He said: Can you imagine, she came to visit me, the damned bitch! But what did she do to you? She came to ask me for a vessel, for a sieve to sprout wheat. I, poor devil, said: Here, you have it, take it! What she did to me, everything possible, only death I didn't await from her! My cows died, pigs died ..., and plenty of other things happened! But why, I asked him, why would she do that to you? Because, he replied, because I gave something of mine to her. I shouldn't have done that. Then he said: Then somebody told me: You go there to P., there is Marina there. She will tell you. That woman was called Marina, she was kind of a witch. She told me: Janez, you go home. You have to gather brushwood from three different streams. And I did. What do I need to do next? Then you should burn the brushwood by the stove and the first person to drop by to see the fire will be the person that bewitched you. That's why your livestock keeps dying. (I don't know how much he paid her for that, he must have paid her something.) So I went back home and I gathered the brushwood and put on the fire by the stove. She warned me: But Janez, when this person comes in to see the fire, you should not say a word, just point at the door for her to leave. [laughs] He said: So I picked all that up and put it on the fire and there she is, that damned bitch who asked me for a sieve. [The neighbour:] Christ, Janez, what are you burning? [Janez:] I only pointed at the door. [The neighbour:] Good Lord, Janez, are we not friends anymore? But we are neighbours! [Janez:] So I pointed at the door once again, and the woman still didn't want to leave. So I held her by the throat and pushed her through the door out of the house. And uttered no word. And I have had peace ever since. [laughs] These are stories, bed time fairy tales! [laughs] (149)

The person identified as a witch could thus be anyone who accidentally came by, not necessarily one that the accuser was in strained relationship with (cf. de Blécourt 1994: 298). Davies actually assumes that the fortune-tellers' instructions to clients about the first person to come along being a witch was particularly employed in cases when their clients had no knowledge about who the possible perpetrator could be: "Under these circumstances, some

cunning folk would make vague predictions, usually along the lines that the first person who the client met after a certain time or in a certain place was the witch” (Davies 1999b: 207). The narration about the inquiry of the unwitcher, told by the grandson of the last fortune-teller from the famous H. family (cf. inf. 164, p. 264–265), illustrates Davies’ argument nicely. On the other hand, several other accounts suggest that this method of recognition was not employed only in the case that the clients had no idea about the identity of their witch, and that the “principle of the first person” was so widely known that it became an almost axiomatic part of the identification procedure, even when the victim already had strong suspicions as to who the perpetrator was and when the entire procedure was in fact based on this assumption.

In the following narrative, the victim had obviously assumed the identity of the witch even before the procedure started, as their clothes played a vital part in the ritual annihilation of the bewitchment, if it was to be carried out successfully, yet even so, the additional confirmation of the suspicions nevertheless arrived only when the suspected person (the master here appears on behalf of his wife!) also turned up as the first person to come to borrow something after the ritual had been performed. However, the arrival of the first person may not have always been as random and coincidental as it seemed at first glance—people may have performed the ritual in the expectation that the suspected person would be likely to come next (cf. Bever 2008: 228):

I'm going to tell you something else I just remembered. My mother and I were feeding a pig there in the pen, there was wooden fence around it, and suddenly one of the pigs started to cause problems. My mother told me: Quickly, call your father and tell him to bring a knife with him! Afterwards it somehow calmed down. But my late mother sent my father across the river there, one had to cross it by boat then. My mother said to my late father: Go there and tell me what it is! That fortune-teller [referring to Angela H.] said everything: You have to get clothes from here and here (...) and burn them at the first [appearance of] dusk. And she also said: But you should take good care that nobody comes to borrow anything. A neighbour, for instance, that would come to borrow something. You shouldn't give them anything. I was still young and curious. I thought: God knows, even if they burned the clothes, she would not appear. I asked: Will somebody really come? And do you think he didn't? It was in fact the master of that house that came by! My mother and I were feeding the pigs when he asked my mother: Minka, lend me this book. She said: I can't. I was listening, I had such huge ears [laughs], I thought to myself: What now, will she give it to him

or not? She said: I can't, tonight I can't lend it to you, it's all in vain. Come next time and you will get it, but not tonight. And she didn't give it to him. After that everything was fine again. (139)

On the other hand, not every person that appeared first was indeed believed to be the witch—in case she or he did not fit the expectations, ritual was sometimes simply not taken seriously:³¹

I: *And so it was, that there was a crossroads, you see, and they said, of course, this is the crossroads where you have to bring the egg, put it on the crossroads, and wait there ... and the woman who comes first—she is a witch, isn't she? Because a witch, she is attracted by this egg. So what happened then ... Some maids were going down, one of them was Mira, there were two of them, both chubby. While they were mowing, they found this egg inside, and brought it to the crossroads, you see. That's how it happened, and they said—whoever comes by—or if she comes by, you must keep quiet, you know. And then I took the breakfast down to those who were mowing, those men you know, and I had this basket with me. The women were sitting around that egg, and laughing. So I said: Well, why are you laughing now? But they said nothing, nothing at all. So I begged them: Can you please tell me why are you laughing? Then they burst into such laughter I thought they would explode. This went on so long that at the end they decided to tell me. They said: Well now, it's you the witch! Who? [laughs]*

F: *Because it was you who arrived first?*

I: *Because it was me who arrived first, you see. It means [laughs] that this was just rubbish, you know. That you must put eggs there and she will come. How could the poor thing come, when she cannot come at all. So women like this were then called witches, 'see. But in fact I don't believe that they ... that they could possibly be of that kind, you know. (165)*

I2: *One woman here said that another woman's house, when she was young, was all full [of toads] every evening. She said: I put them in a pot, on the fire, and those toads in a pot on the fire, and gathered them and put them there. When they were [on the fire], right then a boy came down. She said: I have this now. I fried them on the fire, and that boy came right when I was frying them. And she said: You know, that's nothing.*

F: *And what did they say? That if someone comes by, it's what ...?*

I2: *Well, that that person is a person who has evil thoughts, right?*

F: *How did she do it? She put them in a pot, and ...?*

I2: *Yes, she put them on the fire in a pot out there at the crossroads, right?*

F: *At the crossroads?*

I2: *At the crossroads, she burned those toads there, on that [fire], and a boy came.*

- F: And what then, when the one who wanted to do evil came by?*
I2: Well, then they laughed, and went home. (63)

The appearance of the culprit at the time of the procedure was, however, not always necessary, and was sometimes not an element of the procedure—the burning of the witch’s clothes as such occasionally also sufficed for the witch to lose her power. According to her grandson, upon the first visit a client would pay to Angela H., they would tell her all about their misfortunes. When bewitchment was confirmed, people had to bring a piece of clothing belonging to the suspected witch and fresh holy water from their parish with them on their next visit.³² She then performed a sort of a ritual, which he claims he does not recall, and at the end washed her hands in the water; the rest she would keep in the house. Upon their way back home, they had to burn the clothing on charcoal and use it to smudge the path or the byres and pigsties in order to “chase away evil”. Following the procedure, the clients also had to stick to a few rules or the procedure was in vain: they could not curse, they were not allowed to sit in the first row in the church, and they had to pray a paternoster. If everything was performed correctly, the procedure was supposed to “take the power of the witch away”.

- I: My husband’s sister lives up there (...) She used to have a job and also a cow, and there was that neighbour, and the sister had huge troubles with the cow. Whenever she wanted to milk her in the morning, she had such a big udder [shows how big it was], and yet gave no milk. Then she started to lock the byre. And she told us just the same as happened to us: I was told to get clothes and burn them in the first dusk, and then it is going to be better.*
F: And who did that?
I: The envious neighbour. (139)

In these cases, the focus of these procedures was seemingly directed solely at the final annihilation of the bewitchment through homoeopathic magic (burning the witch’s clothes “burns”, i.e. destroys, her and her power) and towards the prevention of further misfortunes, and not at identification, as witch’s identity had apparently been known to the victim before the procedure began. Yet it was still the end of misfortunes alone that provided a firm confirmation that the clients were not wrong in their assumption about the identity of the witch and provided the final proof that the suspected person was, indeed, the ultimate source

of the bewitchment. Whenever the misfortunes did not stop after the procedure was done, further attempts needed to be made at identifying the witch, and these had to be repeated as long as it took for the misfortunes to finally end. The grandson of Angela H., the last in line of the famous fortune-telling family, recalls his observations while living with his grandmother:

They made attempts, step by step—if the misfortune didn't stop, that was not the right person. So they cut off a piece of another person's clothing and tried many times, until it worked. They brought clothing from one person, and if it didn't help, they brought somebody else's, and so on. (164)

The reputation of this particular fortune-telling family and the methods they used must have presented a constant threat to the inhabitants of the region. Anybody could eventually end up being identified as a witch through their clothes. Moreover, those who actually did bury the objects in their neighbour's farmyard out of envy must have trembled with fear of being identified. One possibility to escape the menace of accusation was to hang the washing inside the house and thus make the clothes unavailable for their neighbours to cut off a piece for identification. However, this would automatically trigger the very same suspicions, namely that they hid their clothes in order to prevent being identified. Also, people proved quite inventive in their fight against witches—if they could not get a piece of clothing hanging outside, they might just cut it off one of the scarecrows, which were usually dressed in their owners' worn-out clothes (cf. inf. 66, p. 123). So no matter what one did or did not do, one could eventually end up being dragged into a spiral of witchcraft accusations.

I can tell you, this is very simple. In the village, evil people who caused harm to others would never hang their clothes outside like people normally do, only in enclosed places, inside. So this could immediately be established. Understand? Because they were doing harm and didn't want to be, didn't dare being exposed. If you took a piece of their clothing, you took their power. Then people came to my grandmother [Angela H.] with this nonsense and she told them to wrap the piece in a bundle, go on a pilgrimage and sprinkle it with holy water and then keep it in the house. This was supposed to take the power of that evil person away. They hid their clothes because they knew they did evil and were afraid, that's why they were hiding. They knew. Of course they knew. This is a profession like any other. (164)

The above account told by Angela's grandson gives alternative instructions about how to proceed with suspects' clothing, allegedly given by Angela to her clients, which I never came across in the conversations with my interlocutors. However, no matter what instructions she gave to her clients, they posed no risk for her to be subsequently blamed by the angry victims for not having correctly identified the witch had the misfortunes not stopped. The proceedings described above were based on the clients' own suspicions about the identity of the perpetrator, which Angela, in fact, did not suggest directly, although she strongly encouraged people in their attempts to identify the witch. She also did not need to fear the rage of those unjustly accused, as the entire identification process was laid upon the clients. The fortune-teller merely provided their clients with instructions: the task of identifying the perpetrator was entirely in their hands and the identity of the witch was, as a rule, never disclosed by the fortune-teller. They claimed to know who the person was and to see them in the cards, yet they would never tell their name to the victim (cf. inf. 164, p. 279).

Whenever a client had no clue whatsoever about the identity of the witch, and one can surmise that when they first visited a fortune-teller this was not always the case, the fortune-teller would usually help them to articulate their suspicions by giving vague suggestions or descriptions of that person and waiting for the clients to complete the picture. Giving vague suggestions, which leave the clients the freedom to complete the identification by themselves, according to their own suspicions, was a common practice of fortune-tellers, as researchers of witchcraft have often noted (cf. Favret-Saada 1980: 50–51; Devlin 1987: 109; Davies 2003: 107). They would usually carefully direct their clients' suspicions towards their female neighbours, and the task left to the clients was to fill in the blank with the name. The suggestion of a *neighbour* was predictable, as it was always the envy of their neighbours that people feared most. The suggestion of a *female* neighbour also coincided with the general opinion that most witches were women; moreover, their suggestion proved true in both cases, if a woman appeared as the first person after the identification ritual was performed, or if her husband—as the master of the house stood for the whole family and property (cf. inf. 36, p. 297–298; inf. 29, p. 152; inf. 139, p. 292–293). However, the exact identification need not take place during the client's consultation with a fortune-teller, but was usually left for the clients to make through various procedures when back at home, as show above. The following narrative gives a very detailed description of a séance by a fortune-teller and offers an illuminating glimpse into the

identification process, in which a fortune-teller carefully offers suggestions about the witch's identity which, in turn, are readily embraced and complemented by the client:

I: Well, this I shall tell you. This was a truth that I personally witnessed. We at home had pigs, I don't know how many, they all got sick.

F: Why?

I: Why? Well, nobody knew why. This was around 1944, 1945. They all got sick and I went to see one such woman. I went to see one such woman and I took some hair from those pigs, I pulled them out and took them with me to that woman. And when I came to that woman, to her home, I was a young woman then, she looked at me and said: You, girl, you didn't come to see me because of love, you came for medicine. The moment I entered she told me that. I just stared at her and said: Yes, it's true. Then she moved about here and there and said: Sit here. I sat there, like this, she sat opposite of me, then she put a book in front of her and turned the pages a little and said: The animals are sick on your farm. Yes, I said, true. She said: Give me what you brought with you! I had it wrapped in a paper in my pocket, and I gave it to her. I gave it to her, she looked at it and I don't know what else, she was mumbling something to herself and then said: All your pigs are sick and are going to die too. Is there no help? I asked her. She said: Well, we shall try. And she brought cards, playing cards, and put them on the table. And she put all those cards around the table and said to me just like this: Your house is located in the middle of the village. I said yes. She said: The person that did that to you, she said, is a woman, and she is your relative. Then she kept moving the cards and she said: You are relatives through the male bloodline, close relatives. I said: Yes. And she said: This house is on the right side of your house, on the hill, not far from you. Could you remember who that might be? And I said: Yes, I remember and we are indeed relatives and everything. And she kept looking at those cards and said: She is a tall woman with a dark complexion. She said: Yes, that's her, that's the woman who has done this to you. And then I asked her if she could help, if it was possible for her to cure that. She said: It is possible. It is possible if you do as I tell you. I said: I will. Then she said: All right. Then she gave me some powder and wrapped it in paper. What it was, I do not know. Then in another paper she also wrapped some powder. Then she said: When you come home, at dusk, if you have a stove you should put some fire on the metal door of the stove three times and then put powder on it. Half of it you should pour over that fire and walk with it around the pigsty here and there. If somebody comes at that moment and wants to talk, you should not utter a word. The other half of the powder you should give to the pigs. We did all that. She told us: The powder that is in the other paper you have to pour on their land, but remember to dig into the ground with a chisel three crosses, away from your body, and God protect if you did it toward yourself! Then pour the powder inside, again

away from you. Then she said: In three or four days come and tell me what happened. We did all that the very same evening. And the next day the pigs were already totally different, they stood up while before they were just lying there exhausted. And they stood up and started to eat and in three days they were as if nothing had ever happened to them. And that woman down there also asked me if I wanted her to turn this away from us and send it to them so that their pigs would die. I said: I don't want that, I only want our pigs to be healthy again. And they were. And that evening that man came by, but it was too late, we had already done everything she told us to. He approached us unexpectedly and started to talk.

F: *This was the husband of that woman whom she thought that ...?*

I: *The wife did that!*

F: *But it was her husband that came?*

I: *Indeed, it was her husband.³³ And he was my father's brother. And this I tell you, this I truly believed. Afterwards I realized that everything was true. And that woman didn't even know me. (36)*

Only on two occasions have I heard mention of an identification method whereby a fortune-teller offered a client to see the face of the witch in a pail of water and/or a mirror, but never as a first-person narrative. One of the narratives about this method referred to the famous fortune-teller Jan H., the other one to a fortune-teller working in Croatia.³⁴ Again, however, the final identification of the witch seems to have been left to the client, as the technique relied entirely upon the suspicions of the client, who had to complete the image in the reflecting surface into a picture of the witch. Staring into reflective surfaces such as water or mirrors might perhaps trigger an altered state of consciousness that enhances access to unconscious knowledge and induces visual hallucinations (cf. Virtanen 1990: 34; Bever 2008: 223–227; Tart 2011: xiii), but these, however, must have undoubtedly been based on the clients' preceding subconscious or conscious assumptions about the identity of the perpetrator.

I1: *Well, there was a lot of talk ... And they also said that here, across the river, up in the forest there was a man [referring to Jan H.] who could predict future from cards, but they said that ...*

I2: *... that he knew what he was doing.*

I1: *That he knew many things. And that once somebody went to see him ... who also had such "good" neighbours, you know, and he went to see him, because the cards revealed everything to him. And he told him: Be careful of your neighbour ... He pretends to be very good but he would be just as happy to drown you in a spoonful of water. But he lived in a densely settled village and didn't*

know who the neighbour was ... and he was extremely curious and nervous then (...) and kept poking that man so he finally said: Well, if you won't tell it to anyone and will keep your promise I shall show him to you. How will you show him to me? he said. Wait and see! And he brought a tub, a huge pail of water, and put a mirror beside it (...) and said: Now, do it like this: Look at the mirror, look in the water! Now, of course, when he looked at the mirror he saw himself, but when he looked in the pail he saw that neighbour. They were saying that this was all true, that he saw that neighbour and was so nervous that he said: Because you are shameless and you pretend to be so good to me and so grateful—here, you bastard! And he took a pistol out of his pocket and shot into the pail. And in fact, they said, that man died at home. Well, at least it was said like this that it was true. (25)

Accounts of this divination method were recorded in Slovenian newspapers as early as the nineteenth century. According to the newspaper reports, it was apparently used by a fortune-teller operating in northeastern Slovenia who showed in a mirror the face of a woman who had bewitched her neighbour's cow and the face of a man who had caused pigs to die (Slovenski Gospodar 1873, VII, no. 28 (10 July): 224–225; 1875, IX, no. 36 (2 September): 294). Scrying, lekanomancy or hydromancy, a mode of divination where the answer is shown in a bowl of liquid (a mirror, a crystal ball, polished stones, a bowl of ink, urine, milk, and similar), has been a well-known divinatory method, practiced also in order to establish a communication with the deceased in the ancient Near East and ancient Greece and Rome and throughout medieval and early modern period (Harmening 1979: 214–215; Hand et al. 1981: xxviii–xxix; Thomas 1991: 138; Davies 2003: 106–107; Bever 2008: 222–223; Tart 2011: xiii). In nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic accounts, it is mentioned as practiced by fortune-tellers, for instance, in France (Devlin 1987: 109), England (Davies 2003: 106), Ireland (Jenkins 1991: 320), Germany (Kruse 1951: 44, 51–52; Schöck 1978: 112; Sebald 1984: 127), Hungary and among Hungarians in Romania (Pócs 1999: 146–147, 2004: 178), Russia (Jasinskaja 2013: 195), and Belgium (de Blécourt 2013: 363, 370–371). Legends about witches being wounded or killed because the victim, who recognized the witch whom they held responsible for their misfortunes in the mirror or in the water, shot or stabbed the image, are well known in European folklore (cf. af Klintberg 2010: 251, M 55; 254, M 71). While one can be sure that they did not relate a true experience, it is not clear whether the two fortune-tellers in fact used this method in their séances³⁵ or the legends merely attached to them due to their profession.

In times when medical and veterinary care were not available, let alone mental health care, the unwitchers' services were indispensable. Yet, their magical power, their abilities, their knowledge, and their rituals must have triggered some anxiety, fear and doubt about whether it is right to address an unwitcher in times of misfortune, especially since the Church condemned their practice: Is it not a sin to see the cunning person? What if they get bewitched instead of helped? What if something terrible happens during the procedure? ... From this perspective, telling narratives about the séances with a fortune-teller which testified of the extraordinary supernatural abilities of cunning folk to counteract a witch's powers, as well as those about the harmful side of their power, helped people to resolve their contesting ambiguous attitudes towards the specialists. In this sense, they can be understood as "a performative locus employed by tradition participants to negotiate their conflicting perceptions of the various cunning folk", allowing people "the opportunity to engage in the social valuation of their services" (Tangherlini 2000: 290).

In addition, narratives about seeing the witch in water also embody and express people's most profound fears of being bewitched by the hidden enemies in their own community, of whose identity they could never be sure. By narrating them, people talking from within the witchcraft discourse communicated their pleasure and satisfaction when the violation of the social norms in the community was punished and justice restored; death or severe injuries seemed the only rightful retribution for the malefactor. Such "retributive" stories functioned as a sort of outlet for hidden aggression against "one's own" witches, as direct physical violence was only exceptionally allowed when accusations of bewitchment were at stake.

Indeed, narratives about the outcome of the identification process are often full of concealed violence, which was readily embraced by the community. In many narratives, identification is presented as closely intertwined with retribution, and the only thing that distinguishes the identification narratives from narratives of retributive bewitchment is the narrative strategy employed, which emphasises a focus on identification. When the identification process is carried out, pain or injuries are often the only proof of witch's identity: when a piece of witch's clothing or any other object that belonged to the witch is being burned or manipulated in any other way, the ritual particularly aims at her identification through the terrible pain that it is supposed to inflict upon her. Often the witch is only recognized by her injuries as the consequences of the ritual become clearly visible. In the following narrative, the true identity of the

witch was only confirmed when the death of the neighbour occurred, which was interpreted as a consequence of the ritual that had been carried out. References to this particular ritual can be found in many places in Europe in records from witch trials, folklore, and other sources (cf. Macfarlane 1970: 4; Favret-Saada 1980: 4, 66–67, 74, 1989: 44; Devlin 1987: 110–111; Briggs 1991: 633–634; Davies 1999a: 63):

I1: There was an evil woman down here. All the time the livestock was dying. As soon as they got a cow, it started to become pale, and eventually died, pigs too ... everything died. What is that, why is that? The vet didn't help a bit. It was she who bewitched the pigs. Then, she [the neighbour] said, she took a piece of her clothing, went to such a witch or Gypsy or who knows where, and she [the fortune-teller] told them to cut the first animal that was going to die and cut out its heart, put it into the icebox and stick into it sixteen, or how many, pins crosswise. And that this woman, who [did that] ... [that] something was going to happen to her. And she said that soon after that a big pig had died ... Yes, a pig died and then they did it and she said: Why, she said, did the neighbour die? Nothing [no misfortune] has ever happened since. It has been about ten years now since she said that and no animal has died since. (53)

In spite of the consequences implied by these methods, aimed at identification and/or overcoming witches' power, they were not considered in any way problematic when people were deciding about whether to carry them out or not. Even when, as in the last narrative, they were clearly warned by the unwitcher that by performing the ritual "something was going to happen" to the person identified as the witch, they would nevertheless perform it, obviously without even needing to hide the fact from the other members of the community. Moreover, listening to the narrator, recounting, and mimicking her words, she seemed rather victorious and satisfied with the success of the ritual her neighbour had performed.

Obviously, a certain amount of suffering and, occasionally, even death of the identified witch was deemed an acceptable part of the procedure as long as it was interpreted as a consequence of the identification process. In this case, causing harm seemed justified as it was necessary for the witch to be recognized and her power overcome. The underlying logic was that the person who comes first is driven by pain; that the pain in the moment of ritual can only be felt by the person who caused the bewitchment; that the ritual could not affect anybody else but the true witch; and that the pain or injury that a person experiences in the moment of the ritual is, therefore, necessary for the witch to be identified. These stories

seem, to a certain extent at least, a narrative device whose function was to justify the pain that people inflicted on another person through the identification procedure—but while the physical pain of the neighbour that first came to the spot might not have been explicitly recognizable, the psychic pain that their attitude towards them triggered must have been clearly visible. If the “victims” could persuade themselves, and others, of the justness and, moreover, of the absolute necessity of their action, then the guilt they might have felt at causing their neighbours’ torment was easier to bear.

The identification of a witch, the annihilation of the bewitchment, and the overcoming of the witch’s power thus often also imply a sort of retribution—all these elements are simultaneously encompassed in one and the same ritual performance: a person who comes to the place where the burning of the bewitching objects or clothes is being performed is identified as a witch (= *identification*); they come to the spot because they feel pain (= *retribution*); if the victim does not talk with the witch, their power is going to be overcome (= *annihilation of the witch’s power*). Yet, no matter that the identification of the witch often already implied the retribution and that the alleged witch was already going to suffer during the identification procedure, our narrators occasionally mentioned that they were also explicitly asked by the fortune-tellers whether they wanted to send the misfortune back to the witch (cf. 36, p. 297):

And so pigs were pining and eventually died. (...) Then a fortune-teller told my father that this was done by a neighbour. A close neighbour. She said: Well, you can return [the bewitchment] if you wish. But he was deeply religious and he answered: No, I wouldn’t want to have it on my conscience. God will pay them back for all this. (29)

Even if the approval of the fortune-teller’s return of the bewitchment back to the malefactor could be understood in terms of a “practice dispensing justice and restoring order, performed as a response to misfortunes” which “fulfils the function of norm control as a ‘punitive’, individual kind of jurisdiction”³⁶ (cf. Pócs 2004: 174–175), being Catholic made it next to impossible for my interlocutors to admit such wishes aloud (cf. Hesz 2007: 22; cf. above), even if they had agreed with the proposal. The Catholic faith, of course, interdicts people from expressing revengeful feelings, let alone acting upon them, and whenever the fortune-teller’s question was mentioned in conversation, people used the dialogue as a narrative device

to demonstrate their piety and the virtuousness of their character. Laura Stark suggests that the opportunity to return the bewitchment the Finnish magic specialists offered, gave their clients “a sense of empowerment and functioned as an effective outlet for their desire to revenge” and maintains that not all of them were turned down (2007: 17). Indeed, several narratives told by the fortune-teller’s grandson seem to suggest that the request for having the bewitchment performed by a fortune-teller, not necessarily as retribution for the preceding bewitchment, was not as uncommon as it seems at first glance. Such statements, however, were never told as a first-person acknowledgement.

THE ROLE OF UNWITCHERS

When Jeanne Favret-Saada discusses the unwitching process that she witnessed during her fieldwork in the Bocage, France, at the end of the 1960s/beginning of the 1970s, she clearly demonstrates that the relationship established between the unwitcher and the victim was a durable and committed one (1980, 1989: 47ff). The unwitcher was completely involved in the victim’s life: first it took them several nights of unrelenting work on the victim’s property to establish the diagnosis, which was followed by an intense interrogation. When the unwitcher was done with their initial ritual work, they still did not consider themselves demobilized: they continued with the observation, paid visits to the clients, prescribed a series of measures against bewitchment and instructions about how to behave, which were, in addition, continuously supervised (Favret-Saada 1980: 74; 1989). In her research, Favret-Saada emphasised the positive therapeutic effects that entering into such a binding relationship with an unwitcher and undergoing an unwitching process had for the psychological condition of the alleged victims and their families: the bewitched gradually learned to exchange the passive position in which they were resigned to repeated misfortunes for an intensely active one, trained themselves to do what had to be done and when, and regained their ‘force’ by learning how to commit indirect violence. All these personal traits and attitudes were essential to individual producers in agriculture, artisans, or commercial professions who comprised Favret-Saada’s interlocutors and typical victims, that is, those professions which demand a fusion between the family and the business: “Where producers are incapable of occupying a position of ‘force’ or mustering the aggression that makes an entrepreneur, the unbewitcher leads him to it” (Favret-Saada 1989: 52ff).

Contrary to Favret-Saada's observations, no such long-term and obligated relationship was established between the unwitcher and the victim in our region. Even though people occasionally, whenever a misfortune occurred again or turned out not to be cured after their initial consultation(s), or when they simply reported on the success of the treatment, might have repeated their visit to a fortune-teller, the fortune-tellers were never involved in the personal lives of their clients as closely as the French fortune-tellers seem to have been. Their help consisted in giving advice, medicines, and prescriptions to people about how to protect themselves and their households against bewitchment, how to identify the witch and neutralize her power, and, if desired, how to return the bewitchment—elements often encompassed in one and the same ritual performed by the victim themselves. As mentioned above, sedentary specialists only rarely, upon a specific request, visited their victims at home; the much more common practice was to receive clients in audience.

Most of my interlocutors were subsistence farmers, unlike those of Favret-Saada merely producing enough food for themselves: at least up to the 1970s, that is, the period when the poverty in the region was extreme, often not even enough to feed their families, and starving was not an unusual sensation. Even if they managed to produce a small surplus of apples or wine, there was no market³⁷ in the region where these products could be traded. While a certain amount of aggression might have helped the eldest son, i.e. the (future) head of the family, in coping with the perpetration of violence on their relatives that goes along with the settling and succession—the elimination of brothers, disinheriting of sisters (cf. Favret-Saada 1989: 54), it would have had no crucial impact on the majority of the population that constituted victims of witchcraft as regards their surviving on the market, as there was simply no market where the aggression could have been used to their benefit. Different socioeconomic conditions in our region, therefore, also triggered different sorts of relationships between victims and fortune-tellers in the unwitching process, compared with those in the France. These, in turn, accounted for a different function of fortune-tellers in our region. While their role might not have been therapeutic in the sense that Favret-Saada demonstrated for the Bocage, their services nevertheless had a huge impact on the life of the subsistence farming population and played crucial role in managing the tensions that the social and economic circumstances imposed upon them.

We have observed that throughout the entire séance and in all of the prescriptions about ritual behaviour they provided, fortune-tellers

structured their therapies around one basic rule: the transference of the cause of the misfortune from the victim to an external source. Even if they gave medicine, advice about hygiene and nutrition of the animals, and suggested other measures directed at the prevention or spread of infection (repainting, airing, removing of byres, egg diet, lard for swine diseases, etc.), which undoubtedly must have helped, to a certain extent at least, these were almost never mentioned in the victims' accounts of the fortune-tellers' instructions. It seems that this part of the séance was forgotten as soon as the measures were carried out.³⁸ On the other hand, the message communicated by the fortune-teller, that the ultimate source of their misfortunes lies in bewitchment, never ceased to linger in their memories and was eagerly communicated to their families and the wider community. This message underlies all of the ritual activities prescribed by the fortune-teller, as we have seen above: the performance of a ritual of burning powder together with all the detailed prescriptions emphasised the impression that they were fighting some kind of *force majeure*, well beyond normal human powers; objects buried on their property were considered to have been placed there by an unknown enemy who wished them ill; symbolic protection of the boundaries of a farmstead or a byre by circumambulation even more directly pointed to the evil threatening from the outside the symbolic boundaries established through the ritual. Furthermore, the directive to identify the witch as the first person to approach after the ritual had been performed or after the return from the unwitcher emphasised the unequivocal message that the danger threatens from outside and from the neighbours. This redirection of responsibility for the misfortunes that befell the household, from the victims onto witches, must have surely had a comforting effect on their feelings of guilt for not being able to maintain their households which they may have felt or were imposed on them by their families and community.

But who actually needed to be comforted this way, that is, by the transference of the locus of responsibility from within to an external force? As stated above, by far the most oft-stated reasons for people to pay a visit to a fortune-teller was the dying, illness, or loss of appetite of the livestock (usually cows and pigs, more seldom poultry) and cows not giving milk or giving bloody milk. The responsibility for taking care of these animals and their products was always considered to be in female hands (cf. Tilly and Scott 1989: 44–45; Jenkins 1991: 305; Sieder 1998: 25; Svetieva 2001: 150; Sok 2003: 165; Eilola 2006: 37). On the other

hand, the diseases of horses and oxen, which were in the male domain, never featured among the reasons stated as those requiring a consultation with a fortune-teller. In addition, when looking at the gender of those who consulted fortune-tellers in case of misfortune, we clearly see that the great majority of clients were women (cf. de Pina-Cabral 1986: 195; de Blécourt 2013: 374), as confirmed by Ivan H. who as a child was able to witness the unwitching practice of his grandmother. Even when it was men that paid a visit to a fortune-teller, they occasionally did it at their wives' request (cf. *inf.* 139, p. 292–293). Ascribing misfortune to the agency of others thus seems much more important for women than it was for men.

This is, on the one hand, certainly related to the central importance of the woman in the peasant community, “in whose hands rested the safety, continuity and property of the family, both symbolic and actual” (Jenkins 1991: 305), but, on the other hand, it was also due to the much more vulnerable position women occupied in traditional rural society as compared to men. After her wedding, the woman as a rule moved into her husband's household, where she had almost no rights until her husband's parents decided to hand over the farm to their (oldest) son, usually only after many years or even on their deathbed—only then was she granted the rights of the mistress of the house. Living in an extended family with her husband's parents, often in tense relationships with her mother-in-law (Svetieva 2001: 149; Sok 2003: 198; cf. also du Boulay 1986: 147; Jenkins 1991: 305) with whom she had to spend most of the day, and her new family's expectations of her, above all to be a hard worker and a good housewife, must have been an enormous amount of pressure for a young woman to cope with. At her new home (and often new community), she had to subordinate and conform herself as long as she proved to be a good worker, not until at least a few years passed (Sok 2003: 197–198). But even when she finally took over the household and gained more rights as a mistress, the community control was not lessened. Her position, as well as the good name of her family, in the community, which above all expected women to be and prized them as hardworking housekeepers, mostly depended on how her domestic abilities were performed and evaluated. To be unsuccessful in her area of work, especially in the part that had a direct impact on the sustenance of the whole family, that is, in breeding livestock and poultry that provided products (milk, eggs, and meat), could gravely undermine her position in the community (cf. Davies 1999a: 122; Destovnik 2002: 58–59; Stark 2004:84). Under such circumstances, in

order for a woman to maintain her position within her extended family as well as in the community, it was essential to meet all the expectations that her extended family as well as the community imposed on her and retain control over domestic order and prosperity. When her position was threatened, a woman had only one possible option: to avert insinuations that the misfortunes that befell the livestock she was responsible for were her fault, and redirect the responsibility for those misfortunes to another person—a witch (cf. Eilola 2006: 46). However, in order to carry that out successfully, to persuade her family and the community as a whole that it was not her own incapability of being a good housewife that was the cause of misfortunes, but other people's envy and malice, it was essential for her to have a fortune-teller's authority in support.

In traditional communities, this seems to be their only possible choice: if they responded to reproaches by quarrelling or violent behaviour, they would risk automatically falling into the category of village witch, as I shall discuss later. While violence and aggressiveness might serve men in their resolving of tensions in the community, this was not an acceptable behaviour for a woman (cf. Svetieva 2001: 149), and displaying such behaviour in public would hasten the destruction of her position. The role of fortune-tellers, therefore, seems crucial in helping women resolve the tensions they were facing due to the demands imposed on them by the traditional gender role they had to submit to and in upholding the position they were assuming in the community when it was threatened. This positive aspect of the role that fortune-tellers played in the community, however, comes from judging them from a female *victim's perspective*. At the same time, one should not forget all those women, and occasionally men, who represented collateral damage from the fortune-tellers' treatment and due to their instructions ended up with a reputation of being a witch and found guilty—while not for their own, certainly for others' misfortunes.

NOTES

1. The veterinarian I talked to has been working in the region since the beginning of the 1980s, and his father, also a veterinarian, worked in the region before him from the end of the Second World War until the beginning of the 1980s.
2. At least since the end of the Second World War, the veterinarians in the region had a university degree.
3. Personal information from a veterinarian in the region.

4. This was not confirmed by the veterinarian I talked to, who has been working in the region since the 1980s. He recalls only one case which occurred about ten years ago, when a woman who is now about eighty, referred to witchcraft in relation to a sick domestic animal. His mother, who often accompanied her late husband, who served as a veterinarian in the region from the Second World War until the 1980s, during his visits in the field, also does not recall any such case.
5. The word *šlogar* derives from the German verb *schlagen* (cf. *Karten auf jemanden schlagen*) (Bezljaj 2005: 85).
6. This does not mean that they stopped practicing after the stated period; this is merely the time to which the studies on their practice refer to.
7. The names of which Ivan H. does not remember.
8. The aspirin was brought by her daughter when she came home for a visit, or occasionally, by the pharmacists themselves.
9. This was a Roman Catholic religious order of Trappists, a strict contemplative order of monks who were thus never engaged in unwitching, as was the case in some other places in Europe.
10. Her grandson does not remember exactly what it looked like, but remembers that she gave the clients an object. Afterward, the client had to attend the first mass in a church and put the object under one knee during the Elevation of the Host.
11. Lisón Tolosana saw the reason that people at least in the matrilineal areas of the province of La Coruña usually turned to wise men instead of women in the “typical expression of the inversion of gender roles in the mystical/magical world,” while Rey-Henningsen explained the role of men through their marginalized status in an area where they have fewer opportunities for social repute and independence than women. In view of their inferior status, she finds it more logical that men tried to take over the women’s roles (1994: 200).
12. In the Balkans, the transfer of powers is often performed in a liminal place, like for instance on a bridge over a river—the river and the bridge representing symbolic passage into the world of spirits.
13. For a (black) dog connoting the devil or an imp, see for instance, Allen Woods (1954); Briggs (1967: 55, 71); Henningsen (1982: 134–135), and Wilby (2000: 287).
14. The mystery of the book in possession of the H. family still haunts people’s imagination. The great-grandson of Una H. is convinced that his relatives from the village (with whom he is not on good

- terms) stole the book immediately after Una's death, which he seems to have been told by his grandmother. Nevertheless, when Angela H. died, the entire family (including the relatives living in the village) started asking him about the book that she allegedly possessed, yet it was apparently never found. While her grandson insisted that she in fact possessed none, I have several times heard from other villagers that it is he who inherited "all her books" upon her death, the "one" included.
15. De Pina-Cabral finds a partial explanation for the secrecy that enshrouds the consultation of a white witch in Alto Minho in the conviction that their power could be used also in an antisocial fashion (1986: 190–191). Among Hungarians in Romania visiting an unwitcher had to be done in secret, as witches were believed to renew their bewitchment if they learned that it had been removed by an unwitcher, or they could hinder the unwitcher in his work. In addition, a visit raised a suspicion that one wanted to magically harm others (Hesz 2007: 31).
 16. Favret-Saada writes that the unwitcher often maintains their other professions for the sake of appearance, to protect themselves from the police and taxmen (1989: 43, 52). This, however, was not the reason for Jan H. to continue his work.
 17. This, however, has rapidly changed in the last few decades, with the advent of contemporary urban New-Age unwitchers who charge for their services (cf. also de Pina-Cabral 1986: 191–192, 194). They have also become fairly common in the towns on the periphery of our region, and mostly justify their charging with New-Age notions about money and time being "energy"—charging for the time spent on a customer allegedly provides the exchange of energy and allows for its flow.
 18. De Pina-Cabral writes that the white witches of the "old type" who do not charge base their decision on their fear of being accused of wanting personal gain over the welfare of the client (cf. 1986: 195).
 19. The narrator uses a masculine form for a witch. This could point to the notion that men were the first allusion when referred to unwitchers, but this was not always so.
 20. The status of a person visiting the fortune-teller, revealed by the hand with which the cards were being cut, must have already given a fortune-teller an idea about the reason of their visit—the problems of

- married people were usually related to domestic livestock and household prosperity, whereas for unmarried people to the search for a partner.
21. Her grandson confirmed that she was blind in one eye; on the other hand, he described her as being very tidy and well-kept, with her hair in a braid, and a very communicative person.
 22. According to her grandson, the true story was that a hunter killed her dog, for which she brought charges against him. The only outcome was that he was excluded from the hunting society and had to give up his gun.
 23. The fear of acquiring the reputation of a witch if practicing unwitching could probably be recognised from the words of de Pina-Cabral's informant, to whom he jokingly suggested that she should become a *bruxa* (white witch) instead of working in agriculture since it would bring her more profit—to which she replied that she would never do that because “the neighbours would call me *feiticeira*” (a witch) (1986: 190). Perhaps this was the factor that biased the opinions held about Portuguese cunning women (healers) who were regarded as virtuous by some and wicked by others (cf. Cutileiro 1971: 273; cf. also de Blécourt 1999: 187).
 24. Apart from a journey to the unwitcher to set things in order again, one can assume that such a trip may have provided people with an opportunity to escape from the profane everyday reality into a world of “thrill and miracle” which they sometimes even undertook with their friends (cf. Lindahl 2005: 175)—in this, their journeys somewhat resemble those of contemporary legend-trippers.
 25. Although he officially referred to his great-grandmother, I believe that he was actually talking about his grandmother, whose work he could observe while living with her in his childhood. He was generally cautious and reluctant to talk about his grandmother, as she had the reputation of a witch in her own village, and this was probably his strategy to avoid talking about her, especially during my first visit, while at the same time telling me what I asked him.
 26. *Dinar* were the currency of the former Yugoslavia.
 27. It is interesting to note that none of the interlocutors mentioned that they ever came again; they probably feared being exposed if the misfortune did not improve as they had announced.
 28. The ritual was not necessarily based on the manipulation of the bewitching object.

29. Favret-Saada refers to the ritual performed by the unwitchers themselves, which was not the case in our region.
30. When talking about the unwitcher, the narrator kept switching from male to female gender and back again, which could suggest that she visited unwitchers several times and that they were of both genders.
31. In these cases, the identification ritual did not follow the visit of an unwitcher, but was performed according to the traditional instruction which was commonly known. It can also point to a lack of belief in witchcraft on the part of the people who carried out the ritual.
32. Nevertheless, when people were already acquainted with the unwitching procedure, they obviously brought a piece of the suspect's clothing with them upon their first visit. In addition, the bringing of clothing does not always seem to be necessary—the unwitchers sometimes only gave instructions to the victim about how to carry out the identification ritual.
33. Here too the husband stands in for his wife.
34. Jan H.'s grandson claimed that the technique was used by the unwitcher from the M. valley (see above).
35. The grandson of Jan H. believed that he did not (cf. inf. 164, p. 270).
36. As is the case in Csík County, Romania, where witchcraft among the Hungarian population is not only an accusation, but they either perform it or have it performed, usually by an Orthodox monk or priest, or by a lay sorcerer (cf. Pócs 2004).
37. At most some peasants could sell the livestock (mostly oxen and cows) at the occasional fairs, and some wine, firewood (cf. Sok 2003: 167, 170), and eggs to some locals and local shops.
38. The only mention of the unwitcher giving tea and remedies appears in the report from the séance above (cf. inf. 150, p. 273–275) and the only mention of the unwitcher's alleged instruction to remove the byre appears in a comment made by Igor K.'s wife (whereas he claimed to know nothing about it) (63).

Social Witchcraft: Village Witches

Owen Davies, in his research on witchcraft in nineteenth-century Somerset, based on newspapers, archival and demographic sources as well as data gathered by folklorists and antiquarians, made a distinction between two categories of witches, the so-called “outcast” witch and the “conflict” witch. He describes the first as one that more or less corresponds with the stereotypical notions about witches: a scapegoat figure living a solitary life at the periphery of the community, both socially and geographically, who was to be avoided; usually marked by some physical characteristics, especially strange eyes or an uncanny stare, and often developing some specific behaviour which additionally marked her out, and often with “discreditable or abnormal personal or family history”. While the outcast witch was recognised as such by the community as a whole and partly even by the “witch” herself, the conflict witch, on the other hand, “was the creation of personal antagonism and unresolved tension between two individuals or families. The parties concerned were usually neighbors or occasionally members of the same family” (Davies 1999a: 141–148).¹

The distinction between a witch who more or less everybody in the community recognises as such, on the one hand—whom I refer to as a “village witch”, and one recognised as such by a particular individual or a family, usually a neighbour, on the other hand—who I call a “neighbourhood witch,”² has, to my knowledge, not been thoroughly explored by field researchers of contemporary rural European witchcraft. In most

ethnographic research, the possible distinction between the two categories has simply been ignored and not touched upon—neither confirmed nor contested. Therefore, were these two categories of witches not known (everywhere) in contemporary European rural witchcraft or did the researchers perhaps simply not pay enough attention to the possible distinction between the various categories of “social” witches?

The lack of a recognised distinction between the neighbourhood and the village witch in the research of contemporary European witchcraft seems to have been, in some places at least, indeed grounded in the specifics of the ethnographic situation: not everywhere where witchcraft discourse was alive were there individuals with the reputation of a witch in the whole community. Favret-Saada claimed that in the region of her research there were no village witches, the main reason being that people did not talk about witchcraft except for with their families, the annunciator, and the unwitcher:³ “So far as I know, there is no such thing in the Bocage as a common agreement about who is a ‘*village witch*,’ witchcraft is always a matter of a dual relationship between two families only” (Favret-Saada 1980: 165).

While Sebald does not distinguish between neighbourhood and village witches, from the picture of witchcraft in Franconia he presents, on the other hand, one would assume that there were only village witches and that neighbourhood witches were unknown. According to him, witches were always considered evil and harmful, their knowledge and role was believed to be transmitted from mother to daughter, that is, within the family, and they relied on a grimoire; they, and their family, had an evil reputation in the community and experienced “quasiostracism” (Sebald 1984). However, there are indices that suggest the existence of neighbourhood witches in the region of his research too. He claims, for instance, that anybody who wishes can engage in witchery, “[h]owever, *unlike the normal villager using witchcraft defensively*, the witch, almost always a woman, uses witchcraft aggressively. Moreover, she makes witchery a constant part of her lifestyle, while other peasants might use witchcraft *as occasional ‘justice magic’*” (Sebald 1984: 126; emphasis mine). One wonders whether Sebald did not take the claims on frequency, defensive use, and justification of the “neighbors’” witchcraft too much for granted—as argued above, these could clearly be strategies to justify their actions—and focused only on those witches who conformed to the general stereotypical image of a witch, and identified as such in the whole community.

In Swabian witchcraft, characteristics of neighbours accused of witchcraft were blurred with those typical of stereotypical village witches, which may suggest that neighbourhood witches were chosen from among those women who already had such a reputation in the community, or at least those whose family had a reputation of witchcraft beforehand: they were the scapegoats in the community, they looked “like a witch”, had a distinct nose, they were believed to possess a magic book and to be obliged to transmit their magical knowledge to someone else before their death (cf. Paul 1993: 111–113). Inge Schöck, on the other hand, briefly addresses the difference between persons accused of witchcraft in southwestern Germany, which could be recognised as the distinction between a village and a neighbourhood witch, when she discusses the factors that may or may not lead from a person being accused of bewitchment within a smaller (family) group to the more general accusation of the community—still, she does not treat them as separate categories (cf. 1978: 234–236). De Pina-Cabral, writing about envy among neighbours in Alto Minho related to witchcraft accusations, mentions a woman famed for her evil eye and envy throughout the entire hamlet, who was accused of having bewitched the neighbour’s cow by looking at it. She was poor, old, bitter and quarrelsome, and complained loudly against exploitation by wealthier neighbours; she did not take side of either of the groups into which the residents were divided, and people in general were afraid of her and tried to avoid her when possible (1986: 181–182). Her reputation in the village, as well as her other characteristics, seems to qualify her as a village witch, and yet de Pina-Cabral did not distinguish her position from that of envious neighbourhood witches.

One possible reason for the distinction being difficult to recognise—where it existed at all, which, as it seems, was not always the case—may have been that this was not explicitly articulated by the people who narrated about witchcraft. In our region, for example, both categories would simply fall into the same category of “witches”. However, a slight difference between the two can be observed in the denomination of the accused person: while the narrators did not hesitate to overtly label those individuals that figured in the communities as village witches by what they believed them to be, that is, witches, they tended to avoid explicitly referring to their neighbours who they suspected of bewitchment as “witches”. As discussed above, they preferred to call them by other names, such as “envious”, “harmful”, and “evil” neighbours. Similarly, they were

called “filthy bastards”, “bad men”, and “terrifying” in France (Favret-Saada 1980: 166), and evil people (*böse Leut*) in Swabia (Paul 1993: 111). Nevertheless, whenever responding to our questions about “witches” and witchcraft, people were equally referring to both categories.

The distinction between the two categories may also be blurred because the victims in their narratives tend to rationalise the identification of their neighbour as a witch by emphasising that “everyone knew they were witches”, which would at first glance indicate that their identity as a witch in the village was commonly acknowledged. But one should treat their statements with a critical eye: such claims can just as well be a narrative strategy to strengthen their position of the victim and substantiate their accusation of the neighbour. De Blécourt suggests that when several people in a village are designated as witches, they are usually neighbours of the bewitched, whereas there is probably only one well-known witch who was labelled as such outside of a small circle of neighbours (1999: 204). Yet, when a certain family was attributed the reputation, which could persist for generations, several members of the same family could even have the reputation of a witch simultaneously throughout the entire community. Moreover, in our region, there were sometimes even two or three individuals, not necessarily members of the same family, that had a reputation of a village witch in the same community. Since there is no clear distinction on the level of terminology between the village and the neighbourhood witch, a meticulous analysis of the narrations is sometimes required in order to uncover the distinction between “witches” and “witches”.

When a woman acquired the reputation due to an accumulation of accusations of her bewitching activity made by several members of the community who recognised her as the source of their misfortunes, it is indeed impossible to distinguish between the two types, since “(...) if you call someone a witch enough times they become a witch in the eyes of society” (Stewart and Strathern 2004: 52). Briggs writes about the distinction between two categories of suspects in the early modern period which more or less conform with the distinction between neighbourhood and village witch in our region: “[a]t any one time a particular community probably had a small group of strong suspects, with a much looser periphery of marginal ones; the latter were probably only known to individual families or close neighbors, and were not *yet* the subject of general village gossip” (2002: 18–19; emphasis mine). For a woman to progress from

the status of neighbourhood witch to the status of village witch, a significant portion of the community would have to be convinced of the validity of the accusations, whereby the key factors in determining who is going to progress and who is not were according to Davies his or her social and physical qualities: “If the suspect also displayed some of the stereotypical characteristics of witches, such as old age, unusual family history, distinctive eyes or some peculiar habits, then this would be seen by other neighbours as good confirmation of the validity of the accusation, even if the accused had previously attracted no suspicion before” (Davies 1999a: 151). Schöck too concludes that appearance can be a contributing factor to witchcraft accusation (1978: 117); in addition, she claims that allegations against people with higher social status are rare, and when they happen, they have less chance to get support in a wider group (1978: 234). De Blécourt similarly suggests that those with enough social support will have fewer problems dismissing the accusations, whereas a person who occupied a low status, whose conduct was already found suspicious and who could not mobilise support against accusers (1999: 209) may have likely ended up with the reputation in the entire community.

Unless a person gained the reputation due to the accumulated accusations of neighbours of her bewitchments, the bewitchments that a village witch was accused of were those directed against the entire community: she represented a danger to everybody, not to (a) particular family(ies) only. In our region, there were two types of bewitchment that were exclusively blamed on village witches, and never on “envious neighbors”. One was manipulating hail; this accusation was typically attached to witches in the past but has since more or less vanished from witchcraft accusations in Europe (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 151), and it was very rare in our region too. Hail was a misfortune that befell the entire village, and the institution of the village witch allowed people to unite in their feelings of despair when faced with a lost harvest, and to release them through anger directed against the person who was thought to be the source of the disaster.⁴

II: Her name was Branka. And she was allegedly a witch. She knew how to perform witchcraft. But she was smart, intelligent, and knew how to help people when they were ill (...). They said that she was guilty when the hail destroyed the village. These women were always blamed for the hail. But it is better not to mention this woman, her relatives still live here. Don't mention that. (30)

The other type of bewitchment typically ascribed to village witches was stopping livestock in their tracks. Although it did not affect the whole community simultaneously, passing by the witch's house was nonetheless feared by men from the entire community—anybody passing by the witch's house could become the victim of her bewitchment. Therefore, in this case too, this was not a misfortune that would affect the relationship between two persons, or two families only; instead, the danger the village witch represented threatened the community as a whole.

Moreover, the village witch (when not acquiring the reputation due to the general agreement regarding her bewitching activity by her neighbours) was generally not feared for acting out of envy, which was the emotion typically ascribed to the neighbourhood witch. Even accusation of bewitchment as such was not an indispensable factor for a person to acquire such a reputation. There were other factors that were often more substantial in the construction of a person's status as a village witch, and were either decisive or else contributed to the progression of a person from a neighbourhood witch, accused of committing bewitchments out of envy, to a village witch.

THE STEREOTYPICAL WITCH

The physical features conforming to stereotypical notions about witches known in folklore and popular thought indeed often seem to have been characteristic of women with the reputation of a village witch. Moreover, the reputation of a village witch was sometimes attached to women exclusively due to their conforming to the image of a stereotypical witch. Old age was typical, and many of the frequently listed features of their appearance can actually be linked to old age: they were said to be wrinkled, withered, curved, limping, without or with only a few teeth left ... In addition, they were often described as unpleasant looking: ugly, filthy, unkempt, with strange, sharp, snaky eyes, pointy chin, long hooked nose, with warts and scabs ...

F: Were these women considered witches since their youth, or ...?

I: Yes, well, when she gets old. Then she starts to be a witch, doesn't she? At first she is normal ..., well, and then she gets those ... (7)

I: Here they, well up here some said, or there was an old belief that she was a witch, I mean.

- F: *So what was she supposed to be doing then?*
- I: [laughter] *Well, that she rode a broom and changed things into frogs and so on, but this is nonsense, isn't it? (...) You know, it was so that people usually began to hate such a woman, [unclear], so she lost friends and everything. This is what happened here, as in the old days, all was so naive, you know. Well, and in this place it was she. They liked best to call a witch those who had some defect. Here at my neighbor's [she points with her hand towards the house], there, you can still see the old house, there lived one with a hunchback, you see. Her name was Reza, you know. She was also thought to be [a witch]. (31)*
- F: *But did she [the witch] look strange perhaps?*
- I1: *Well, not really. Though she did have such a long nose, and a rather long face. I don't know, her face was pretty weird, that's what it was.*
- I2: *It was her look, she had this kind of look. Even you would remember it? [laughs]*
- I1: *She had kind of strange look.*
- F: *So that was it? Is that how you find out, or is there a sign to recognize a witch, for example?*
- I1: *Well, you cannot say now, I'm telling you quite honestly, I don't believe in this, do I? Anyway.*
- F: *What then?*
- I1: *You know, she had such a poisonous look, like a snake. When you look at a snake. If you've ever seen it, if you've taken a closer look at it?*
- F: *No, I haven't.*
- I2: *A viper! [laughter] And if you're gazing at it, it is gazing at you.*
- I1: *Yes.*
- I2: *Yes, indeed.*
- I1: *But it is sneaky, so that just when you turn your back a little (...)*
- I2: *Well, they said that if she disliked someone's acts, she said: I will come back to you, I'll do something to you, yes.*
- I1: *I knew nothing about all this, never. I never heard, and much less seen any of this, as we didn't have much of a contact with her. But she kept to herself, she was a loner. Can't say she socialised much with anyone, she rather kept a distance. (41)*
- I: *That was an old woman. One Jasna M., or whatever they called her. She was always said to be a witch, but I can't say. I do, I really remember well that she never did any harm to me, she even liked me, and I liked her. I ... well, this is just gossip, you know. This, this is nothing ... reliable.*
- F: *But was she from here, from the village?*
- I: *No, she came from up there, from L., you know.*
- F: *O, really? So why did they say that she was a witch?*
- I: *Well, she always claimed that she was, that she was a witch [unclear].*

- F: *Oh, she said it herself?*
- I: *No, no, not so. Well, the others said so. 'Cause she was so terribly thin. And had such a long nose, and then ... Her reputation was rather, otherwise ... [unclear] This is nothing reliable. [laughter]*
- F: *Did people believe she was a witch since she was young, or when she became older?*
- I: *Well, I knew her in her old age. I didn't know her when she was younger. What shall I say [unclear], she died years ago.*
- F: *So did something bad happen to someone, if she took against him, or how?*
- I: *No, no, no. Nothing.*
- F: *So [she was reputed to be a witch] only because of her look?*
- I: *Ah, just like that. I think it was just because of her look. This poor thing, she had a little chick up there, and she was always joking, and so ...*
- F: *Was she ever accused of doing something bad, like harming someone?*
- I: *No, nothing. (74)*

Such a physical image of a witch has had a long history in European popular as well as elite thought, in early modern demonological views as well as in folklore.⁵ Already at the end of the sixteenth century witches were described by demonologists as old, lame, blear-eyed, lean, deformed, and full of wrinkles. English literary accounts from the sixteenth and seventeenth century often stress witches' ugliness, wrinkled face, furrowed brows, hairy lip, gobber tooth, squint eyes, squeaking voice, and scolding tongue; they were depicted as lame, foul, toothless, and deformed (Briggs 2002: 15). Witches in southwestern Germany in the twentieth century were typically described as poor, old, dressed in old fashions, in dark clothes, without teeth, with a pointed nose, warts, skein hair, and avoiding looking one directly in the eyes (Schöck 1978: 117–121). A narrator from the Dalmatian hinterland even directly stated to a folklorist at the beginning of the twenty-first century that “When someone is ugly and old, then you know she could be a witch” (Šešo 2012: 196).

This stereotypical image of a witch was also transmitted from generation to generation through folklore. As a rule, the typical traits ascribed to witches in Slavic folklore are those that do not meet ideals of beauty: they are depicted as having thick eyebrows that meet; a frowning glance turned aside or to the ground; red, wild eyes with goat horns instead of pupils; red teeth; excessive or scarce body hair; and a tail (Tolstaja 1998a: 142). In Polish folklore, a witch was often an elderly (although sometimes also a young) woman in shabby clothes, scaring people with her mere appearance (Baranowski 1965: 100). In Russian folklore, a witch (*koldun*) could

be identified by his appearance: he is huge, grim, and has a crude “wolf-like” appearance when old; his hair is long and grey, his beard unkempt; and he lives in an old shack at the end of the village (Tokarev 1957: 25). A witch in Croatian folklore from nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklore has been similarly described as a woman who is old, toothless, ugly, evil-blooded, and bad-tempered, blind or having strange eyes, and unattractive (Šešo 2012: 196). In German folklore, a witch is described as a person whose face is pale, their eyes deep-set, their body weakened and withered, their hair unkempt, untrimmed, and heinous. Their hands have dark spots—the traces of the evil spirits’ or devil’s grip—and their most reliable feature is the goat foot (Petzoldt 1989: 97–98).

Even though none of the stated authors linked these physical characteristics specifically to village witches, at least in our region the notion of the stereotypical physical appearance of a witch corresponds to a substantial degree only with the village witch. In addition, as mentioned above, this could also be an additional factor that contributed to the decision about the identity of the neighbourhood witch and may have paved their path to acquiring the status of a village witch.

Not only old, ugly, and physically deformed women could gain a reputation of a village witch due to their physical appearance, though. Any deviation from average appearance could potentially lead to the reputation, though old age, ugliness, and deformity by far prevailed as far as physical qualities are concerned:

- I1: When a girl was very pretty, right, [she was considered a witch], but not just that ..., it is generally known that she [was also considered a witch] if she had some kind of deformity. Someone who had a hunchback, someone who limped. For instance, if someone had a mark, a wart on her face, those people ... Just like that, let's say, a handicap, something different about them. That makes you ... if some[one's] limp was divine punishment, right, now it's not necessarily just witchcraft, being marked, being different.*
- F: And what did those people do if a girl was very pretty?*
- I1: Well, in the old days, for instance, in those days someone could say: Yeah, she's a witch, right?*
- F: If she was pretty or if she had a physical mark?*
- I1: Both, let's say, extremes: very pretty, very pretty, right, or for instance ugly.*
- I2: Above or below average. (108)*

Svetieva also noted that in our region any woman who seemed unusual in terms of relationships, style, and dress, could be accused of witchcraft

(2001: 153–154). A certain woman whom people said was a witch in fact looked rather classy and elegant, yet, in all her appearance and demeanour she looked unconventional and was generally taken as “weird”: she wore a hat, walked around the village with an umbrella and a shopping bag, spoke with a thin, soft voice, and always went out at dusk—all of which was unusual for peasant women.

BEHAVIOUR

Just like deviation from an average appearance, any deviation from the socially and culturally accepted behaviour norms could also lead a person to acquiring the reputation. In the early modern period witches were depicted as quarrelsome (cf. Briggs 2002: 18), boastful, illiterate, miserable, lustful, wicked, and ill-natured. The witches described in the English pamphlets had a wide reputation for misbehaviour (Macfarlane 1970: 158–164). In Swedish and Finnish seventeenth-century narratives witches were usually old, unmarried, and sterile women, who broke societal norms by harming others through cursing and displays of aggressive and asocial behaviour, and were pictured as wicked mothers and stony-hearted persons filled with hatred and envy (Eilola 2006: 43–45). As far as their behaviour was concerned, southwestern German witches were described talking a lot, asking many questions, being inquisitive, behaving as if they were better than others, and occasionally as quarrelsome (Schöck 1978: 117–121). In Croatia too, people described them as quarrelsome (Šešo 2012: 200). In addition, besides inquisitiveness, which was a personal characteristic that immediately aroused suspicions of witchcraft, being asocial was just as undesired as inquisitiveness and could just as easily lead to the acquiring of the reputation (cf. inf. 41, p. 319). Again, none of these characteristics were specifically defined as being linked to village witches when observed by ethnographers, yet in our region village witches undoubtedly frequently exhibited these personal traits.

I: Well, here also, not far from us, they also said that [she] was a witch. But she wasn't one. She was more introverted, she wasn't very sociable. We young people didn't believe in that, in witches and so on. But the older folks did. There was another woman who lived down here [of whom it was also said that] she was a witch.

F: And has she already passed away?

I: Yes, when I was still small.

- F: *What did she do?*
 I: *Nothing, she was a peasant ... She just liked to argue with people. (49)*
- I: *And to this day they say that a witch lives in that house.*
 F: *Did she look different, or was she an ordinary woman?*
 I: *An ordinary woman, but I saw her wear her dress inside out. When she went there to sniff around.*
 F: *What was she after?*
 I: *Well, all over. Wherever there was something [happening], she stuck her nose in it.*
 F: *And how did she do harm to people?*
 I: *Well, either a farm animal would get sick after a while, or she [bewitched] so that there was no luck in the family, or something like that happened.*
 F: *How did she do harm to people?*
 I: *When you could stick your nose in, [you] could hear, then you would know. This way you don't. You couldn't directly [follow] her somewhere.*
 F: *But afterwards, did something happen when she came to visit or after she [had been there]?*
 I: *When she left. And I myself saw, I saw it with my own eyes. They [the neighbours] weren't home and she went behind the pigsty and two days later the pigs were sick. And I told them [the neighbours]: Listen, you had a visitor, but I don't know what happened in the pigsty. I didn't see, I wasn't there to see what was in the pigsty. And the pigs really did get sick. (97)*

Sometimes, the reputation attached to women who did not conform to the male idea of proper female behaviour and did not conform to the conventions about how women were expected to behave and what they were and were not allowed to do (cf. Lerner 1984: 84). They, for instance, shouted all the time, mocked others, quarrelled, and generally behaved “like men”, that is, cursed, smoked, drank alcohol, and similar. Thus one woman who had a reputation of a village witch was said to have “smoked a pipe like a man”. An interlocutor who talked about her own grandmother who had a reputation of a village witch estimated that it was precisely the fact that she argued a lot and often pressed charges against other villagers that led to her status of a village witch:

- I: *My granny was not popular in the village. It used to be a huge estate once, one of the richest. She came from a rich farm. Then she and her husband took out a mortgage, her father pledged the farm but then everything failed and they lost the whole farm. At that time, it was a terrible shock, but they somehow survived, as the youngest daughter married a very wealthy man, so*

they managed to cover all this. But when the agrarian reforms were introduced after the war,⁶ this land was taken and given away. After the war terrible things were happening ... She was very bitter inside, very negative. But when I think back now—this woman was just fighting for her rights. People were teasing her, but in fact they were jealous, because she was an extremely resourceful woman. She could turn everything she touched into gold, so people were really really envious.

- F: *So she was then said to be a witch [referring to our previous conversation]?*
 I: *Yes, this was actually just a nickname people gave to each other, it was quite usual in the past. Any woman who was not strictly normal, just like the others, if she differed from others in something, she was called a witch.*
 F: *In what would she be different?*
 I: *My grandmother was quite negative. They took her for a witch, because she was so evil. She loved to argue, you know, because when I think about it—she had a field with lettuce she used to grow and all, and then the chickens came, as nobody closed them in, and they destroyed everything. And then they used to say: Yes, look at you, you witch, arguing again! Well, she did enjoy going to the courts—she had enough money, so she kept suing them. In this way, she just collected black points to be defined like this. These were such strange things, you know ... (167)*

A woman's unsubmissiveness in relationship to her husband certainly also contributed to their reputation. We were told that one woman with the reputation of a village witch stood up against her husband and pressed charges against him for sexually abusing his step-daughter, i.e. her daughter. Even when their husbands were drunkards and incapable of taking care of the household economy, which forced women into holding the reins of the farmstead in their own hands, they had to hide this from other people in the village. Women who took over men's work were not appreciated by the community and were often overtly derided (Sok 2003: 167–169; cf. Lawrence 1988: 121). Many narratives about village witches actually reflect the mocking attitude and hostility of the community towards women who “wore the breeches” in the house:

- F: *Did you know anyone who was considered a witch?*
 I: [laughs] *No. I do know that the old people there, when I came to the house, and when I got married, right ... [laughs], and my husband, he had a sister-in-law—since his brother was older and he took over the property in the village, right—and she, when she came to the house, the aunt said, that she had heard all sorts of things [about her]—you understand, right? How she had that, when there were ... wedding guests and all, when they came to the house,*

when she married to his home. [laughs] And she went, and with that shirt that he was [wearing] that day when she [married him], her husband or at that time bridegroom, right, she tied some kind of knots in it ... on the sleeves. The aunt asked [why] [laughs], because she didn't know what it meant, and she said, yeah, she said: Do you not know what this is about? This is, she said (...) so that she would have her husband under her command. Under control, aha! (114)

Here they were, I shall not say the name, in a certain house here in the village, a mother and her daughter. Well, the daughter needed to be married. The mother was a widow and she had a farmstead—and who will [do the] work? The daughter had to find a husband. Well, and there was a man, Miran by name, one such peasant ..., how could I say, one such man who took care of such unmarried couples, such brides, and he got them together. And so he said to a certain Marko: Let's go to visit that house for a bride. But, he said: To the devil, they say the woman is a witch! And he [Miran] said: She is no witch, she just drinks because she has to take care of everything by herself! And they went. Then fine, the bride they still somehow liked, but the woman, the mother was terrible, very peculiar. And they started to leave: Yes, we will come another time, we will. And the mother said: It's okay, but since you are here for the first time, wait a little, I shall fix you a luncheon. And before that, of course, she also gave them wine and served those [snacks] nicely. And she left to prepare the dish, and the daughter followed her. Then the elder said: Hey, I'm going to check where the women went. After a while he came back and said to the bridegroom: Don't eat, don't eat! [Marko:] Why the hell shouldn't I eat when I am hungry?! Well, and she brought him a plate full of scrambled eggs (...) and bread and everything—eat, drink! Now the elder said: I don't know, I would rather not eat, I don't feel well. But the bridegroom, he ate and ate, and devoured it all, God help him! Well, and when the dish was finished, she said: Do come again! The bridegroom answered: We will, we shall make a deal for your Anica! And of course, the mother was happy and they left. And then the bridegroom asked him. Hey, why didn't you eat? He [Miran] said: If you saw what I saw, you wouldn't have eaten either. [Marko:] Well, what did you see? At those times there were no kitchen-ranges, not at all! People used to cook in a stove, they cooked and baked in front of the stove. He said: Damn, when I peeped through the hole to the kitchen, you know what I saw? The young one stood on the table in front of the stove with her skirt lifted up and the mother was cracking an egg on her behind. [laughs] And those eggs fell into the pan and you ate this. [laughs] Such were peasant adventures! Well, and he said, what will happen now? He said: You shall never leave her again. She bewitched you. Oh, he said, don't talk nonsense. Well, we shall see. And it was true, he married exactly that woman. That one! (...) And then it was said that her

mother gave her a ring. At that time, golden wedding rings were quite rare in the countryside. She said: Just go, now, Anica, look, the bridegroom is coming. For everything was already prepared for the wedding. The bridegroom and the guests are coming. Here's the ring and make sure you look at the bridegroom through it. What, why should I? So that it's you who is the boss in the house. Not him. And that's exactly how it was [laughter]! She was as sharp as a devil. Come on, let's drink! So there they went and married in a church, kneeling there by the altar. Well, I don't know who saw and heard all this. Did people just make it up altogether, or was it really so, I can't say. Gossip, you see. You know, somebody said: Anica, when you are kneeling before the altar—at that time the bridegroom and the guests used to wear large suits, those long capes—take care to put your knees on his cape. At least one of your knees. And then watch carefully how the candles are burning. If they burn equally, or if one burns so that the flame goes down, or it goes up, make sure to remember. So, the bride was kneeling on one piece of his suit watching the candles. His, on the side of the bridegroom, was lower, much lower, and hers was burning high up. And when she came home, she shared that. Yes, yes, Anica, make sure to remember. It is you who will be the boss, but you will also be a widow. But how can you tell that? Well, I saw the candle. Yours was burning straight up, while his flame was going down. And that's how it was, you see. [laughs] If this is true or not, I cannot say. (149)

Obedience, modesty, and subordinate position to the men were expected from women in patriarchal society. When they did not meet the expectations in behaviour determined by their gender, this could be the triggering factor leading to a woman gaining the reputation of a witch, as suggested by the above interlocutor. Not having witnessed the process of a person's acquiring a reputation, it is hard to judge whether this was a decisive factor that brought a woman the reputation of a witch, or only added to it, but such behaviour was certainly not helpful in preventing her from gaining it. Although to conform to the norms of behaviour was much more crucial for a woman than it was for a man, when the norms of behaviour were severely breached, the reputation could become attached to men too, although rarely: a man who drank heavily and cursed at the cross, and also conformed to some of the stereotypical physical features of witches, was one of the few men with the reputation of a village witch we heard of:

There was a man here, who had a limp, and he was so bent ... I knew him when I still had no children ... People said that he knew how to bewitch, they were afraid of him. He also drank a lot ... And he went to the cross and looked at the cross and swore. (58)

RESIDENCE, MARITAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STATUS

The label of a witch was often, although not exclusively, attached to women who lived alone, who were widows or unmarried,⁷ as mentioned in several narratives above. In early modern witch trials, older women and widows seemed to have been heavily overrepresented;⁸ the solid majority of witches were older than 50 and the percentage of unmarried witches (never married as well as widowed) was higher than the percentage of such people in the general female population (Levack 2006: 149, 155; cf. also Macfarlane 1970: 162–164; de Blécourt 2000: 301; Briggs 2002: 17). Widowhood or celibacy went hand in hand with the lack of social support. Having no public support to contradict the allegations made them an easy target for acquiring the label of a witch and could contribute to a general consensus about their witchcraft (cf. Jenkins 1991: 327), and even more so when they were poor. The larger numbers of old and widowed women among the accused can also be due to their limited access to the defence mechanisms present in common law (de Blécourt 2000: 301).

Not having much contact with other members of the community, which was often stressed in the descriptions of village witches in our region, was often conditioned by the location of their residence on the outskirts of the village. Their distance from others also triggered suspicions and mistrust towards her: what is out of sight is out of control, and one could never be quite sure if something antisocial was going on. The description of their clothes, aprons, and scarfs expressed the same fears: described as dressed in long black clothes and aprons that covered their bodies and faces, village witches were often said to look “as if they were hiding something in them”. This made a woman mysterious, opaque, and consequently suspicious. Moreover, living at the edge of the village often coincided with their low economic status. A person with the reputation of a village witch in our region was usually very poor, and their cottage described as small and modest. The following narrative describes the village witch as living in poverty in her small cottage, and walking barefoot (barefootedness being a typical indicator of poverty in the region—cf. Svetieva 2001: 154):

There was an old woman here, poor, she was walking around here, she had big feet and always walked barefoot. Everybody was talking [about her as a witch], she was the only one who didn't know it. Poor woman, she was very poor, you know, always alone, and she had a small house here, alone. (77)

On the other hand, women who were unexpectedly prosperous were also likely to attract the reputation in our region. The situation was similar in some other parts of Europe: in Galicia, people who inexplicably gained good fortune in life were suspected of having made a pact with the devil and were often branded witches (Rey-Henningsen 1994: 213). A woman in Germany was accused of witchcraft because the family was building a new house in spite of their income being, in the estimation of the people from the village, insufficient to afford it (Schöck 1978: 126). In Poland, the witch was recognised by the biggest quantity of milk in the village, which she was said to have gathered from other villagers (Woźniak 1984: 47). Any unexpected improvement of fortune could thus easily trigger accusations of witchcraft and lead to a reputation of a particular person, or the whole family:

- II: *My father used to tell me that there was a boy there in his village, he was eighteen years old and had never been able to walk.⁹ And when he was eighteen, he stood up, went to the attic and hanged himself from the door frame and died there. He said that people could not possibly understand how he could do it, when he could never walk, how he stood up and walked up there and died up there. And the neighbor who went there said that they had to unclasp his hands and he said he was so seized with horror when they were unclasping his hands that the sweat was pouring all over him, it gave him such horrors. And then people were talking about how they promised the boy to the devil, have you ever heard of that? That a man came to them and said that if they gave him what they still don't have but will have. And he gave them a certain amount of money and they should have luck in work everywhere, with the livestock and elsewhere. And he gave them money. And she was pregnant and then the child was born who could not walk.*
- F: *Did these stories only start spreading after his death?*
- II: *No, they were spreading already when the boy was alive, but he said that they were hiding the boy, it was a shame [to have a deformed child]. People were thinking how could they restore their fortune, they had more money than they could have afforded. And then someone told them this, how they promised this boy to the devil.*
- F: *Was this a rich household?*
- II: *No, it was a poor household, but suddenly they restored their fortune. But he said they had no more luck when the boy died. Everything started to go wrong, everything started to fall in ruins. That year it stroke their corn-rack, and the cart moved by itself and scattered and all the wheat was destroyed ...*
- F: *Did the father or the mother make a contract with the devil?*
- II: *They both did.*

- F: *Did they have the reputation of being witches in the village?*
 I1: *He said that no one dared taking offence to them, they all treated them very politely, he said they would talk about the weather or something with them but nothing else. I believe that they feared them, this family struck people with fear. (53)*

In our region, larger wealth usually implied larger amounts of milk than expected with respect to the number of cows a person owned, which is strongly related with the typical accusations of witches magically milking others' cows. The following two narratives demonstrate the gaining of the reputation of village witches stemming from their larger quantities of dairy products, but while the narrator in the first interview talks about the village witches from within the discourse, the second narrator clearly distances herself from it:

- F: *Well, were many women said to be witches?*
 I1: *There, close to, I would ... I'd say there were two quite ... quite ... what do I know ... (...)*
 F: *And how do you know they are witches?*
 I1: *Well, we heard that, we didn't really know ... we heard it.*
 F: *What did you hear they were doing?*
 I1: *Well, the one who stopped the hail ... and the other one who was coming for milking ... My God, how much butter she had, you know, this raw butter ... She always took it to M. to sell. So they said: Where does it all come from ... if two little cows was all she had. You guess.*
 I2: *Where from, really!*
 I1: *How is it that she had so much profit and that ... she had all this butter ... From two cows, that was not possible, was it? And then she moved all her things to M., sold everything, and even ... put [money] in the bank, but that was already later, and in two, three years—a bankruptcy. And then she was angry and destroyed. She got nothing. Nothing for all the bewitchment and magic efforts, nothing at all! (59)*

And again another one [laughs], a hardworking woman and very busy. So she prepared all kinds of things. She had a cow and always cheese and butter and all this. And they also accused her to be—that she was a witch and that she was milking other peoples' cows [laughs]. I can't say how, she somehow cast a spell to get plenty of milk. She had a lot, indeed. But that was because she was a good housewife. She was clever in using everything, you see. Other women didn't know how to make cream, so they produced butter, whereas she knew how to do everything. You see, she worked for such people where she could learn all this. I didn't think that made her a witch. [laughs] (121)

Not only above-average success in manufacturing dairy products, the productivity of which was certainly one of the main criteria of evaluation of a woman, but exceptional success in practically any domain where others proved less successful could potentially ruin a woman's reputation. Thus if a person did not want to risk their reputation, they had to pay attention not to be too successful (or, if they were, to hide it), yet, as discussed above, their position in the community and their reputation also suffered if they were not successful enough. In the next narrative, we are actually able to catch a glimpse into the very origin of a woman's reputation, the moment when she acquired a status of a village witch due to her diligence—her deviation from the role of a housewife, by taking care of all the work, even that which was qualified as “men's work”, undoubtedly contributed to the escalation of the allegations:

Oh, that one, she used to be taken as a witch. Yes, here, down here at B., there was one whose name was Tonka. She was a hardworking woman, many children and mostly girls [she had], she was resourceful! While her husband (...) he liked to go to wedding feasts and play. And she had to work hard with all these kids and all, providing food for them, and taking care of the farm. So once all the farmers each harvested their own wheat, and so did she. They put it all in heaps, so the next day they could take it home or put on the racks. But in the evening, there was loud thunder, burning inside the clouds. She realized the hail is coming any minute now. So—as there were many children, she urged them all: Let's quickly put all this inside, and get ready the cows and the cart. Do all this quickly: the sheaves on the cart, and then under the hay-rack. So the next morning, when the hail had beaten down the harvest, only hers was left, and all her wheat was under the hay-rack. And I mean everything, all the harvest she had. So that's when people started to talk about her being a witch. They said they saw lights over the field during the night carrying wheat under the hay-rack, and that she was a witch. That the witches took it [the hay] all inside. So this poor woman, even to this very day—I mean old people would still say: That woman is a witch. That's how she lost her good name. The name of that house is corrupt even nowadays. (107)

KNOWLEDGE

The problematic “having more” not only implied wealth or other sorts of success in domestic economy, compared to others, but also pertained to any knowledge and abilities that were unavailable to others and were as such on the one hand envied, and on the other

hand often perceived as potentially dangerous when used for antiso-
 cial goals. Village witches were not professional magic specialists, not
 “wise women”, and never acted as (professional) healers. Occasionally,
 they just had some very limited above-average knowledge about how
 to heal perhaps one particular disease. Some had a bit more knowledge
 on herbs and medical plants than others did, some knew a particular
 healing technique that others were not familiar with, or a small trick
 that helped them treat the farm animals better. Any knowledge that in
 any way distinguished a person from others was considered suspicious
 and linked the person who possessed it with witchcraft, the more so
 if any of the factors mentioned above that facilitate such a reputation
 was also present.

II: Two of them lived in our village. I will not say the name of one of them, because her family is still alive. Her grandchildren are still alive, they are adults now ... But the procedure and the description are the same. One lived here, in our little lodge in this tower which was half ruined. She was apparently some kind of ... illegitimate daughter of someone who used to live here (...) And this, say, illegitimate father voted her the right to stay here until death in this small tower. Her name was Jera and she was said to be a witch. She knew how to do witchcraft. I must say she was a clever, intelligent woman and could help people when they were sick.

F: How did she help?

II: With medicine and teas. She knew all the old herbs, and as she had no income, she made her living only with ... the fruit that she picked. She could get a litre of milk here and there, others gave her some eggs and so on. I think she had a hen which slept together with her. And this Jera for example ... once I was coughing a lot. My parents (...) did not allow any contact between the children and a person like her who was very dirty, you know, old, and she had such bloody eyes, perhaps because of smoke, she looked horrible. But I was fond of her. And I always shouted across the fence: Aunt Jera, aunty Jera! So she called me, she had such a hooked nose, like a real witch, and a pointed chin ... When she heard me coughing, she said: Come down, come down. So I went and she offered me some orange, hot tea. Clean orange color it had, just like an orange. And I drank it and after two hours I stopped coughing. Then my mother went to ask her what she gave me to drink (...). She said: Madam, this is liquorice. [laughs] She had all kinds of medicine, that's why people looked at her as being different than other women. And this [a witch] is the simplest nick-name to give a woman, especially if she's old and ugly. (30)

I: But I do know that he said, you know, when I said ... for a child ... that the child was also sick and they did not know what to do. And then one woman came, you know, and they said: Well, she is a witch, this woman is a witch. And then she was talking and spreading something ... like garlic over the child—and that was exactly this old man who said this and I almost didn't believe him—and she [the witch] was saying something. She was spreading that and talking, as if she used some kind of soapy liquid. And that the worms—like this, as if they came out under the temples [she touched her temples with both hands], such worms put their heads out and she took a razor ... that gadget for shaving, that machine, and she like dragged it over them cutting off their heads. And since that time the child was healthy (...) They really believed that. And I couldn't believe it, but this old man who told us so many things ... I just had to believe him, you see. Well, that's what was said, that they were witches, you know. But they were not witches. (91)

I: Before there was one (...) Katarina from R. She also knew to do it.

F: Was she also a witch?

I: Yes. She knew to do it, she could do magic things. But one woman [Irena] from up there, she said that she was taking a cow away to another village, that was D. again; she wanted to mate it with the bull. But the cow refused to go anywhere. She just wouldn't go out of the barn, even if the woman managed to get it out, the cow would just turn back ... Irena had a cane, but this didn't help at all despite the beating ... Then she [Katarina] said: You know what, I will do something to make the cow go out. She went inside the house, and took some, like some water or something, she brought it with her and spread it up and down the cow's back, then she took a very tiny rod, and she gently caressed the cow up and down her back. Then the cow just went ... She didn't have to be pushed, just went easily behind her and back again. So that day it wasn't necessary to go and push the cow. She [Irena] said that she [Katarina] just touched her and she immediately followed. She [Irena] replied: Well, now I know that you can do things, she said, where are you walking around? She [Katarina] had learned this from her mother. That is, her mother knew how to do it. This goes from generation to generation. (73)

And I know well that my great-grandmother had a piglet. And that man came around, he came [looking for the pig], so it would mate [unintelligible]. Then my great-grandfather took money from him. Well, when you drank, you paid. And he took the money and then he left, and another man came, Dane, and he brought the piglet. But the pig just didn't wake up, he didn't want to

do anything, not a thing. His wife, my great-grandmother, said: You, you took money from him? And he [the great-grandfather] said: Yes, okay, I'll bring him the money back. And he went, and that man, when he saw him, said: Hey, you, the piglet doesn't want to mate? And he [the great-grandfather] said: No. [He:] Wait, I'll give you [something]. And he mixed something, some water, what do I know, and I don't know what, and gave it to him. He said: Pour this on him. And that is how it really was. He came, he brought [it], and the piglet was the same as before. You know, that man was really a witch, but such an ordinary man! (93)

In the part of the region where the technique of drowning spells was not commonly known, as it was in most parts, overtly practicing it also led to gaining the reputation of a witch, especially when the physical characteristics of the practitioner fit the stereotype:

There was just an old woman ... who was not only doing bad things, no. She could do tricks, for example, like drowning spells, you know. And through such things she was then called a witch, you see. (91)

She was also thought to be [a witch]. Because she knew this old medicine if someone was ill. It was her own fault, that they called her a witch. Because if some child was ill, she would—I don't know, she would pick up some pieces of charcoal and so on, and she (...) well, she healed this child, and things like this. (31)

As having extra knowledge that distinguished a person from other members of a community was a factor that likely triggered the reputation of a witch, any knowledge should be kept hidden. The following interview clearly expresses the risk of gaining a reputation when extra knowledge, even when helpful, is revealed to others:

F: *So why did he drown the spells?*

I: *A calf got sick at this farm. At the neighbors'. And this man knew how to do it. He heard that from his own folks ... his parents, you see. And they did it in this way. That is one thing, and then also ...*

F: *And did this really help?*

I: *It did. Therefore I say that this woman, well, you are now all witnesses, as you went to see her. This woman said herself that he was a witch. (...) You see. And this father was awfully offended by what this woman said to him. He said: I helped you, but you didn't need to call me that now... That was bad what*

she said, you know, that he was a witch ... As he really did something good, you know (...) She was like, I mean ... offended, because 'you can do it and I can't', you see... Because they didn't want to tell one another, you know. This mum, for example, she could whistle—this mother-in-law of mine—like an owl ... But she would never tell anyone about it, no ... So that nobody knew at all how, I mean how to do it. (...)

F: *So then there were actually some women in the village that had reputation of witches?*

I: *Yes.*

F: *But not all of them?*

I: *No. No. No. No. This one could... Well, she could do something, you see. For example, just like that woman said about this old man. For sure there was a reason why she said that, wasn't it?*

F: *So in fact, they called a man who was able to do things against someone who did something bad a witch?*

I: *Yes. (91)*

MAGIC BOOKS

An accusation of having extra knowledge also pertained to the owners of magic books, as a book was considered the source of the magic knowledge itself. As already mentioned, in our region the possession of the book was much more often ascribed to men than to women, and the category of people who acquired the reputation of a witch due to the possession of a magic book was the only one in which men clearly predominated. The books were ascribed many magic powers and were shrouded in mystery, as were magic books everywhere. In France, Favret-Saada was told that these books are marked on the bottom of each page with inscriptions such as: "Turn the page if you dare, or if you understand" (Favret-Saada 1980: 133–134). In Denmark, people said that once started, it is impossible to stop reading the book—when one arrives at the red letters, it is already too late. In addition, the owner was believed to always know who read it (Rockwell 1978: 91–92). Special skills were believed to be required for a person to be able to read it, and the dangers that arose when the book was read by an incompetent person, such as the conjuring of the devil, is a motif that often figures in the narratives about magic books in our region. Several narratives about the undue reading of the book, usually *Kolomonov žegen*, were actually variants of the migratory legend about the

conjuring up of the devil by a person who did not know to read the book (ML 3020, Inexperienced Use of the Black Book; cf. Rockwell 1978: 92; Briggs 1991: 614–615, 622; cf. Klintberg 2010: 296–297, P41), also known elsewhere in Slovenia (cf. Kotnik 1924: 31–32; Krajczar 1996: 251–252):

And in that book, they said that from those books you could read what to do. And then, if you wanted to prevent that from happening, you had to read it backwards. That's written in there and you have to know how to read. That doesn't mean that you can read regularly row by row—you have to read certain lines. For example, the first one, then maybe the third or the fourth one, so then they could do whatever they were up to. [laughter] (43)

I1: They used to say they had a Kolomon, I don't understand that, it was a book. (...) It was one such book he was reading from and argued that all was true, but I don't know it, it was or not. So he conjured the devil up on the stove. And that devil ...

F: The one who read that book?

I1: Yes, the one who was reading that book. They had all kinds of rituals, but that devil just wouldn't get off the stove. So the landlord began to be quite scared and then that devil started to demand a child. If he was promised a child, he would get down from the stove. And then one child actually died.

F: In that house or where?

I1: Yes, in that house, but not that the devil took him, he just died. Yes, people used to talk about it a lot. (122)

They knew, yes, people knew—those who had some kind of Kolomon or something. You surely know about this since you are discussing this, and studied about it. Have you ever heard about Kolomon? It is a kind of a book with all the magic inside it, you know. And that man had—I didn't know him, I have never seen him, [I know him] just by his name. So [I] knew that he ... that he was able to summon a dead man. He called him back to the earth but wasn't able to send him back. (121)

I2: [talking about witches] (...) they also had ... what did they call it ... Kolomon. The Kolomon book.

F: What's that?

I2: Well, that was a book, you could read from it ...

- I1: *That was a kind of a magic book.*
- I2: *Yes, a magic book, so when you read from it, you could conjure the devil, the evil one. And these sorts of things. There was someone who came to the neighbour's house, and he saw the Kolomon on the table, but the neighbour was not home. So he sat by the table waiting for him and saw that book, but didn't know what it was, so he began to read it. Then the neighbour came inside and asked (...): What are you doing? Well, what, he said, I'm reading a book. [laughs]. He [the neighbour] said: What is it you have under the table? And there was a dog under the table, a big one ... So he looked and said: Well, isn't that your dog? He replied: No, you summoned him, in the middle of the day, when you were reading Kolomon. Yes, then he had to, because he knew how to ... chase him out.*
- I1: *He chased him out.*
- I2: *Yes, barely, the master chased him out, otherwise I don't know, that dog could even bite that neighbour to death.*
- I1: *Yes, he came in the form of a devil.*
- I2: *That dog was in the form of a devil [laughs]. They said it was true, and that ... they had Kolomon, and they were joking, so they took a basket of millet—you know, millet, it is such a tiny ... just like these dots ... [indicates some crumbs on the tablecloth], yes. He poured a basket of millet all over the floor ... and said: In five minutes all this will be picked up. Then he went to read Kolomon and the millet disappeared, so he went to fetch the basket [laughs]. (59)*

In the Bocage, France, where village witches were allegedly not known, neighbourhood witches were assumed to possess a magic book (Favret-Saada 1980: 133–135). In our region, however, the assumption that someone possessed a book automatically led to their acquiring of a reputation. As the book was believed to be transmitted from one generation to another, once a person was accused of possessing the book, the reputation attached to the entire family and lingered on into the succeeding generations. But even if it was a man who was initially believed to possess the magic book, which was usually the case, the reputation of performing witchcraft was likely to become attached to his daughter. In the village of G., for instance, we were told about a woman named Anica, who had the reputation of a village witch. Being in her eighties at the time of my last visit in 2015, she was still a very lucid, good-humoured, com-

municative and bright interlocutor, an avid reader and a good narrator. She never married and lives alone in a tiny old cottage at the boundary of the village, separated from the village by a swath of forest. She didn't have many contacts with people from the village, except with a young couple who had moved to the neighbouring house just a few years earlier. Except for her old age (though she had obviously acquired the reputation already in her youth!), the location of her house, and her celibacy, and perhaps her walking around at night, "when witches gather", there was nothing that could link her personality, behaviour, or appearance to that of a typical village witch. The origin of her reputation seemed to lie mainly in the fact that her father possessed the book of Kolomon:

- F: *So you say that Anica's father was supposed to have had special powers?*
 I: *People said that he had a Kolomon, the Kolomon book, they said, right? That book.*
 F: *Where is that book now?*
 I: *Yes, now they (...), I don't know if [she][Anica] had that book, she said that she had never seen it and she didn't know anything about it, but people said that she did ..., that she was a witch. And people often met her when she was going home from the field, carrying a bundle, and she was allegedly very diligent person. What she couldn't do over a day, she was doing at dusk, late into the night. People used to be afraid of walking around at night, when they were more superstitious, but she just went. What she didn't manage to do during the day, she did over the night. So they said that she was a witch, that she had plenty of everything, and that she carried what she took from others at night. (47)*

The possession of the book in the case of Anica, mentioned in the above interview, was not a matter of ascription only. Her father indeed owned the book, which she readily admitted, yet denied having ever even seen it. Nonetheless, her denial did not matter—once the possession of the book was established, one could no more escape the reputation:

That's why they have that Kolomon, priests mostly have that. My father had a Kolomon, but he was smart and he hid it in a drawer or burned it. Then once someone from the castle came and he had somehow found out that we had a Kolomon. He told my mother that he would pay a lot for the book, but my

mother said that upon her life there was no such book in our house. He [the father] probably burned it because of the children. (35)

TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE

Not only the book, but any magic knowledge that an individual was thought to possess was considered to be handed down within the family, and thus contributed to the family's reputation, which could endure for generations (cf. de Blécourt 2004: 95). The magic knowledge was usually believed to be transmitted from mother to daughter, which meant that the reputation of the mother too inevitably passed to the daughter (cf. Sebald 1984: 131):

I: Her mother was like that.

F: Her mother?

I: Yes, she was even more. Well, I didn't know her, but this I do know.

F: Is she still alive?

I: No, no, she died. (...) This one [the daughter] is already seventy, that old lady was ... Well, she was a hard-working woman. She was a careful woman, otherwise she was all right, but she also knew. Well, I don't know, [they were talking] that she knew [how] to do [things]. (29)

While it was generally believed that the knowledge was transmitted within the family, there was no agreement regarding the exact manner of this transmission: some narrators believed it to be transmitted through teaching; others maintained that it was inherited (cf. Macfarlane 1970: 170; Briggs 2002: 19) and others still believed it to be transmitted via the magic book. However, there is no indication in our region that different concepts stemmed from different discourses rooted in different social structures (cf. de Blécourt 1999: 169), some narrators even wavered between different manners of transfer. Generally, the exact manner of transmission was not something that occupied people's minds—it was the magical knowledge ascribed to a particular family that mattered.

F: Was a witch already born with this knowledge?

I: No, but I shall say this: people say that it is also inherited.

F: Inherited?

I: Indeed. That a daughter inherits from her mother. Or if a mother teaches her, the daughter. (116)

- F: *How did witches acquire their knowledge?*
 I: *Well, they must have told someone from their kin.*
 F: *You mean someone from their family?*
 I: *Yes, yes! Yes.*
 F: *To their children?*
 I: *Yes. To their descendants, so that it was transmitted further. (91)*
- F: *Did that woman that was believed to be the witch differ from other women?*
 I: *No, not at all.*
 F: *Not?*
 I: *No, she just had that power, witchcraft power.*
 F: *Where did the power come from?*
 I: *Well, I don't know if anybody knows this. It was probably inborn. (72)*

Many narrators emphasised that the magic book, the source of witches' power, had to be handed over to another person before death, otherwise they could not die. The transmission of power, whether in the form of a book or through some other means, is a well-known motif in European folklore as well as in ethnographic records, for instance, in Germany (Kruse 1951: 17–18), Hungary (Dömötör 1973: 185), Denmark (Henningesen 1982: 131), Russia (Tokarev 1957: 26), and Spain (Rey-Henningesen 1996: 143–144).

- I1: *They say that all witches have their book and that they cannot die before they leave their vocation to their successor, right?*
 I2: *... yes, that when she took this from the old one, the old one could die.*
 I1: *... here there was this old woman ... And when Ana was dying, our father was there, he was chopping some wood, and he said he could hear her screaming in the house. And then that Marta entered the house, and everything calmed down and she [Ana] died and that witchcraft continued.*
 I2: *Yes, it's true, it did. (...)*
 I1: *She died hard, when the devil ... had her in his hands. [laughs]*
 I3: *Yes, yes, they used to gather, you know! People used to talk about this.*
 I1: *Yes, the old one was a witch and she couldn't die before giving that to someone else.*
 I3: *This was true that her mother couldn't die, and that he heard that, I also heard that woman screaming. Then they said: Do something that she would die, she cannot suffer like this, right? Do you remember this? Yes. And that she [Marta] came and that they were talking for a while very very quietly they were speaking, and then she [Ana] died. So they said. (53)*
- I: *Well, they say, I heard this, that if, for instance here in our village, if I knew how to bewitch, right, now you can't die unless you pass it on to someone else. Yes.*

That you can't die unless you pass it on to others, [and when you pass it on], then you can die. Well, we were told about a neighbour down here, right, when that old woman died, right? Then there was another [neighbour], when no vulture or any devil ever came to steal any chickens from them, nothing! While here [in our house] it did all the time! I said: What on earth do they know ...? They know something ... that nothing ever gets stolen down there, and here in our house it does. Yes. Here ... she must know something ... These are this kind of things. They say that you can't die unless you pass it to others. Then you can die.

F: *But how do you pass it on? Do you have to teach someone else, or do you give something to someone ...?*

I: *Well, when ... I can't help [you] with this.*

F: *You don't know?*

I: *Well, I don't know anything about it, how that could be passed on, no.*

F: *How does [the witch] choose the one to who she passes it on?*

I: *Well, that one is already always in the house ... To the oldest one, right? For instance ... now the mother will pass it to her daughter. But that is witchcraft. Yes.*

F: *So, daughters of witches were also witches?*

I: *Yes, of course.*

F: *The eldest daughter, or?*

I: *Yes, of course. It was passed to the eldest daughter. Yes. They also often told that up here there was one, whose mother was also ... hmm ... a witch ... and she also gave ... she passed it to her daughter so that she could die. But they were more than ninety years old. (60)*

DEATH AND FUNERALS

Narratives about village witches also reflect the widespread notion that witches die of painful death (cf. inf. 63, p. 81–82). Their funerals are said to be accompanied by unnatural phenomena, as the earth does not want to accept them due to their “sin” of dealing with witchcraft (cf. Dömötör 1973: 185; Tolstaja 1998a: 143).

Here a woman died fifteen, twenty years ago. She was a bit odd, really. She behaved strangely. For her people said she was a witch. And then there was another one, Helena, down there, also from S. They were friends and people always saw that woman in the mornings, coming home in the mornings. She had an apron which she always rolled upwards as if she was hiding something in it. One woman told me this and she strongly believed. I was laughing at her at the time, but she knew a lot about them [witches]. And when this woman died, she was dying for about fourteen days altogether. She couldn't die—neither live nor die. She was suffering terribly, was in a lot of pain. (107)

[They called this man] a witch. (...) He was such a strange man, he was in conflict with all the neighbours. He was no good. When he was already on his deathbed, he was screaming so loudly, he could not be left by himself for one minute. Somebody had to be with him all the time. Only bloody women were appearing to him. (36)

And when that woman died, that man, he was here with me in this kitchen, he said: I was there when she died, and the house and that addition shook so strongly! He said: I thought that everything would fall on us the moment she passed away. And everybody held her as a witch. I don't know... (107)

Moreover, witches seem to have been occasionally recognised as such precisely due to their prolonged and painful dying and strange phenomena occurring during their funerals, and could thus acquire the reputation even after their death:

I: Well, I never had anything to do with that [witchcraft]. If you [want to talk] about those things, you have to be prepared, [you have to think] about all of it ... It's not like [I could talk about it] today, when you picked me up on the road, it's not like that. [pauses] I shall tell you something now. When they were carrying that old Zoran, when he died. They used to carry the dead, yes. (...) And when they were putting him into the grave, it was thundering terribly out of the blue sky. (...) First there was lightning, right, but no thunder, there was only lightning, and then there was thunder. And he was a witch. All the devils came to wait for him. [laughs]

F: He was a witch, they said?

I: Yes, he was a witch. If there were no clouds, but it shook! (...)

F: How was he buried?

I: [He was] buried just like everyone.

F: Normally, at the cemetery?

I: Yeah, instead of burying him behind the fence, that witch! (...)

F: And how did they know that he was a witch?

I: Well, they only realised afterwards [after the funeral]. (115)

II: The other witch also died the same way, a cloud of soot rose out. And that was the proof that she was a witch. (30)

ATTITUDE TOWARDS VILLAGE WITCHES

When people suspected their neighbours of being witches, they would usually not dare to accuse them directly. You can never be sure, they said, so they kept their suspicions to themselves. They would maintain good

relationships with them, at least for the sake of appearance. The breaking off of relationships only happened when neighbours were identified as witches through the identification procedure, and even in that case they would not usually accuse them directly—however, the message their behaviour was communicating to the identified person was certainly unequivocal. The attitude towards village witches, on the other hand, was different: people tried to avoid any contact with them that was not absolutely necessary, which could ultimately lead to social ostracism. When avoidance was not possible, village witches were treated especially kindly, as people feared that if they took offence, they would seek revenge. Therefore, when they needed help with the farm work, everybody came to help them and communication with them was extremely polite. Moreover, children were specifically warned not to make fun of them or tease them.

Here it was Minka, people totally isolated her, saying that she was a witch ...
(31)

I: Well, I mean, I don't know what to say, we were not very much afraid of her, just that no one wanted [to have anything to do with her]. Our parents told us: Greet the aunt kindly, and never make fun of her! God forbids you make a fool of her or something! You should respect her. Well, she had a husband who was imprisoned in the First World War and was in prison in Russia for six years. And when he came back, he was a tailor, my father even told me that he himself said: Don't have any conflict with my Tereza as she knows more than baking pears.¹⁰ (25)

Although it seems that village witches were not always aware of their reputation (cf. inf. 77, p. 327)—during my fieldwork, I was several times told about a person with a reputation of a village witch, but when visiting them, I never observed any hint of their awareness of their reputation—some narrators mentioned that reprimands and public accusations were occasionally yet directly uttered at them:

F: Was she [the woman who was observed dragging the sheet over the dew of the narrator's grandmother's field] considered to be a witch by all in the village, or did she only have a conflict with your grandmother?

II: In the whole village. The whole village considered her as a witch.

F: And where did she live?

II: She lived in a forest, in a small cottage, and that house then burned, so she and her husband barely saved their skin. They barely escaped.

- F: *So she lived there with her husband?*
 II: *Yes, with her husband.*
 F: *Did she have any children?*
 II: *She did, but they did not come [to her] home. One of them was said to be of her kin. But probably she did not pass it on, because people say that you have to pass it on, otherwise you suffer on your deathbed, so probably she did not pass it on, since she suffered so much before she died.*
 F: *But if you do pass it on, is it easier to die?*
 II: *If you pass it on, you can die, you must have heard about that?*
 F: *Yes, I've heard that. What kind of relationship did people have towards her?*
 II: *Well, if they [the witch and her husband] asked for help, everyone came because they were so afraid. Everybody was so scared, they had such a great fear of them.*
 II: *But did she know that she was considered a witch?*
 F: *She knew, of course she knew. Often, when someone was drunk, some man, he said it right to her face. (53)*

When she [the narrator's grandmother with the reputation of a village witch] went through the village, she [another woman] liked to tease her, saying: Well, there you go again! She couldn't help making a remark each time she saw her going through the village with that stick. She started, but our granny served it back, they always played this game. And of course she called her [the narrator's grandmother] names: You old H., you witch! (167)

In the above text (cf. inf. 30, p. 317) we have seen that the village witch sometimes functioned as a scapegoat, enabling the release of tension when misfortune affected the community as a whole. In particular situations, when she was recognised as being guilty of misfortune, the suppressed fear and animosity against her were particularly likely to escalate, and the release could take on the form of an act of verbal violence (cf. Svetieva 2001: 154). Yet, even at times when no misfortune caused by the alleged witch's action occurred, the suppressed enmity and revenge may have escalated in suitable circumstances. The following narrative actually hints at a collective murder of a village witch, albeit already at the witch's deathbed:

- I *Well, and I heard something else. This one woman was stealing chickens. And that she couldn't die, she just couldn't die, right? And then one neighbour said: Well, of course, she [can't die because she] stole chickens! So they went, and they burned the chicken feathers on her breast, and then she expired. And then I thought to myself: of course she died if the feathers were burned on her, if the smoke went in her nose, and then she suffocated. [laughs] Well, and they said that after that she could die, right? It was like that, right, but if you think*

about it, right. Would you find it nice, if someone burned something under your nose? It would suffocate you too. [laughs] And she then died because of that. She liked to steal chickens alright. But someone quickly remembered, well, we're going to burn this fast, these chicken feathers, right, feathers, and that then it will be over. Of course it was over for her, right? I would [die] myself, if in the end someone burned feathers on my breast, and the burns ...

F: *But did they know exactly which women were witches?*

I: *Well, that woman, who they accused, right, the whole village knew that she had done it, they accused her. But she had, she really was always dressed like a real [witch] ..., and she had that face, and a wide apron, she wore a wide apron, and she was wringing her hands in it, and she came to the fire, and she said: What are you doing to me? That she couldn't leave, but she came to the fire. And she [lived] far away, not that close, so to say, not so [close] as the neighbour here, and she came close. This I would say, [that] was some eighty years ago, right? Well, she came up to the fire, when it burned. (33)*

The narrators below also claimed that only a few people came to the funerals of village witches, yet, although referring to other people's claim about their witchcraft activities, they both narrated about a witch with whom they had a personal "witchcraft relationship", so their claims may have been grounded in their personal conflicts:

I: *... she didn't die and she didn't die, for a long time she didn't die, because she ... was evil. While ... my husband ... he came here from the kitchen, I had the bed here ... and then he died quickly ... I said: Is something wrong? Nothing, nothing, it's nothing ... He died beautifully ... one moment he was still talking, and then he was already dead.*

F: *Did anything unusual happen at these witches' funerals?*

I: *Well ... nobody went to their funeral ...*

F: *They didn't go to her funeral?*

I: *Neighbours ... who knew what had happened, they didn't go to her funeral.*

F: *But that Marica [the witch she was talking about beforehand] from this village, did anyone go to her funeral?*

I: *Nobody went to her funeral either ... she had just three people, four, when they buried her.*

F: *Oh yes?*

I: *Who knew that she was [a witch]...*

F: *But why didn't they go to the funeral?*

I: *Well, because she could get them.*

F: *It would have been dangerous for them to go to the funeral?*

- I: *Yes ... they didn't want to ... some of them didn't want to. In our village ... they said: It's good that that devil took you, so we will be saved for the future, right?* (16)
- I: *We had a neighbour up here [points in the direction], but she died. She knew how to do it so that you were unlucky.*
- F: *How did she do that?*
- I: *Well, a lot of people said that ... if that woman came to somebody's house, right ... there would be [no] luck for a whole year. And nobody went to the funeral ... five people went to her funeral, no more.*
- F: *And the whole village knew that she was [a witch]?*
- I: *Yes, yes, the whole village knew. (...) Yes, she, yes, she ... knew ... Everyone avoided that woman.*
- F: *And what, something was unlucky afterwards?*
- I: *Not with livestock ... she, if she begrudged someone something ... she bewitched [them], right, and if they happened to have a pig, piglets, they didn't want to suckle, or somehow, so that they died of hunger. No ... nobody liked her ... only a few people liked, liked to talk with her, as if ... because they sensed that something would go wrong [if they didn't], so they were forced to speak with her.* (83)

*

In many respects, a village witch was an incarnation of the anthropological Other. By (often) residing at the very boundary of the village, village witches were by the very location of their home already marked by antisocial forces that characterised the periphery, by the otherworldliness coming from the other side of the community (cf. de Pina-Cabral 1986: 136¹¹; Alver and Selberg 1987: 24). Yet even when not geographically located at the periphery of a village, their marginal position in many other aspects substantially contributed to their liminal status. Indeed, their old age alone implied their progressive transference to the category of people leaning towards the other world. The women with the reputation of a village witch in our region were typically those who had reached or passed the age of menopause. While they were most usually referred to and described as “old(er) women”, one interlocutor specified that they were about 40–45 years old—the age that could directly point to the onset of menopause,¹² when the status of the woman changes from one who is able to conceive to one who became infertile (Héritier-Augé 1990: 292–293).

The stereotypical image of their appearance—old, ugly, with deformed bodily features—was yet another sign of their ambivalent, otherworldly nature: in Slavic traditional culture any anomaly in personal appearance

was considered to be the result of an incursion of the otherworld, or as its replica, lameness in particular (Tolstaja 1998b: 218–225). Even their status of being a widow or unmarried places them among liminal personalities; by becoming a widow they returned among the unmarried, that is, back into an unclear status (Lindow 1978: 59).

Their knowledge of healing techniques and remedies that distinguished them from others, the abilities they possessed that others did not, the magic book as a source of their knowledge, and inherited or learned magic power also made them liminal figures, as any above-average knowledge was considered ambiguous and associated with the supernatural, with the “other world”. A violation of social norms, and insubordination to the social expectations as regards their gender role, similarly placed some women at the social boundary: they became borderline figures in the community, imparted with the very same “otherworldly” characteristics as if they were located at its geographic boundary or possessed knowledge from the “otherworld”.

Behaviour, appearance, age, economic, social and marital status, knowledge, possession of a magic book and residence—all these factors could thus bring a woman to the brink of the community, to its social or symbolic boundary. There they could be different and could live by their own standards of behaviour, not conforming to the rules imposed on them by the society and outside its control; they could have less or more wealth and extra knowledge, and could deviate from the social norms in any other possible manner—but all this came at a price: a price of being an “outsider”, often excluded from the normal social interactions within the community, occasionally a scapegoat, or, at the very least, a constant subject of village gossip.

NOTES

1. A similar distinction was made by Lucy Mair in her research of African witchcraft (1969: 188, 196).
2. In using the term “neighbourhood witch” I follow Pócs’ term “neighbourhood witch” (which she also calls “social witch” and identifies with social or neighbourhood conflicts, whereby the source of the conflict is the breaking of a norm of coexistence—cf. 1999: 10) instead of using the term “conflict witch”, as conflicts between the individuals or their families, as we have seen earlier, are not a prerequisite for a neighbour to be found guilty of bewitchment, neither do they necessarily follow after the neighbour has been suspected.

Although neighbours were not the only accused—sometimes the family members and beggars coming from other places feature as the accused parties too—the number of these were negligible compared with neighbours. Apart from the neighbourhood witch, Pócs distinguished between two additional categories of witches: “magical” or “sorcerer” witches, i.e. magic specialists, and “supernatural” or “night” witches, i.e. “the demons of night visions and dreams” (cf. 1999: 10–11), but she does not mention the category of a village witch. Contrary to Davies, I also decided to rather use the term “village witch”, employed by de Blécourt (cf. 1999: 211), as village witches are not always, at least not overtly, treated as outcasts in the community. Davies also defines a third category of witches, the so-called “accidental witch” (1999a: 141, 148–149), mentioned earlier, which I do not consider a separate category—although (usually) a totally innocent person, she nevertheless figures in the domain of neighbourhood relationships and is (usually) recognised as “a witch” by a particular individual or family, and not the community as a whole.

3. Simpson suggests that the fact that nobody was reputed to be a witch in the village could mean that the “belief system” was crumbling at the time Favret-Saada did her research, and that people perhaps felt that they would not receive enough communal support if they spoke openly about it (1996: 12).
4. Narratives and gossip directed against a particular individual can be internally unifying, reinforcing internal cohesion of the community (Gustavsson 1979: 35, 78; Stewart and Strathern 2004: 32–33).
5. The same stereotypical image of a witch is evident even in much of contemporary popular culture and fairy-tales (cf. Schöck 1978: 116–117; Gerlach 1999: 964–965; Briggs 2002: 15–17).
6. In 1945, the Communist regime in Yugoslavia expropriated land and allowed landowners to retain only 35 hectares, whereas in 1953, with the second agrarian reform, all land that exceeded 10 hectares per person was nationalised.
7. Favret-Saada, on the contrary, writes that in the Bocage a witch was never a widowed, unmarried or a divorced person (1989: 42); this is perhaps due to the specific situation in the Bocage where, according to her, there were no village witches.
8. Briggs calls for a careful handling of the data as the reputation of the defendants often dated back to middle age or earlier.

9. This is the second narration of the same story by the same narrator that I tape-recorded in 2015. In her previous narration of the story from 2001, the narrator was talking about a boy who was completely physically deformed.
10. An expression that alludes to her knowledge of witchcraft.
11. De Pina-Cabral actually refers to the periphery of a parish, but the same ideas are in fact attached to the boundary of the village.
12. In contemporary Western society, menopause on average starts a bit later, however, in the society where poverty and exhaustion from hard work were an everyday experience, it probably started much earlier.

Night Witches

While the realm of a neighbourhood witch is a neighbour's body and household and that of a village witch a village community as a whole, there is a type of witch that does not interfere with any of these, but appears almost exclusively in the world outside the boundaries of both the homestead and the community: the most typical milieu of encounters with night witches is forest. I shall call this type of witches "night witches",¹ as the typical time for seeing and encountering these witches is night.² Narratives about experiences with night witches display a strong connection with the symbolic geography of space, a delineation of safe (house, homestead, and village) and dangerous spaces (extending beyond the homestead and village boundaries)³ and to a certain extent functioned as folkloric mechanisms for the erection and maintenance of spatial and temporal boundaries on the cognitive maps of community residents, boundaries which demarcated geographical areas of purity, liminality, and danger, as Narváez demonstrated for Newfoundland memorates about fairies (cf. 1991: 336–338, 354) that very much resemble the narratives about night witches in our region. Narratives about night witches thus helped people to orient themselves safely, gave them the awareness of permitted and forbidden movement in space and time, and also acquainted them with the consequences should they violate the rules.

The prevalent subjects of the encounters with night witches were men (but not exclusively), which, as mentioned above, is undoubtedly due to

the fact that men crossed the boundaries of the community much more often than women and, therefore, had more opportunity to enter the dangerous foreign space of night witches' congregations. The most typical deed ascribed to night witches is causing people to get lost, an experience they expressed in typical idioms, such as "witches carried me" (*coprnice so me nosile*), "witches drove me [off]" (*coprnice so me gonile*), "witches mixed me up" (*coprnice so me zmešale*), "witches led me" (*coprnice so me vodile*), or even "witches drove me" (as in "operate a vehicle") (*coprnice so me vozile*). When visible, night witches are usually described as congregating in the form of light, that is, as lights, fires, or flames, usually encountered in the forests, at the crossroads, and when observed from a distance, also above fields and meadows, in swamps, or near a body of water. However, the experience of getting lost due to the agency of witches was not necessarily always accompanied by a visual stimulus.

Narratives about night witches in the form of lights and about the experience of people being "carried by witches"⁴ are seldom touched upon in anthropological studies of witchcraft. Like village witches, this type of witch was obviously not known everywhere in Europe. When narratives about supernatural entities, for instance, ghosts or fairies, appearing in the form of lights and/or leading people astray, circulated in a certain region, these provided an explanation for a night-time experience, and the witchcraft explanation may have, therefore, not been needed. Yet even when researchers came across the narratives of this type of witch, they tended to exclude them from the general discussion on witchcraft. De Pina-Cabral, for instance, who during his field research in Alto Minho recorded narratives about night-time encounters with witches which seem to very closely resemble the narratives about night witches in our region, insofar as they too only appear at night and attack men, beguile their victims (by appearing as young girls dressed in white) and "have a tendency to carry bluish lights on their bare buttocks" (1986: 89), discussed them in a chapter on the relationship between men and women and sexuality, separately from the discussion on social relationships informed by accusations of bewitchment.⁵

According to de Blécourt, Daras' field records on witchcraft in Kempen, Belgium, suggest two separate bodies of narratives, one "which designated a particular, nocturnal male space outside the village" and other which tackled social relationships. In his discussion of space in Daras' witchcraft narratives, de Blécourt argues that in his as well as in the collections of other Flemish student collectors, "witchcraft space is articulated

in several distinct ways, depending on the genre of the particular narrative. In *mere stories* (in contrast to narrated events and memories), witches could be encountered in places beyond the village boundaries where men passed in the middle of the night. (...) *Personal experiences*, on the other hand, were a different matter entirely; here witches were situated in places where they should not have been” (2013: 366, 368; emphasis mine). He therefore distinguished the narratives about night encounters with witches from other narratives about (social) witchcraft on the basis of two criteria—spatial: contrary to “social” witches, night witches appear outside the village; and generic: the narratives about night witches, contrary to other bewitchment narratives which relate personal experiences, are “mere stories”.

However, while the spatial distinction is indisputable, it is a question whether the narratives on night witches, in contrast to those reflecting tensions in the community, were indeed “mere stories” for the narrators, or whether they perhaps only chose to narrate them as “stories” to the folklorists for any of the reasons discussed above.⁶ In Spanish Galicia, for instance, Marissa Rey-Henningsen, quite to the contrary, observed that narratives about nocturnal encounters with witches—there too mostly experienced by men—were typically narrated as personal experience narratives, and specifically identified first-person narration as being the main factor that distinguished these narratives from other witchcraft narratives: “On the whole, it is only the form and certain specific details that distinguish these stories *told as personal experiences* from those that are *told as tales, legends, and comic stories* (...)” (1994: 206; emphasis mine). Narratives about witches (*raganas*) leading people astray at night were also often told as memorates in Latvia (Laime 2013: 293). The legendary quality of narratives about night witches thus does not seem to be characteristic in all places where they were recorded. In our region, clearly, narratives about night witches were far from being “mere stories”: they generally expressed people’s personal experiences and were as a rule narrated as either as first- or second-hand memorates.

If genre is thus not everywhere the distinctive feature of the narratives relating the encounters with night witches, what about their influence on social relationships in the community—a feature that seems to distinguish this body of narratives from that of typical bewitchment narratives in Belgium? As de Blécourt writes, to know the identity of the witch was crucial when bewitchment was assumed, whereas “[n]arratives

about men who, in the middle of the night, ended up in groups of witches never identified individual witches” and “had hardly any bearing on the intricacies of bewitchments, which usually occurred inside the village boundaries” (2013: 366). Is the lack of impact of nocturnal experiences on social relationships within the community *the* element that distinguishes the narratives on night witches from other bewitchment narratives—and, therefore, the element that justifies their exclusion from the general discussion on witchcraft in a particular region? While it is true that narratives about night witches constitute a relatively homogenous body, marked by specific discursive features that clearly distinguish these narratives from those about neighbourhood or village witches, and while it is also true that night witches were generally not identified as particular persons from the community—instead, they were rather referred to as abstract entities and in the plural—several narratives nevertheless testify that the narrators in our region occasionally did directly link the lights observed at night with a concrete person, or ascribed the experience of getting lost to the agency of a particular woman in the community:

Well, this happened when I was down in K. Down here they had ... well, the barn is still standing there but it is empty, they already died. Yes, he had farm-hands come in. They had a lot of livestock down there. And they went into barn to tend the cows. But there was one [witch] in the vicinity. Then there were witches, and they led those farm-hands. Always at night, till the break of day. Ah, they are dead now, that one and that woman who was a witch is dead now, too. They all died. But I knew them. And when daylight came they let him go. And he ... he recognized her, this witch. Yes, he tried to oppose her ... They even took his boots off. And he went after her and told her: I recognized you. You do this one more time I will hit you and leave you there. (...) And since then there have been no more problems. (115)

II: Yes, women are to blame (...) There was this guy who was running a butcher's shop. He got a fine sirloin to take home, and some wine, too. So he came to a creek and fell in, he was totally muddy. When his wife saw him come home so dirty, she was scared and wondered where he had been. Bloody witch, he replied [laughter]: All night long she was leading me here and there (...) I remember her, she was an old witch ... a real one, with a hooked nose, she really looked like a witch, and one of her teeth, the long one, was sticking out. They called her Vera ... Otherwise, she was very good-hearted, but everyone said she was a witch, I don't know why. She would always give you things, but people said she had some special look and that she could do this. (30)

- F: *What about, for example, was there a woman, or a man with powers, that made him able to bewitch, or something like that, have you ever heard anything like that?*
- II: *Yes, up here they said so. There was a village.*
- I2: *On that hill there [she points to it].*
- II: *On this hill, they said it was Katarina B. I myself saw it that she was [a witch], when I was small. One evening, quite late at night, you could see the lights. Here, and there, all over the place [points with her hands to imitate the flashing lights], the lights were spreading to the other house, you see. Yes, that's how it was. They said that Katarina was ruling around. I was really scared of this old lady, she was really very old, and had this long face [points with her hands, making faces], more pig-like than human. (44)*

In addition, narrators referring to night witches recognised as humans occasionally employed the idiom typical of the discourse on social witchcraft, that is, that “they knew”:

- II: *And up there, there was also a little house, up on that hill. [talking about a house of a woman who was taken as a witch] We had to go to a language course. And so did our neighbour. While she took one way home, the two of us, we took another. And then we came to the crossroads, and she [the neighbour] saw something going in front of her, so she went toward that house, right to the valley. She was walking all night long and came into a garden, but couldn't find the way out until daylight. Then she could see, when the dawn came. There are plenty of stories like this. They couldn't do it to everyone, but they did mix up some of them. I don't know if this is true.*
- F: *But how did they mix them up?*
- II: *She was just walking, just went on. She said that she saw some light and just followed that light. And she came to that house and inside the garden, but there was no tenant to be seen.*
- F: *But during the day these were ordinary women?*
- II: *Yes, of course they were normal women, but some of them knew this. Some knew. (34)*

In fact, if one places several narratives on witches in succession, a gradual transition from narratives about social to narratives about night witches becomes increasingly clear. While the narrator in the interview below refers to a particular woman from a village, observed while stoking a fire at the crossroads:

- I: *So my father too, when he went to work as a carpenter, right, he also went down from V. by the road over the stream ... A stream ... I don't know what*

it's called, an ordinary stream, right, he goes down to the stream and then he goes up towards our house and then a hot wave comes towards him, he had no idea what it was ... And some people also saw shining women at night around here.

F: *Where did they see that, where did this happen?*

I: *Down in T.*

F: *Right in the village?*

I: *No, no, no, there was one there where we went up to the vineyard, right, and we went by the path, and there was a crossroads here, one path went there and one went up towards our vineyard. There at that crossroads a woman always burned [something] at night from midnight ... from eleven to midnight.*

F: *What did she do?*

I: *Burned, burned.*

F: *She burned a fire?*

I: *Yes, a fire, yes.*

F: *And she was a live woman?*

I: *Live.*

F: *Why did she burn [the fire]?*

I: *[secretively] She knew something.*

F: *Did people know who this woman was?*

I: *Yes, we knew. I know we went with my sister once from R., right, in the autumn, and she also came down the path and we were talking all the time while walking, and my sister knew how she was, and she said [to her]: Accursed witch, she said, what is she looking for, and does evil to people! And she was completely quiet ... This I know.*

F: *And were there any consequences of her burning?*

I: *Yes ... (9)*

... in the following interviews, witches making a fire and gathering around it are already referred to in the plural, as is typical of the discourse on night witches:

I: *Yes, up there, in the wood (...) These were ... These were witches, they burned fires during the night. When I was grinding at night, all nights before Christmas (...), I looked through the window and I saw ... I saw through the window how they were burning the fires. (...)*

F: *Why were they burning? What did people say?*

I: *Well, I don't know why. We weren't that smart. Even there up from Z., there was a woman—they said it was Nada, and that she was burning fires in the woods with witches. (129)*

F: *So witches did harm to people or ...?*

- I1: *Well, some did and some didn't. Some did good. But I don't know about these [latter]. Mainly [they said] that they walked around and they saw them from the distance.*
- F: *And what did they do?*
- I1: *Burning.*
- F: *What?*
- I1: *They were burning fires and dancing around that fire.⁷*
- F: *At night?*
- I1: *At night, at night! (105)*

... whereas in the next narrative the fire that witches are burning and dancing around transforms into lights, the usual form of night witches:

- I2: *[The witches were] burning ... fire, and then they were dancing around that fire.*
- F: *At night?*
- I2: *At night, yes, at night.*
- F: *Is there one such place where this was said to be happening? Did people say (...)?*
- I2: *Now that you mention the place, in V., here, yes, my parents and grandparents used to work for some noble family in V. And once at night, one girl woke up and went to the toilet. There was a fireplace, before the cellar, a big one, and she didn't dare, of course, to go out, as the toilet was outside. Well, so she said she didn't dare to go out. Then everybody in the house woke up and they were watching that fireplace. Suddenly it spread around and reached the whole valley of V., and the lights went all the way down. I was told this by my ancestors, my parents and grandparents, so I believe that this is how it happened. But if you say this to anyone today, they will deny it. However, I firmly believe them. But of course, I have never experienced anything like that. (105)*

Finally, it is but a step to the typical narratives in which night witches themselves gather in the form of lights, sometimes small flames or fires, whereas a fire around which witches gathered and danced is not mentioned:

- I1: *These lights supposedly moved extremely fast. And yes, people used to say that the witches, these witches had gatherings.*
- F: *Where?*
- I1: *Down there, towards one of our fields, here. (...) Where the asphalt road ends, there is a road, and that is on the other side. There you can go and see where the witches had gatherings. People never liked to go over there. That's what*

I remember quite well. So, if we had to go to the vineyard, for we have a vineyard, you see ... if we had to go there at night, we went that way, and the neighbour went down there—to avoid the place where the witches usually had gatherings. (...) They gathered in the evening, when it was dark. In the darkness of the evening, you know. (53)

I: Yes, there were places, people said, where they [the witches] came together.

F: Really? Where?

I: This happened also up here on P. Lots of lights were there, all together at first, and then they spread around. One went on one side of the ridge, and the other went on the other, so they were not walking together.

F: But why were they gathering?

I: They were certainly discussing where they would go and all that, who knows? (...). Jesus, tonight I'm going to dream about it! (60)

Since witchcraft is intrinsically linked to misfortune, the finding that night witches were not blamed for misfortune was yet another argument that seemed to justify the exclusion of these narratives from the general discussion of witchcraft. De Pina-Cabral thus writes that (night) “witches are not blamed for general cases of misfortune”—and yet, in the same breath he admits that if men fall into their hands, “severe harm, even death, may befall them” (1986: 89). But what is “severe harm, even death” other than misfortune? While it is true that night witches were not blamed for causing economic misfortune, that is, the illness or death of livestock, damage to the crops or animal products, they were certainly blamed for causing personal misfortune; but “social” witches too were blamed for causing personal misfortune, such as disease, paralysis, tensions in relationships, and even death. Misfortune is thus ascribed to night witches and social witches alike, the only difference being the type of misfortune that night witches, compared to social witches, were blamed for (loss of orientation, and possibly related fear and exhaustion), its duration (in most cases misfortune caused by night witches was temporarily limited to only a single night) and the location where it occurred (as a rule outside the boundary of the homestead and the village, usually in a forest).

If therefore, in spite of the thematic, spatial and discursive specifics of the narratives on night witches, whose realm—in contrast to that of social witches—was (mostly) limited to the nocturnal space outside the boundary of the homesteads and the village, neither the genre of these narratives nor the night witches’ association with misfortune, nor their effect on the social relationships in the community, clearly differentiate this body of

narratives from other witchcraft narratives, there is no reason to exclude them from the general discussion of witchcraft in our region. Moreover, as the agents in these narratives were explicitly called “witches”, and people explicitly ascribed these experiences to witchcraft, they must be treated as a part of people’s everyday reality which they experienced, interpreted, and explained in the context of witchcraft.

THE APPEARANCE OF NIGHT WITCHES

Witches in the Form of Lights

We have seen that (night) witches in Portugal were described as girls carrying bluish lights on their buttocks (de Pina-Cabral 1986: 89–90). In Galicia, Spain, witches could be seen floating through the air at night like a row of lights or a torchlight procession (called *santa compañía*)⁸ (Rey-Henningsen 1994: 199, 206). Lights, indeed, sometimes also described as small flames or fires, were the main form in which night witches, when they appeared as visible entities (which was not always the case), were described in our region as well.⁹ The descriptions of the lights vary with regard to colour, size, number, and other details, yet a sensation of light is a constant in these narratives; only exceptionally was an accompanying auditory sensation mentioned. People usually observed or encountered several lights, but their number was rarely precisely defined; when it was, the numbers mentioned were three, five, six, or seven. In general, people usually simply spoke of lights in the plural (one light appeared only exceptionally). The colours of the lights were, in approximately the same proportion, described as yellow (like the light from a light bulb), blue, red, or green, but most often they were described as being of all colours (when listed, beside all these also including pink, violet, and white). The size of the lights in the descriptions varied as well: most commonly they were compared to the size of fireflies; other descriptions mention comparisons in size with light bulbs, walnuts, balls, and flashlights.

I: *I was sitting on a cart and they brought the fodder. Then I waited by the field near the hill, and they were rushing with three pairs up the hill ... while I was waiting for the cart to move (...) they drove two carts away with oxen ... (...) We went up the hill with the first cart, with my mum, and my brother, and he said: Stanka, don't be afraid, don't be. I can see everything, I see everything [imitating him] (...) And then I took hold of*

the reins ... Here I'm holding them, and they come ... these seven lights ... white, blue, green, all kinds of lights. They came directly towards me ... across the village ... ummmm [imitating them] I couldn't understand a thing, what they were talking about. A little away there was a creek ... we called it V. ... and he said to me: Don't be afraid, even I can see everything ... I will show them the right place, let me go down ... just remain calm. [imitating him] He thought they would kidnap me, or what the hell was he thinking ... I was still young, you see, but I was eleven, twelve years old, and still remember what happened ... Please don't be afraid, I am here by your side ... don't you worry [imitating him] ... I was holding the reins so hard, I thought my hands would fall off [laughter], I was firmly holding the reins ... (...) Then we heard the splashing sounds in the creek: Splash, splash, splash! [imitating the sounds]

F: *They were walking like this?*

I: *Yes, through the creek ... there they were shining a little ... with their lights ... I saw those who took this ... this kind of lights ... blue, pink, white ... there were all these lights. (...) They came across ... from one village ... they came across the hill and down, not only up the hill, but also on the plane, so they arrived near my carts ... I had to take care of the carts ... but I couldn't help it if they decided to take the carts away [laughter], yes ... when they went away, ... they were gone... And the lights were gone ...*

F: *So you heard their steps in the creek?*

I: *I heard everything!*

F: *And the lights were shining up there?*

I: *Yes, here and there below and above them, they were shining as if ... well, as if someone was shining inside of them on purpose. There were seven lights. They were storming about together. (...) The lights were shining and you could hear when they were ... murmuring ... they used some other language.*

F: *They spoke a different language?*

I: *A different language. Yes.*

F: *Not Slovenian?*

I: *Nooo, not at all.*

F: *So you actually heard them talk to each other?*

I: *Well ... yes, this mmm [imitating their speech] ... they ... started whining, humming ... around the cart... [laughter]... and I was... well, afraid. You know what ... a twelve-year-old child ... is afraid of such things ... I could see them, see the lights shining, but couldn't see anyone walking ... Yes, how they were moving, these shining lights ... Where from? [laughter]. That's what I experienced ... going out alone ... how many times have I told this to people, but all they said was: Well, this can't be true, this just can't be true. How come it can't be true when I heard it myself ... both heard and seen it, yes! (16)*

I1: I don't know. I could go by at any time during the night, and so ... I never saw anything. But there were people who claimed that they saw witches going around this chapel with lights. We had a carpenter here. He said that he used to work up there for someone called Jakob. He went home and suddenly lots of lights swiftly flew by, and I don't know what. He said they mixed him up. Things like that, you see, so I was listening to hear whether he made it. Who knows if it's true. I never saw anything. So I don't know if it's true. (28)

In our region, lights were typically understood as witches; only exceptionally were they also interpreted as fairies (*vile*) (cf. also Primc 1997: 115, 128), and once as the wild hunt (*divja jaga*). In the latter case, they were linked with auditory stimuli, especially the sounds of gunshots, and dogs' barking, which are otherwise not characteristic of the night witches, yet typical of the wild hunt phenomenon. On the other hand, a sensation of light is not generally characteristic of wild hunt, and it seems that in this narrative the two traditions actually intertwined.

How exactly the people understood the nature of the relationship between lights and witches is unclear: witches were either envisioned as carrying lights, having lights on their buttocks, transforming into lights, or else the light was linked to them in some other way—in general, again, just as in the case of the relationship between a witch and an animal, what the link between the witch and the light actually was, was not something that would occupy the narrator's mind:

I: (...) If the [witches] were walking around at night, they also used lights. They had—what do you call it—well, the byre lights, oil lamps. They used these lamps—lanterns, so they could see where to go. When they had something they wanted to protect, they turned off the lights to avoid being seen.

F: But why did they meet at all?

I: From pure malice. (117)

F: What about lights, have you ever heard about them?

I: Yes, someone said that they [witches] had them hanging from their waist.

F: Hanging?

I: Hanging, yes, from the waist. But I have never seen one. (115)

(...) when they had these shining buttocks which were visible at night, they said these were ... that these were witches, you see. Anyway, I didn't believe any of this. (12)

- I: [Talking about witches.] *Even here in our house our mum was telling us that, she said that umm ... her brother came... he was supposed to go home. He went home, you see. And also, nothing but trees and bushes, so he couldn't get through, you know. Anywhere! Next morning, daylight came and suddenly he was on a nice road and everything, so he could go home. That's it!*
- F: *So what did he say, why couldn't he find the way, because of witches, or ...?*
- I: *Well, of course ... when they blocked his way! He just couldn't, he was unable to come home.*
- F: *But did he know who these women were?*
- I: *Well, up there they had something inside ... they were such old women. People said they were all witches. They lived that way up from us, on top of V. Well, that's how it was.*
- F: *And these were the women who lived there, it was their home?*
- I: *Of course, yes, of course. And those old women were witches. Yes!*
- F: *But how did you know they were exactly these women?*
- I: *Well, he knew them, and they had all kinds of ointments and such things, so they could do this, you know? Our father, my dad also saw them going down there, you see ... he saw lights down from our neighbour's house, and then he screamed: You bloody witches, you will not win! They were quickly coming towards us ... You should have seen our daddy smash the door, so they couldn't break in,¹⁰ when they ...*
- F: *Who came? The lights?*
- I: *The lights, well, of course, the lights came ... Just try, you bloody witches, you are not coming anywhere close to me! And he barely managed to get inside, to close the door, otherwise they would have caught him.*
- F: *Do you think that these women who lived up there—did they transform into lights, or did they send lights, or how was it?*
- I: *They must have, they knew how to do it, so they did it, yes.*
- F: *But these lights weren't them, or were they?*
- I: *They were them all right, but they knew how to do it, to pretend that they were going, well, they bewitched this.*
- F: *And could he hear any steps, did they speak, or did he only see them?*
- I: *He just saw them, just lights and such things, nothing else. He only saw the lights, well, that's all. Now what happened here in the past, it is gone today, because all of them died, you see. They were so evil, they just wanted to touch that man, and who knows what they would do to him, so that he couldn't go back or forth, and keep him there inside ... umm ... like a sort of punishment for him, I would say ... yes ... nothing else, no. (60)*
- I: *In the past, you know, there were witches, but I have never seen them. But my father and my husband, they saw them, as he [the husband] lived on the other*

side of the hill [before they married]. They were there, the three of them ... There was also this ... neighbour's mother. There were lights flying on the leaves at night. So when he was at home, he saw directly down to the neighbour's place and he saw those lights on the threshold, and he was shivering.

F: *That was that witch [she was talking about before], living in that house?*

I: *Yes. That house. And she was doing witchcraft at night. But I don't know that.*

F: *So then she changed into light,¹¹ or what?*

I: *Well, it seems so. (...)*

F: *What were these lights like?*

I: *Well, sort of white, reddish, yellow, lights of all kinds.*

F: *Different colours?*

I: *Yes, different colours.*

F: *What was their size?*

I: *Just like a tiny little light, so that you couldn't see the size.*

F: *Was it only one, or were there more?*

I: *Yes, also, one light here, it was flying around and across like this, well it is hard to say.*

F: *Was the witch at home when this little light was flying around?*

I: *Well, not at all. Definitely not. She certainly transformed [into the light].*

(29)

The use of the identification of the human witch behind the luminous shape was mentioned only exceptionally: while the identification in the first case seems unintentional, in the second it is probably intentional, aimed at forcing the witch to reveal her human form. This would suggest an underlying conceptualization of the physical transformation of the witch into light, or perhaps her soul journey in the form of light, yet these are the only two narratives referring to the identification that we recorded, and the procedure is otherwise unknown in our region.

I2: *My neighbour went into the army, he is dead now. He was born the same year as I was, 1912, and went into the army in Serbia. One night he was keeping watch and he saw some blue lights flying back and forth. And then I don't know how it went, but he fired a shot and then went to see what it was, and it was a completely naked woman, and he found her there then. And then he said that that was a witch [laughter].*

II: *Was that Vojko?*

I2: *Yes, and he said it's the truth. He said, if I saw that woman I would not shoot her, and maybe it could be something else but it was not anything else but a woman who flew here and there with some blue lights.*

F: *Did this naked woman in fact fly?*

I2: *Yes, she was completely naked.*

F: *But was she flying?*

I2: *Yes, yes. (38)*

I1: *He recognized them [witches]. But I heard a different story.*

I2: *Well, he recognized them, and they were all local women.*

I1: *They were all neighbours, weren't they?*

I2: *Yes, neighbours ... from that village ...*

F: *How did he recognize them?*

I2: *Well, he went there and so (...). He threw the rosary into that ... and then the persons appeared, you see. Before that, all he could see were just flames. (62)*

Narratives about supernatural lights observed at night, or their interpretation as being *witches*, for that matter, are by no means limited to our region. In addition to Spain and Portugal, in Serbia narratives about witches flying at night and glowing like fire were likewise known (Karadžić 1972: 301–302; Čajkanović 1994/5: 219). Lights were in some way related to witches in various other parts of Slovenia as well. In Trnovec ob Savinji, the blue lights which darted to and fro during the evening were believed to be witches (Hudales and Stropnik 1991: 56). Lights which were seen to fly during the night were interpreted as witches in the upper Kolpa Valley, in Haloze, Gabrovčec, and Kal (Žele 1996: 31; Primc 1997: 181–185, 187, 190–197, 211, 215, 229, 232, 242; Gričnik 1998: 86; 146, 160; Kastelic and Primc 2001: 52, 54). An Istrian narrative from Butari tells about *štrige* (witches) who, after attempting to attack a man at a crossroads, changed into lights and disappeared (Tomšič 1989: 49).

Much more often, however, narratives about supernatural lights, abundant in folklore collections in Slovenia and elsewhere in Europe, associate them with the *souls of the dead*,¹² usually restless souls,¹³ which are, according to traditional conceptions, forced to remain in a liminal reality between this and the other world after death, and are unable to proceed to the world of the dead—while, of course, no longer belonging to this world either. In the Catholic interpretation, these souls typically became souls “in purgatory”, that is, cleansing themselves of their sins in purgatory. As early as the eleventh century, Tiethmar of Merseburg reported ghosts in the form of “mysteriously burning lamps” rising at night at churchyard cemeteries in Waldsleben, Magdeburg, Deventer, and Rotmersleben (in Hornaday 2002: 81). Narratives from the Slovenian Prekmurje region,

close to the Hungarian border, about *brezglavec* (a headless man), believed to be the soul of a deceased child who died without being baptised, are highly reminiscent of the narratives about night witches in our region: in the evening, when it is getting dark, or early in the morning before dawn, one can see a bright light, like a burning candle, flying over the earth at a high speed (Kühlar 1911: 57). In the same area narratives refer to *džileri* (engineers) and *méraši* or *merari* (surveyors, geodesists), observed at crossroads lighting their way with lanterns, or appearing in the form of glowing beings, believed to be the souls of the engineers and surveyors who did not properly survey the land and who after death are obliged to walk from hell back to earth to survey in order to make up for the evil they caused during their lifetimes (Rešek 1995: 61–62, 67, 69). Narratives recorded among the Slovenian minority living in the Zila (Gail) Valley in Austria tell of poor souls in the form of countless blue tongues of flame that the Pope had banished to the mountain rocks until they repent their sins (Kelemina 1997: 123). In the same region, the “souls from purgatory” were believed to reveal themselves as wandering lights (Zablatnik 1990: 127). In Mojstrana, in northwestern Slovenia, narratives relate about the souls of the damned souls which rise up from the swamps in the evening in the form of little flames and rule the world all night (Bezljaj 1976: 66). In eastern Styria such wandering souls were called *svečniki* (candles)—these were believed to be the souls of dead people who during their lives moved boundary stones, buried ill-gotten money, or died of violent deaths (Kelemina 1997: 21). In Carinthia, the lights which move from hill to hill at night were believed to be pious souls which have no peace and are pleading for help (Repanšek 1995: 92, 94). In the Bohinj basin in the northwestern part of Slovenia, in northern Slovenia above Dravograd, as well as in Pivka in southwestern Slovenia, narratives tell about “souls doing purgatory” which people observed at night in the form of small lights (Cvetek 1993: 154; Žele 1996: 32; Glasenčnik 1998: 22–23). In the area of Tolmin, on the border with Italy, lights, flying through the air at night, especially in highland meadows, called *vidanic*, were believed to be “pious souls” (Dolenc 1992: 41, 111). In the Škofja Loka hills and the Gorenjska region in northwestern Slovenia, the lights which move to and fro above puddles and pools, usually called *védomci*, *vedúnci*, or *videnci*, were held to be the souls of children who died without being baptised, souls of accursed people, or struggling souls (sometimes also the souls of living people) (Wiesthaler 1883: 565; Dolenc 2000: 29–31). In Šmartno pri Litiji in central Slovenia, lights flowing from one castle to another

through the air, called *svetinje*, were believed to be the souls of the dead who had to atone for their sins (Dolšek 2000: 61).

Narratives in the Kordun region in Croatia describe “wild fire”—green flames which can be seen in meadows and forests and were understood to be the souls of suicides. In Sisak, light which moved around at night was thought to be the bones of the dead blown by the wind. In Lika, Croatia, the dead returning home from the grave with candles are called *mrtničko svitlo* (the light of the dead) (handwritten materials collected by Dražen Nožinić, from the collection of Ljubinko Radenković). On the Croatian island of Brač, *macići* (munchkins), the souls of unbaptised children, were also pictured in the form of moving flames (Bošković-Stulli 1974–1975: 145). In Croatian Istria and among Croatians in the Drava Region of Hungary, “candles” observed while burning in the twilight were interpreted as the souls of the dead (Bošković-Stulli 1959: 141; Franković 1990: 135–137). Narratives from Bosnia from the nineteenth century likewise referred to the flames appearing at night as the “glowing souls of deceased people” (S.M. 1889: 334).

In Czech folklore, the souls of the unbaptised children can turn into “children of fire” after death, while the soul of an adult unclean dead can become *obnivec* (fiery man), *světloša* (light bearer), or appear as a small man carrying a lantern (Navrátilová 2004: 296–307). Polish *nocnice*, small wandering fires, were said to be the souls of unbaptised children or girls who died before their wedding (Vinogradova 2000: 20, 88–89). Russian legends describe small fires appearing above the graves of dead sinners who cannot enter heaven; such fires also frequently appear in places where murdered people and unbaptised children are buried, as well as in the forests (Vlasova 1995: 61; Tolstoj 2000: 76). Russian legends from the Tambov district tell of “candles” appearing at the graves of suicides and drowned people (Radenković 2008: 355). Narratives recorded in the Grodnenska district in Belarus speak of so-called *bludjačyj ogon* (wandering fire), tongues of fire which appear above graveyards and whose colours constantly change. In fact, in all Slavic folklore one finds narratives about wandering fires, flames, or lights, understood to be the souls of dead who could not find their way to the other world, usually observed in the “open” spaces such as forests, meadows, swamps, graveyards, and crossroads (cf. Radenković 2008: 355; Vinogradova 2013).

Yet these narratives are found frequently not only in Slavic countries, but elsewhere in Europe as well. Swedish *gäst*, appearing in the form of a flame or a rolling ball, was considered to be a soul of a deceased person (af

Klintberg 1968). In Germany, the wandering lights called *Irrlichter* were believed to be the souls of unbaptised children (Röhrich 1966: 34), and in some areas of Germany, lights in forests, in fields, near (suspected) buried treasures, and so forth, are interpreted as spirits (cf. Uther 2003: no. 178, 264, 409, 440). In the West County of England, *Pisgies*, that is, little “white moths” that flutter about the grass in the evening, were thought to be the souls of unbaptised children. *Will-o’-the-Wisps*, *Spunkies*, *Pinkets*, *Jacky Lanterns*, *Joan o’ the Wad*, and other supernatural beings were also associated with lights in various ways—Spunkies and pinkets were considered the spirits of unbaptised children, and Will-o’-the-Wisps of the sinners (usurers) who hoarded gold during their lifetimes, or of people who unfairly moved boundary stones during their lifetimes or were too clever for the devil and could not enter either hell or heaven (Briggs 1967: 52). The Welsh *Cannwyll gorff* (corpse candle) was considered a premonition of death, but many also observed candle-light emerging from the body of the doomed person, following the same route the corpse would take from the home to the cemetery (Gwyndaff 1994: 237–238).

Luminous phenomena were also often associated with *fairies*, yet the same supernatural entities were sometimes interpreted as fairies and sometimes as the souls of the dead, and there is often no clear delineation between the two categories. In fact, Katharine M. Briggs argues for a close connection between the narrative traditions on the dead (ghosts) and fairies as far as their actions and behaviour are concerned, as well as for the connection between these two and witches (1967: 15, 19, 52, 54, 106–107; cf. also Pócs 1989: 8–9, 27–29; Jenkins 1991; Mathisen 1993: 23; Davies 1999b: 185; Wilby 2000; Henderson and Cowan 2001: 137–138; Goodare 2014: 162). In Sluagh Sidhe in Ireland, fairies (“the People from the Hills”) were pictured as carrying lights, and the same tradition about “fairy lights” was recorded on Edenappa townland (Briggs 1967: 19). In Morwenstow, narratives tell about “an elf with a lantern in his hand, made of a campanula, out of which streamed a greenish-blue light” (Briggs 1967: 132; cf. also 135). As already recorded at the end of the seventeenth century, the Scottish “spirit”¹⁴ Brownie was believed to be able to shape shift, among others into a ball of fire, and the light on the hill seems to indicate fairies’ presence (Goodare 2014: 150, 157).

It is impossible to present all of the European folklore data on *ignis fatuus*¹⁵ here, but I hope this suffices for the recognition of close parallels among supernatural luminous phenomena in European folklore. The precise description of the phenomena may vary from a simple flash of light

which moves around, to anthropomorphic or even theriomorphic (e.g. in the tradition of African Americans) beings carrying lanterns or torches, or with light arising from them (Wells Newell 1904: 45–46; Hall 1958: 128; Hand 1977: 226–228), yet, the seeing of *lights*¹⁶ is fundamental throughout the entire tradition. The main difference lies not in the outward appearance of the lights, but in their *interpretations*—nevertheless, according to Wayland D. Hand, the link between the lights and the notion of restless souls, condemned to tarry on earth, is clearly established (1977: 230; cf. also Wells Newell 1904).

Witches as Laundresses

Only in the part of our region that was closest to the border with Croatia were night witches sometimes observed or heard doing laundry by the creeks, rivers, wells, or even at places where there was no water, but these narratives were very rare in comparison to those about witches in the form of lights.¹⁷ Usually, their presence was only assumed on the basis of the sound of their beating laundry against the stones—unlike in the memorates on night witches, fairies, or souls of the dead in the form of lights, where it was the visual stimulus that was crucial, in these narratives it is thus the auditory stimulus (the sound of beating laundry) that played the main role.

11: There where I was, there was also some water (...) There was a spring. And we were going to wash there. I also went sometimes. (...) At night, the witches did that job, so you could hear it far around at night, how they were doing the laundry at night. (148)

My husband said that once he went to a fair. (...) He took his pigs there. Then in that castle he saw three women who were ... There was no water to be seen anywhere, but he heard them washing something. And (...) they said to him that if he betrayed them, he wouldn't be allowed to get out of the house when the sun goes down. So he didn't. He was afraid to tell this to anyone. Only later, when these women died,¹⁸ then he said: It was this one, and that one, and that one! (...) He just said there was no water to be seen anywhere, but still he heard them washing. How could that be? (83)

Narratives about witches doing laundry are also known not only in several other parts of Slovenia, mostly in northeastern Slovenia, i.e. in Prekmurje and Haloze, but also in Otlica in the south (Rešek 1979: 150;

Černigoj 1988: 25, 27; Gričnik 1998: 158; 160, 162). In the early twentieth-century Latvian memorates, the same activity was ascribed to night witches (*raganas*), and, like night witches in our region, they too were often only heard, not seen (Laime 2013: 292–293). Laime argues that the tradition of night washers/beaters, mainly known in Catholic countries, stems from the Catholic concept of soul purification after death, and is connected to “folk Christianity” which interpreted them as the “demonised souls of dead women, who had undergone after death the process of purification on earth, as they had either met a bad end or had sinned during their lifetime” (2013: 302). If this interpretation is correct, there is an additional link between the narratives of night laundresses and those about night witches in the form of lights which too are closely associated with the notions about restless souls, according to the *interpretatio christiana* understood as souls cleansing themselves in purgatory.

THE EXPERIENCE OF “BEING CARRIED BY WITCHES”

The experience of getting lost in the woods was the most common experience ascribed to the agency of night witches, referred to by expressions such as “witches carried me” (alternatively: “led me”, “chased me”, “mixed me up”, and “drove me”). As mentioned above, the experience was sometimes related to visual stimuli, described as lights, fires, and flames, but it just as often occurred without being accompanied by any visual sensation. However, one thing that is common to almost all the accounts of the experience is its spatial and temporal context: as a rule it occurred outside the village, typically in a forest, occasionally at a crossroads or near a body of water, which too were often located in the forest. The place where the experience occurred was often not an unknown territory for the person involved—in fact, the narrators usually swore that they walked the same path time and time again, until one night they suddenly did not know which way to go. The experience as a rule occurred at night (sometimes starting at dusk) and usually only lasted until dawn at the latest, or ceased at the sound of the first cocks crowing, church-bells, when people woke up in the morning, or when somebody rescued them; on rare occasions the “victims” also managed to “break the spell” during the night by themselves.

The core of the experience as a rule consists of complete disorientation and confusion as to one’s whereabouts. This, however, could

be experienced in various ways: the victims either wandered about the forest for the entire night in a completely wrong direction and could not find the way; they continuously walked in circles; they ended up in bushes, thickets, and brambles and could not find their way out; or else, they *only felt* as if they were trapped in the bushes and could not continue on their way, but in the morning found out that they were standing on a clear path the whole time; or they suddenly felt as if they were lifted and transported and consequently found themselves at an utterly different place. Let us first look at some narratives exemplifying each type of experience:

The Victims Cannot Find Their Way

I1: He married into our family, you know [pointing to her husband]. And he lived further down there at the foot of this hill, you know. In order to come up he had to go through a forest, and he said: You know, the witches mixed me up. He just walked through the forest, and he didn't know where the path was. When they were ... there was a meadow down there, you know, and there was a forest in between, and up here was this, our hill. And he said that he just kept on walking and did not find the path in the forest. When he went through the forest up the hill, you know. (81)

Oh, if our old grandpa was still alive—he was a hundred years old when he died! Yes, he. He was often telling us how they ... I don't know, well, if it was true, that the witches led him, you see. For example, he went down there through that wood, and he always saw something, like lots of small lights, different lights were flashing around him and then he couldn't make it out of that wood. He said that then he just had to overnight there and, of course, he probably had a drink or two, well, I don't know where they came from, but he was sure that there was something and that he couldn't come out of the wood. That wood is not far from our home, down there, and he said that it was impossible to come out of that wood. People then said that there were these witches ... I wouldn't say. But I did hear that dry wood was cracking and throwing out sparks, perhaps it was the sparks. However, he said that he was so impaired that he was unable to find the way. (96)

I2: But another time (...), another time I went right there on my way home from work, but then I went at twelve o'clock. I walked there many times, many times every day (...) to work and back, you know, but suddenly

I can't find my way home, suddenly I can't find my way home, I don't know which is the right path. There was this path and another path I saw, the paths met, a little way ahead, I saw a house, I saw our home, but I couldn't get to it. I was twenty years old.

F: *But how, what did your parents ...?*

I2: *They told me that the witches led me. (128)*

The Victims Walk in Circles

My father went home in the morning at about three or four a.m., his home was in the hills. He went home from slaughtering pigs during the night. And he lost his way and went astray in the wheat field. And he was walking only in circles of about six metres. He treaded the wheat down so that one could not see what was down there until it was dawn, until one could see. And he couldn't find his way out of that wheat. And he said what are they going to say to me, what was I doing, am I crazy, what was I doing in that wheat? He treaded the wheat down so that it was hardly visible. And he was only walking in circles, that's how he was walking, and he couldn't rescue himself until sunrise, until the light came. (99)

I1: (...) *at the moment that she [a witch] left, I went on, but I suddenly didn't know where I was any more, he said, and he wandered around in circles for two hours until he recognized the place again (...) (8)*

If people got lost at the crossroads [they would say that] a witch carried them ... There was a fog and they missed the road and they were drunk. You must know that in the twenties, and thirties—can you imagine what terrible darkness there was? There was no public lightning. We can't imagine this today (...). And people who went in the evening to husk corn and they drank something and when they went home, and you know, there could be a fog, and you can just step aside and wander in circles for I don't know how long. But it was always the witch who carried you away and it was always a light that a person saw and was dragged by it and then this light disappeared and the person found themselves in another village in the morning. (159)

The Victims End Up in Bushes

I2: ... *[We heard] that witches had mixed someone up, and that he couldn't drive home at all, you know... it just happened to Karli, you know. He went out of the vineyard, and he came up to D. at the crossroads, and he saw some lights there. Then there was a road, and he took it but he went the other way, you*

know. Then he couldn't find his way at all, and he spent the entire night in the forest.

F: How did he get out in the morning?

I2: Then in the morning ... in the morning, after dawn, you know, only then did he realize where he was, and he was way over there on the other hilltop, above S.

II: ... you know, and they mixed him up so bad that he went to the left ... instead of going the right way. Well, then he ... then he went into the bushes and couldn't get out, and had to wait there until morning. (21)

II: Yes, they were saying, even my father said that he once went home from somewhere, and he was not drunk, as they say this can only happen to drunken people. He went through a wood and came somewhere where he has absolutely never been before. And there were lights around him, you see, shining and surrounding him so that he got confused. Not before the next morning could he come to his senses again. He found himself inside that horrible thicket, that is all he told us, yes.

F: Did he say what colour these lights were?

II: No, he didn't. Even if he did, I would have forgotten it by now, but I do remember him saying the witches followed him, they led him inside. He believed this, because he has experienced this, but I don't believe in this witch stuff at all. (105)

The Victims Feel Like They are Trapped

I: What the late father of my husband said ... well, he said that when he went home, he took the road from down here where you can see the sign for the Way of the Cross ... There, he said, he saw lights all over the place, of different kinds. He said, well, witches, you will be carrying me now. Yes, that was true.

F: What did he see?

I: Well, nothing but lights, all kinds, red, green ... But when he said this to them, he couldn't go on any more, they stopped him. Wherever he turned, there was nothing but bushes. Just thicket ... so he couldn't go anywhere ... although he was used to those roads. Couldn't make it home, quite simple. Then it was three o'clock in the morning, and mother heard something ... someone screaming ... but father did not come home. They went up to listen to it, you know, and said—this is our father, so she called children and said: Go down there from G. and down the Way of the Cross, go and see if it is our father, and why he can't make it home. So they went and he was standing alone on a fine road. The road was quite nice, still he couldn't go forward. Because he felt like he was standing in the middle of bushes. So it was. Then they rescued him and he could come home. (60)

The Victims are Transported to Another Location

He had vineyards here [pointing to the top of hill] ... and there was this [female] neighbour, you see (...) And he had roosters. So she stared at him, as he said: She was looking at me through the window ... she had a kind look ... I unlocked the door from outside and put the key inside my pocket ... to go home ... But he was just carried away. Suddenly he found himself in some place called P., at some kind of a mill ... he was carried there. He said: Oh, my clothes are frayed, they are completely torn! (...) I answered: What was carrying you? How did this happen? All he said was: I just know that I put the key inside my pocket to go home when something lifted me up and I was completely lost ... Look, I have wounds everywhere, God knows where I was taken to, but now I have no idea how to come home. [she imitates him] This is what happened to him, yes. It is ten years from now. (16)

Narratives about nocturnal lights—interpreted as witches, restless souls, fairies, or other supernatural beings—leading people astray, are part of the common stock of European folklore. Narratives about lights leading people astray, identified as *witches*, are known in other parts of Slovenia too, for instance, in Haloze, a region in northeastern Slovenia: “Once he also said that he saw some lights when he went home by night. he went further, and there he could see three of them. Suddenly he didn’t know where to go, back or forth. And so he was wandering about all night long. He said that these were witches, that they mixed him up, but he couldn’t see them, as they were hidden” (Gričnik 1998: 152). A memorate from Mirtoviči in southeastern Slovenia is similar: “(...), I went home alone. Above Dimofc some lights were flying. They were all witches. But I was not afraid. At Boslevuoke, I couldn’t cross the Sešica creek. The more I tried to find the way, the more I was drawn into the thickets, and I lay down. When the roosters started crowing, I woke up. The witches then lost their power. Then I could come home” (Primc 1997: 197). In Vitanje, in eastern Slovenia, narratives describe witches as bright lights that mixed people up so that they walked around without knowing where they were and could not go anywhere, and ended up being completely exhausted (archive of Slovenian ethnographic Museum: Vitanje 125) (cf. also Dražumerič and Terseglav 1987: 229; Kelemina 1997: 21; Krejan 1999: 80; Kastelic and Primc 2001: 55; Dolšek 2000: 80). Narratives about witches in the form of lights leading people astray seem to be less widespread elsewhere in European folklore.

More often, however, one finds narratives in European folklore about people being led astray by the *souls of the dead* in the form of lights, often intertwined with fairies or other supernatural beings, as discussed above. In Slovenian Carinthia, narratives tell about stray lights, the souls of people who committed suicide and of children who died without being baptised, which lead people astray into the swamps and water (Kotnik 1924: X, 20–21). In Slavic folklore in general, the main malevolent act done by restless souls in the form of fires or lights was precisely to lead people astray (cf. Polish *wodziciel, błąd, myłki, omana*; Czech *bludičky*; Sorbian *blud, bludne swiečki*) (Radenković 2008: 350, 352; Vinogradova 2013: 252). Similar narratives about the souls of the dead and supernatural beings leading people astray are known in western European folklore (cf. Thompson motifs F 369.7, Fairies lead travellers astray; F 491.1, Will-o'-the-Wisp leads people astray). In Swedish folklore, the *gast* was also said to lead people astray (af Klintberg 1968), whereas in British and American folklore, this was the usual act of Jack with the Lantern (Jack-o-lantern), Will-o-the-Wisp, pixies, hobgoblins (cf. Briggs 1967: 16, 60–61, 1978: 47; Baker 1970: 178; Gay 1999: 55): their victims were drawn into following luminous entities into swamps, bogs, further into the forest, bush full of thorns, or water, where they were drowned or left to die (Wells Newall 1904: 41; Hall 1958: 128; Hand 1977: 229). In the nineteenth century Somerset, being “pixy-led” was an experience that happened to lonely nocturnal travellers who “would find themselves straying from their path under the fairies’ influence, and would spend hours and hours going round in circles until daylight released them from the mischievous spell upon them” (Davies 1999a: 14). According, to Briggs, leading people astray is even “perhaps the commonest of the fairy experiences in modern times” (1967: 138).

I were pixy-led once in a wood near Budleigh Salterton. I couldn't find my way out, though 'twas there, plain to see. I went all around about it three times, and then somebody coom along to find me, and I thought how could I miss the path. They said others was pixy-led there too. (Briggs 1967: 138)

In Hungarian folklore, the same appearance and deeds are characteristic of a supernatural being called the *lidérc*:

I saw it, it's like a lamp, lures people at night. I was going to the sheep herd and couldn't find the way. Like a lamp, was flickering in front of me. I was about 17–18, it was on the outskirts of Dusnok. (Dégh 2001: 104)

The act of leading people astray is also typical of supernatural beings that do not appear in the form of light. In Lithuania, this is supposed to be the devil's work:

(...) Well, it was enough to drive just one turn around, to make the track, and the horse would pull you in circles until morning! And they would say afterwards that the devil had taken hold of the horse's bridle, leading it and not allowing the driver to come back home.¹⁹

In Portugal too, witches can cause people to lose their way even when not related to light:

A man is walking alone at night with a torch to see before him. After a while he encounters witches. He hears cackles around him, something like a gust of wind puts out the flame of his torch, and he starts walking in circles the whole night long; the following morning he is exhausted. (Santo Isidoro, Mafra, recorded by Francisco Vaz da Silva, 1986)²⁰

In Swedish legends, male workers in the forest were also said to have been seduced, mocked, and led astray by the spirit of the forest (*skogsrå*), a solitary woman ruling over the animals (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1991: 215–216). In Russia, a forest spirit called *Leshi* was also believed to lead people astray and made them walk in circles in the same spot (Maksimov 1989: 48). Votic narratives similarly tell about the “evil one” in the forest or the “forest” itself leading people astray:

/But who was in the bog?/It was said that there was something in the bog. Sometimes it was so that if you went to the forest then it was time after time said: Look! Don't step on the trail of the evil one [paha]. Because the evil one will take [you]. But when you got lost you were always commanded to sit and change your clothes the other way round, inside out. Then you'll come and you'll get back to your path.—But I got lost once. Probably I had come to this house. Here, over the river, on the other side of the river there was a small forest. My granny and auntie came home, but I remained there to pick some berries, we were picking cowberries, and I got lost. I was not able to get free. Alas! [Hot!] And they already came to look for me. At no great distance I went around that [forest] and I came back to this place where I had been. You see, I will go now to that place. Again I came to this place. Do whatever you want! Again I come to this place. Then after a while, after a while a necessity came. I was, I am there in Kuru [toponym]. That place was called Kuru. Kuru spruce grove. Then after a while I hear some voices. They came to search. I was not able to get out. Do what-ever you want. —/But where was that evil one [paha]? In the forest?/The

evil one [paha]? *The evil one was in the forest.* —/But what did he look like?/
What? Who saw him? Nobody saw him. They only talk like that. Nobody saw him. You can see only evil people. But you cannot see the evil one. You cannot see.
 (Unpublished text from the Estonian Folklore Archives: VE XVIII 194–196 [7] Liivtšilä village—P. Ariste; Nadyozha Leontyeva, in 1974.)²¹

In the nineteenth-century Finnish “forest cover” narratives, many of them first- and second-hand personal accounts, it was likewise a “forest spirit” who was blamed for causing people to get lost in the woods. The experience took various forms: a sense of mysterious geographic disorientation in which previously familiar surroundings became suddenly unfamiliar, a loss of capacity to act on one’s desires (trapped persons felt as if they could not leave the forest, move or shout and thus announce themselves to persons searching for them), invisibility to others, and encounters with inexplicable beings in human or animal form (Stark 2006: 357–380). Many of these experiences match the experiences ascribed to night witches in our region: geographic disorientation and transportation over a long distance, and the inability to leave the forest or to move, are all familiar features of narratives about encounters with night witches.

THE SUPERNATURAL ASPECT OF NIGHT WITCHES

There is no room to present all of the evidence in European folklore referring to the same experience here, but I hope to have shown that, in spite of the differences, there are fundamental common elements that recurrently appear in the memorates and legends from various parts of Europe, and that it is mainly the interpretations of *what* causes the experience of being led astray—witches, the souls of the dead, fairies, the devil, forest spirits, or other supernatural beings—that differ. Nevertheless, it is always an agency that can be understood as supernatural that is blamed for the experience. While people never explicitly talked about the agency, or the experience, as something “supernatural”, it was generally not particular human beings from the community that were crucial to the understanding of the origin of misfortune that befell people in the forest at night, even though the narrators did occasionally subsequently identify particular women from the community as guilty of causing the night experience.²² In their main features, the narratives on night witches from our region who were blamed for causing people to lose their way at night, whether in

the form of light or as invisible entities, do not differ from various other European traditional legends about the souls of the dead or other supernatural entities, sometimes in the form of light and sometimes not, who lead people astray at night.

Moreover, the *places* where witches in the form of lights were usually observed and experiences of being led astray occurred—forests, places near water, and crossroads, but also bogs, swamps, barrens—represent a typical realm of liminality, where intrusions of the supernatural, of the other world, are expected in accordance with the traditional conceptualization of space (cf. Devlin 1987: 72; Vinogradova 2000: 42–43; Henderson and Cowan 2001: 39; Radenković 1996a: 47–79; 2008: 352; Stark-Arola 1998a: 162, 166ff). As already mentioned, Narváez showed that in the Newfoundland narratives about being led astray by fairies, such experiences are characterised by places which represented boundaries between geographical areas of cleanliness, liminality, and danger—for men mainly forests and for women berry patches (1991: 337–338).

Spatial division is to a great degree related to *chronological* division: a certain place has different value depending on the time of day. “The night is mine, the day is yours,” supernatural beings in Slovenia tend to remind people who they encounter in the forest in the night (cf. Tomšič 1989: 76). Night witches were indeed seen and encountered (almost) exclusively at times which were typical for the appearance of the supernatural—that is, at night, the time period from dusk until the break of dawn or the first crowing of the cocks, or the sound of church bells. In general, the entire night has an otherworldly character, while within it there is an especially dangerous period, the dead of night, a time which lasts from around eleven in the evening to two or three in the morning (cf. Tolstaja 1995: 30; Briggs 1967: 106; Vinogradova 2000: 43; Tolstoj 2003: 33–35; Radenković 2008: 352) when the experience of getting lost occurred most often.

F: *So what did they [the witches the narrator was talking about] do at the crossroads?*

I: *Well, they took someone there, they scratched them, or rolled them in thorns. (...) When they had it in for someone. Oh yes!*

F: *How did [those people] save themselves?*

I: *Well, when the first bell sounded in the parish, their power was ended. When they found themselves in there. Witches once snared that Marko, there where Albina lives, he's our grandmother's brother, over ... You know what brambles are?*

- F: *Yes, I do.*
 I: *Well, they dragged him over the brambles, poor chap, and he came home in the morning all scratched up.*
 F: *But how did that happen?*
 I: *Ah well, those were also such young [women], when they had it in for someone. They got those, when they went there alone, who were boasting, well, that they [witches] can't do anything to them.*
 F: *So witches [caught them]? And they couldn't do anything, they just dragged them over the brambles?*
 I: *Nothing, he was so scared he could soil his trousers.*
 F: *And how did he save himself then? How did he get home?*
 I: *Well, he waited in there.*
 F: *Until morning?*
 I: *Until morning. [laughs]*
 F: *And when did witches have the most power?*
 I: *At night.*
 F: *At night, yes.*
 I: *From eleven on, until the break of day. Well, that's some five hours. In five hours they can work on you well! (115)*

Various measures people employ in order to *protect* themselves from night witches closely resemble protective measures against the supernatural in traditional folklore. One of the techniques of protection against night witches known in the region was to turn one's clothing inside out:

- I: *Of course they sometimes did something to people, there were a lot of them.*
 F: *There was nothing you could do?*
 I: *Not a lot. Well, now we're on to something ... You know, they said that you had to turn your pockets inside out. [laughs] That's because if you had something in there, they would take it. [laughs loudly]*
 F: *And that helped?*
 I: *Yes, that helped. That was the first ransom. (115)*

One [woman] went up there to the neighbors' ... She went to harvest wheat, you see ... So she was harvesting there and the neighbour said: Are you going to reap here until night? She replied: Yes, I will, she said, even if I do a little more at night, so we can finish today, and she turned. She went home (...) She said: Then I will also go home. But a big hill rose up there. She could not go anywhere anymore. Then she started to argue: Witches, you are not going to carry me, I will not let you do that! So she quickly turned her scarf upside down, you know? She also had a jumper and quickly turned it upside down, as well and started making some

kind of crosses, as she had the sickle for harvesting ... When she made these crosses, everything was fine. So she could continue her way home (...) (60)

This manner of protection against supernatural can often be found in European traditional legends. In Slavic folklore, turning items inside out, especially clothing, is a common protective measure against the supernatural (Sreboški Peterlin 1870, in archive ISN: Copernice I., 3, 52; Bošković-Stulli 1959: 15; Vasić 1986: 226; Tomšič 1989: 49; Morato 2002: 46). Turning clothes inside out was considered a protection against spells and supernatural beings such as vampires and *mora*, and turning objects inside out and performing actions upside down were likewise employed as apotropaic measures against various diseases (Tolstoj 1990; Radenković 1996b: 91–93), assumed to be of supernatural origin. In British folklore, this technique assured a protection from being led astray by fairies (Briggs 1967: 18). In Newfoundland too, the turning of a cap or any article of clothing inside out helped against being led by fairies (Narváez 1991: 342–343). Votic’s account from 1938 gives the same instruction: when people keep circling around the same tree stump in Võhkõjärvi, they should take off their skirt and wear it inside out (Estonian Folklore archives: Ve VIII 198–199 [66], Vanaküla village, Jõgõperä village— collector: P. Ariste, speaker: Daria Lehti, in 1938). Another protective measure which people used when they encountered night witches was to throw urine over one’s shoulders. Urine was generally used as protection against the supernatural. In Slovenia, for instance, it was used against attacks by *mora* (Morato 2002: 52–54). In Serbian and Bulgarian folklore, urine works against a supernatural being called *živak*: “The *živak* enters the room at night, moves around the room lit up like a firefly. We can rarely catch it. If we can’t, we pee on it as soon as we see it and shovel as many burning coals from the fire as possible on it” (Tucakov 1965: 39). In Bulgarian folklore, urine was a protection against fairies’ whirlwind (*samodivski veter*)—if one yelled at it that one is dirty, shitty, and peed on (Vinogradova 2000: 359), fairies could do them no harm. In the early modern Iceland, one was believed to be able to protect oneself against evil magic throughout the entire day by snorting some urine into one’s nose (Hastrup 1990: 205) and changelings in Ireland were often “treated” by being forced to drink urine (Jenkins 1991: 319).²³

- II: *There was also my father who (...) We had a vineyard down in T. He didn't and didn't come home. What now, what now? He had one such basket (...) and the keys inside. He came into the bushes, that was also true ... He came into the bushes, and was crawling inside, lost his bat, lost his key, he had no basket, nothing at all. Well, what now? He said: I was sitting there for a while, just sitting, and started to pray, but nothing. He said: Then I remembered I was to pee in my hand [showing his palm], and threw it over my shoulder, and there I was, sitting in the middle of the road. (...)*
- F: *But how did he know he had to do this?*
- II: *In the old times, people were telling all kinds of things. It was not like it is today. (122)*

To utter a word, sometimes a curse (cf. Gričnik 1998: 98, 145; Bošković-Stulli 1959: 150), was another possible measure for a person to protect oneself against witches in the forest at night.

- II: *The lights went over a person, but as soon as they uttered a sound, they vanished. (17)*
- II: *Even his [pointing to her husband] mother and father used to tell us that there were some kinds of witches (...). Those lights, those lights, they saw them, when witches went, didn't they?*
- I2: *Yes, yes, they saw those lights, they followed them ...*
- F: *Oh, you went there and these lights followed you, or what?*
- II: *Yes ... lights went on people, but the moment you said something, they disappeared ...*
- F: *So these were small lights?*
- II: *Big lights, big ones ...*
- F: *They went through the wood?*
- II: *Oh, how they were flickering through the air! ... (17)*

Mum sent us to the grocery in the evening, in the place where I lived. Then me and my sisters returned home and we walked directly through the bushes. We knew the way through the bushes, but we were still going through the bushes. My mum said you have to swear. She said: Bloody witches, won't you leave this child alone! And then we could find the way. I myself witnessed this. (83)

This type of protective measure probably relies on the opposition between the presence of voice, being a sign of human world, and its absence, signifying the presence of the otherworld (cf. Radenković

1996a: 27–28; 1996b: 88–89; Agapkina 2001b: 123–124, 2010: 126–127; Petrović 2008: 363). In charms, “spells are typically cast out to the lands where no bells toll, no birds sing or cocks crow, where dogs do not bark, and sheep do not bleat” (cf. Radenković 1996a: 27–28), that is, to the otherworld, where they can do no harm. In Belarus, a person who had to go out in the dead of night was advised to take a cock with him or her, in order to keep evil forces away with their crowing (Agapkina 2001a: 127). As Bull argues, the sound roots the user to the world which “[t]hrough the power of sound (...) becomes intimate, known, and possessed” (2004: 181–182)²⁴—by uttering a word, a person thus re-establishes “this” world and abolishes the threat of the otherworld, embodied in the presence of a witch or other supernatural entity.

Christian symbols, for instance the sign of the cross, could also be applied as apotropaions, not only when one experienced a disorientation ascribed to night witches (cf. inf. 60, p. 377) but also against supernatural in general (cf. Đorđević 1953: 42; Bošković-Stulli 1959: 150; Glassie 1982: 547; de Pina-Cabral 1986: 184; Gričnik 1994: 42; Repanšek 1995: 19; Zupan 1999: 26):

There were those [stories] how they [witches] enchanted people, so they couldn't go anywhere but were treading on one and the same place. All the time. They said if you made the sign of the cross, you were released. And then you could continue your way. (104)

II: This neighbour of ours, she is eighty-two years old already. (...) She said that it was as if a curtain fell down on her. Wherever she reached forward with her fingers, there were just thorns, she was only touching thorns. She became so tired that it was two o'clock when she reached the cross up there. When she came to the cross, she knew where she was and where to go ... She said: (...) only thickets and thorns. And she was wandering about at night, so she came all the way up the hill, although she was going home ... I don't know, perhaps a hundred fifty metres, or two hundred fifty away ... but she couldn't come home. Well, maybe these women had a drink or two too many? [laughter] She said: I was completely sober, I had no alcohol at all. She said: I don't know. And I sat down on the ground, saying: Now I'm not going anywhere. Not at all, she said, so now you will let me go, you devil! And she made those big crosses, and then it was like a curtain opened. Suddenly she knew where she was and went home the same moment. She said that the witches drove her. (62)

It seems that most of the protective measures against night witches relied upon emphasising the human presence in the “otherworld” (forest at night) by symbolically extending the volume and expanding the boundaries of the human body into the space around it—either by uttering a voice, signifying human space, or by expanding the body by spreading its humour, i.e. urine, around it, or by making protective signs and gestures in the space around it and thus establishing a symbolic fence around the body. Turning clothes inside out, on the other hand, might be understood as an attempt at outwitting the witch, who won’t recognise you if your clothes are different,²⁵ or perhaps as an attempt at hiding one’s human nature from the supernatural by melding with it through exposing one’s “inner body”, related to the otherworld (like shape-shifters externalise their internal skin—cf. Vaz da Silva 2002: 46–47), and in this way imitating the other world, which in all aspects represents an opposition to our world (cf. Radenković 1996b: 88).

All in all, the characteristics of night witches thus clearly point to the perception of night witches as a supernatural agency, and the experience of being led astray as a supernatural experience: not only does their appearance link night witches to supernatural entities of folklore, but also the place and time where they appeared or where and when the experience of “being carried by witches” usually occurred, as well as the protective measures used against them. Moreover, night witches are similar to fairies and spirits as regards their multiplicity and related discourse: like the many fairies related to the dead, who tend to appear in bands, i.e. gregarious groups (cf. Briggs 1967: 52; 1978: 39; Goodare 2015), night witches too, as a rule, appear in a groups and are referred to in the plural, even when invisible. Thus, while occasionally linked to humans, night witches above all embody the threat of the supernatural and are firmly embedded in the traditional conceptualization of the supernatural.

Various parallels and possible interplays between supernatural entities and human witches have already been mentioned by several researchers (cf. Bennett 1986; Jenkins 1991; Mathisen 1993: 23; Wilby 2000; Henderson and Cowan 2001; Goodare 2013, 2014, 2015). Éva Pócs also argued for a historical relation: she claimed that “wherever ‘village witchcraft’ struck root”, demons, ghosts, and “other demonic beings of various mythologies”, who lost their original function, “merged into the beliefs surrounding the ‘human’ witch” (1991–1992: 308). During the process of the diminishing of the positive aspects of fairies and their

role in protecting the community and granting fertility, their harmful, malevolent side thus became absorbed into witchcraft, and many characteristics of “pre-witchcraft” demonic beings in Europe attached to the “real”, human witches: “While fairies gave a supernatural explanation for the evils striking man, after their integration into the institution of witchcraft any unexpected misfortunes were associated with a human being having supernatural power; everyday life was no longer regulated by a supernatural standard system, but by the rules of human coexistence, and supernatural punishment gave place to human malevolence” (Pócs 1989: 8, cf. 27). It is hard to tell whether the night witches in our region can be explained as a result of a specific historical process during which witchcraft discourse subsumed the discourse on supernatural beings, but this could be one possible explanation of why the form and deeds ascribed to night witches in our region equal those that in some other parts of Europe pertain to supernatural beings. Nevertheless, night witches in our region retained the characteristics of supernatural entities and remained a more or less distinct category, distinguished from and only loosely related to witches as human beings. Except for their name, and occasional (subsequent) identification with women from the community, hardly anything else relates them to witches as social beings.

THE REALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE

While the experiences of seeing lights and getting lost in the night were typically interpreted as being caused by witches within the cultural framework that supported such an interpretation, both could in fact be triggered by various “natural” causes. Many narrators indeed attempted to find possible rational explanations for the appearance of unusual lights, such as rotting wood, gases rising out of swamps (cf. inf. 62, p. 71–72), fireflies, reflections in bubbles, or mist from the water, glow-worms or even torch lights (cf. Wells Newall 1904: 1904: 42; Röhrich 1971: 5; Hand 1977: 233; Gwyndaf 1994: 238):

I2: The lights. That's a trick too. That's in the woods by the stumps, that's where the lights are. I saw it myself. I was really scared. I was just passing through, as always. But when I came out of the forest down there, after more than fifty years, I saw something shining up there, like someone was holding a torch. I was a little frightened, but I didn't go look. That's that thing, the rotting stuff glowing. (37)

Well, mummy was still young then, you see. She was born in nineteen six. And she said: We came up here, she said, and here they [witches] were, even in the evening, lots of lights flying, blue ... and it was above that little lake, above the wood. This was mist from the water. (94)

Down here they saw this swampy area and such lights flying around. So these old people, they thought these were witches, well, witches. What they didn't see was that this was evaporating, these—how should I say—gases that one could see during the night. But now I don't know whether this doesn't happen anymore, or maybe we just stopped believing in it, I don't know. (76)

Well, that's what they said down here, in V., right, down here by the road, when there is a lot of rain, and the water comes out. A spring, it's like a cave, and people said that they saw different coloured lights there at night, that they lit up and went out, right? And that they were witches. But others again, who are a little more ... who don't believe, they said that it was just because of the humidity, right, that it is possible for some gases, for some lights to appear. Well, some people explained it that way, and others believed that they were witches, right? (47)

And then the dusk fell, and these bubbles appeared on the water ... they said that they were lights, that they were witches, right? (58)

Once me and my colleague got lost and we knew that people would look [for us] and we had these torch lights, one blue and one red, and we were lighting with them. And one man asked us: Did you see how [witches] were jumping and having all sorts of lights? (14)

Several natural causes could also trigger the experience of disorientation ascribed to witches. One possible cause for the distortion of spatial orientation can lie in our brain: more precisely, it may concern impairment, disease, or damage to the brain regions responsible for spatial orientation, particularly the parietal lobes and parietal cortex, but also other regions that are components of an interconnected neural circuit for navigation. Apart from Alzheimer's disease, other pathological states could also match the descriptions of the states that people who got lost found themselves in and tried to articulate in their memorates on night experiences with witches. A state, in neuropsychological studies sometimes termed "topographical amnesia", could perhaps be diagnosed on the basis of some of the descriptions of the experience. This is a condition in which the "principal deficit lies in the patients' inability

to find their way about in long familiar surroundings or in locations frequently encountered in the recent past". Indeed, we have seen that many of the narrators claimed that they had walked the same path day after day and knew it well, until they were suddenly unable to orient themselves. "Topographical disorientation", which refers to the "inability to recall and describe well-known geographical relationships with which the patient was formerly familiar", or "topographical agnosia", that is, "inability to recognize objects that serve as landmarks", could provide yet additional explanations that might account for the disorientation in some of the cases described (Walsh and Darby 1999: 238–242; cf. Dudchenko 2010). Yet, given that the experience of getting lost in the woods was so commonly reported in our region, and that similar narratives are also widespread elsewhere in Europe, it seems unreasonable to assume that so many people would have shared the same sorts of brain impairments or diseases.

The ability to orient oneself in space generally requires the recognition of one's surroundings, an ability to use familiar landmarks to decide which way to turn, or a maintenance of orientation by keeping track of previous experience. Orientation can thus be easily obscured when visual landmarks are unavailable (Dudchenko 2010: 1–2, 5). Recognition of the environment, the use of landmarks, and maintenance of orientation certainly worsen in the forest at night when and where the experiences of getting lost usually occurred. Indeed, many narrators even explicitly insisted that the experience of "being carried by witches" could only occur at night, and, as already mentioned, as a rule ended in the morning at the latest, when the visibility clearly increased:

- I: Well, during the day it wasn't so risky. At night, at night! [laughter]*
F: What happened at night?
I: At night, if you stepped on that crossroads, they mixed you up so that you couldn't come home. (65)

I2: There is a local road up there, yes, across P. It was often spooky there. If someone was walking there at night, they became so mixed up that they couldn't get out of the woods, so they called for help. When the daylight came and they heard a rooster, they were bright again and could go on. (67)

Disorientation may also occur due to our directional sense being "turned around". Humans seem to possess an internal mechanism for orienting

themselves in the environment which can become detached from reality when our contact with the environment is interrupted by sleep²⁶ (Dudchenko 2010: 3). This “turned around” directional sense might be reflected in some of the narratives describing people walking in the opposite direction, as some of the narratives suggest that the experient may have indeed temporarily fallen asleep. Unfortunately, the narratives give no clear evidence of whether the person fell asleep before or after the disorientation occurred.

- I2: *That neighbour, well, he was drunk and he mixed it all up. He went there, here ... there is a path he often used on his way from ... and it was night. He said he was walking there for a while when suddenly there was no road and nothing anymore. He had to fight his way through the thicket and thorny bushes, but still he didn't wake up before ... when he did wake up, above the road there is a field and those farmers there they had ... planted cabbage, so he grabbed one cabbage head and woke up. Then he said that the witches carried him [laughter] ... but I say that he was drunk and lost his way ... There was no thorny bushes there, it never grew there.*
- I1: *I don't know whether he really went through the thorns or did he just feel that way? (...)*
- F: *Why did he think these were witches, if he was carried away like this?*
- I1: *Ah, he fell asleep. (...)* (68)

In addition, some of the narrators may have also experienced somnambulism, that is, sleepwalking, which can occur during deep sleep, and during which the person presents transient nonresponsiveness but partially preserves arousal and semipurposive behaviour such as walking (cf. Noirhomme and Laureys 2011: 266). This state could possibly explain the experience of “transportation” to another location: if a person walked in a dreaming state, they would be unaware of the change of location. Another explanation is that some people may have actually slept all the while and only dreamt about the experience.

The experience of walking in circles, described in some of the memorates, also has a scientific explanation. When landmarks are not available, as in the forest at night, or when the surrounding are unfamiliar, humans are quite limited in their ability to find their way, and in such a situation disoriented people tend to start veering off course.²⁷ The results of scientific experiments suggest that “veering from a straight course is the result of accumulating noise in the sensorimotor system, which, without an external directional reference to recalibrate the subjective straight ahead, may cause people to walk in circles” (Souman et al. 2009; Dudchenko 2010: 65–73).

In addition, laboratory research has shown that spatial working memory and performance can be significantly impaired by anxiety (Lavric et al. 2003). The situations that people found themselves in (alone in the woods at night, conditioned by the cultural background knowledge about witches lurking near their prey, internalised through listening to the narratives about what happened to people in the woods at night since childhood)²⁸ could, at least in some people, induce anxiety that impaired their orientation.

A very likely reason for people who found themselves in the forest at night to get lost may have also been intoxication by alcohol (cf. Davies 1999a: 14). Wine was abundant, and alcoholism was not rare in our region.²⁹ In fact, people who did not talk from within the witchcraft discourse generally ascribed nocturnal experiences to the effect of alcohol (cf. inf. 62, 68, 86, 105, 151, 159). On the other hand, those who believed in the reality of experience, often particularly emphasised that they, or the person who told them about their experience were not drunk, which certainly hints at the anticipated comments of the audience: the narrators obviously felt a need to dismiss such insinuations in advance in order to persuade the audience of the truth of their or somebody else's witchcraft experience. Several narratives indeed suggest that the experience happened when they were leaving a vineyard (where they usually had some wine stored in their vineyard cottages), or in connection with drinking bouts (the experience sometimes happened after fairs or shared work, which were as a rule concluded by drinking parties). None of the subjects themselves has ever admitted to the experience being triggered by the use of alcohol, but this is only to be expected.

- I2: *This is how it happened ... down there, a little ways from home, I do not know how many metres exactly [...] they used to go there to get stakes [...] And then you know what it's like, I mean, to put in stakes, this was a custom back then, and people used to drink a lot, and everybody used to sing, and men gathered and then they said: Well, now we are going to sing a song [...] and they sang ... this used to be something wonderful when one could hear a song from one village to the next, when they sang ... and then suddenly [...] your late father disappeared from that circle and could not be found anywhere, and then he said that he found himself somewhere, that he was carried somewhere up into the forest. Then at night ... they searched for him, and my husband used to tell this a lot, that is, your father [turns towards her son]. Of course, children being children, well my son was already older: Father, where are you? they*

called. What happened, did he fall somewhere, what if it was a stroke, or ... One starts thinking all kinds of things, whether one is old or young ... And then he answered: Yes, yes, I am up here [imitating him]. Well, what are you doing up there? [imitating] Well, I don't know, maybe the devil brought me up here [imitating], this is exactly what he said [laughs].

F: *What did he think, why he got there?*

I1: *Well, he knew nothing. Nothing at all.*

I2: *... he said that he was like, as if he was ... [speaking over each other]*

I1: *... that she was a witch, well ...*

I2: *... hypnotized, that they said so.*

I1: *That a witch did this to him ...*

I2: *... he said that he was like, as if he (...) was hypnotised, that they said so. (15)*

My father was once at a party, still he was completely sober. He had a little pistol, and when he went home at night, he got confused right in front of his house, he was totally miserable, not knowing where he was. Then he started fantasizing that the witches have mixed him up and he began to shoot around. Then his buddy came, it was quite close to him, so he said: Well, Janko, what the hell are you doing? So he replied: You know what, I have no idea where I am. However, he was just on the old road. Well, he said that this was exactly how it happened, that there came something over him and he got confused, although he was quite near home and his friend standing there. (105)

I1: *... That witches mixed him up, because he just couldn't drive him home, you see ... quite by accident, this happened to one man named Lovro. He went from the vineyard, and he came on top of the hill D. (...) He went from the vineyard, and he came up there to D., the cross-roads and there he saw some lights. He thought that it was the road, and he took it, but he went astray, you know. Then he didn't know where he was and had to spend the night in the woods.*

F: *How did he come out in the morning?*

I2: *In the morning ... at dawn, he started to become aware, only then he came to his senses and realized where he was, and that was just on the opposite hill. (21)*

Indeed, alcohol, especially when combined with malnutrition, could account for the state of mind referred to by experients, who described themselves as being “confused”, “hypnotized”, “having some imagination in the head”, feeling as if “something came over them” or as if “something came to their mind” and similar, indicating some sort of shift of consciousness (cf. also de Pina-Cabral 1986: 91). The descriptions of the moment when such a state ceased is also indicative in this

regard, as the narrators always underlined the difference between their psychic state during the experience and when it ended, using the expressions such as that “they came to their senses”, “they became conscious again”, and similar. Even the expression “witches mixed me up” points to the confusion of mind of those who were led astray by witches. As alcohol induces a slowing of the alpha frequencies, the emergence of theta, and the synchronisation of cortical discharges, it could trigger the altered state of consciousness (cf. Winkelman 1999: 401; Ustinova 2011: 50–52;³⁰ Whitehead 2011: 181) which such descriptions could point to. The shift of consciousness, the seeing of light, as well as the sense of flying or floating, which often constitute the experience understood to have been caused by night witches, are characteristic features of several types of altered state of consciousness, for instance, sleep paralysis, out-of-body experiences (OBEs)³¹ (which can also be an element of sleep paralysis) or near-death experiences (NDEs). Some people might have had OBEs while awake, and some may have experienced them during “vestibular-motor sensations”, a distinctive set of experiences during sleep paralysis, that include a variety of illusory (bodily-self) movement experiences (IMEs)³² (during which a sensation of flight can also be experienced) and OBEs (Cheyne and Girard 2009: 201–202; Bever 2008: 125; Goodare 2013: 169–170). The narratives describing the experience of being lifted and transported to a distant location or to an elevated spot in particular suggest that some people may have experienced a flying or floating sensation during IMEs or OBEs, or some other type of altered state of consciousness, and tried to express their genuine experience as well as they could within the frames of the available cultural vocabulary. In addition, the narratives on walking in circles might perhaps not always refer to actual walking but to what, in fact, happened in the subject’s mind. If so, this might suggest the experience of a “mental vortex”, indicating the falling into an altered state of consciousness, one of the most common experiences of participants in laboratory experiments investigating the effects of stress and various hallucinogens, often also referred to in anthropological accounts of altered states of consciousness as experienced by shamans and other religious practitioners (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 2003: 14–17; Previc 2011: 47, 57, 65; cf. Walsh 2009: 77).

Folklorists who have tried to explain the “supernatural” experiences described in legends usually identified the visual sensations as illusions and hallucinations, conditioned by natural and atmospheric circumstances, and a combination of external circumstances (darkness, wind, fog, and storm) and

inner disposition (fear, stress, etc.). They explained the described sensations and experiences by the emotional associations and concerns of the subjects, the subjects' "frame of reference", their psycho(-physio)logical states, disorders or depression, or mental illnesses (Ranke 1971: 245–254; Ward 1976: 349; 1977; Devlin 1987: 80–81; Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1991: 10, 212). Others ascribed them to "human love of wonders" and "to the way in which memory unconsciously embroiders a tale and makes it more interesting" (Briggs 1967: 139). Deviation from social norms and obligations was sometimes emphasised as a factor that could stimulate the intrusion of the supernatural, whereby the supernatural acted as a form of control and pressure upon an individual to conform to behavioural norms (cf. Honko 1962: 116–118; Grambo 1970: 253–270; Ward 1977: 215, 219; Halpert 1978: 227; Lindahl 1986; Ellis 1988: 69; Mathisen 1993: 23, 26; Pócs 1999: 65; Mencej 2015: 51). Whatever may have caused the experience, it was nevertheless culture that was assumed to have shaped its interpretation. Honko even argued that one not only interprets the experience of the supernatural in accordance with the available tradition, but also *experiences* the supernatural in accordance with it³³ (1962: 92)—tradition is thus already present in memorates³⁴ (cf. 1962: 93–99, 125–126; 1964; 1969: 304).

The Finnish researcher Uno Holmberg, who studied Finnish "forest cover" narratives which closely resemble narratives about night witches in our region, attributed the visions that accompanied the disorientation of a person who got lost in the woods to fatigue, hunger, despair, and excitation, and the contents and interpretation of the visions to the available tradition.²⁵ (Holmberg 1923: 56, in Stark 2006: 363) Laura Stark, who studied the same narratives, argues on the contrary that these narratives did not take their shape from prior internalisation of "folk belief", but from a shared experience which she identified as the experience of disintegration of the early modern self:

What people reported experiencing was not the world and lives of spirit beings, but changes in their own sensory and motor capacities, transformations in their ability to act, speak and feel in ordinary human ways. (...) The recurrent motives in the narratives (...) are best explained by the similar ways in which people actually experienced a state of personal disintegration when removed from the social framework necessary for sustaining the self as a cohesive set of strategic performances. In these narratives, the anthropomorphic beings encountered in the forest play only a limited role:

they are instruments through which the ‘trapped’ person expresses his or her loss of agency. (Stark 2006: 365–367)

Stark thus basically understands the experience as historically specific, intrinsically linked to an early-modern experience of a breakdown of a familiar sense of self in a forest, i.e. in a space devoid of familiar cues. While her interpretation of the state that the subjects of the forest-cover experienced may be correct for the specific socio-historical context in which the narratives she discussed occurred, the experience could certainly not be historically limited to the “early-modern” people alone, or to the reasons for the disintegration experience stated by Stark. Many authors have pointed to the similarity between the experience of being led by supernatural beings (often in the shape of lights) and that ascribed by “modern” citizens from the 20th and 21st century to aliens (cf. Hufford 1977: 240; Gay 1999: 59-60; Rojcewicz 1991: 491).

As people in our region mostly narrated about experiences that occurred some time ago, they may have forgotten the exact details and slowly adapted the description of the experience to the prevailing cultural matrix. In addition, there were more narratives that were related as second-hand memorates than there were first-person memorates. All this makes it impossible to establish with certainty the psychological or physiological condition the subjects may have in fact experienced.³⁶ The triggering factors may have also not been necessarily the same for everyone: different people may have had similar experiences due to different reasons. Some may have just fallen asleep, after which their sense of direction was “turned around”, or became impaired by the anxiety they may have felt being alone in the forest at night, some may have been dreaming or sleep-walking, some became disoriented due to drunkenness, some may have experienced some sort of mild dissociation, some may have hallucinated or had illusions for various internal and external reasons, others may have experienced some sort of altered state of consciousness, and so on. Yet, no matter the reason that triggered the experience, the witches were always at hand within the culturally available repertoire to account for what people were experiencing while, usually alone, in the forest at night. Moreover, even when a person in fact experienced none of the experiences described in these narratives, they could still choose to narrate them as if it was their own experience, that is, as a first-person memorate—perhaps to trigger a more dramatic effect of the narration, to direct the attention of the public towards them (the evenings of shared work, when such stories were told,

were also one of the main opportunities for young men and women to find themselves a partner!), or for various other reasons (cf. Dégh 2001: 62) when talking about one's own experience of being "carried by witches" could prove useful.

USES OF NARRATIVES ABOUT NIGHT WITCHES

Like bewitchment narratives, narratives about night witches could also be intentionally mobilised for various reasons and in various situations. What then were the typical circumstances in which they could be drawn upon, and what functions did they fulfil in the communities in which they were narrated? Devlin emphasised the convenience of the mobilisation of the tradition in order to excuse one's behaviour, "whether caused through laziness, lack of concentration, drunkenness or foolhardiness" (1987: 88). According to Narváez, Newfoundland stories about people being carried away by fairies provided a culturally acceptable justification for deviant behaviour and thus extricated people from embarrassing situations and potential shame (1991: 354). As argued by Lindow, Scandinavian memorates about being led into the mountains by supernatural beings (*bergtaining*) could be used to explain the disappearance or long delay of someone who was taking a walk in the forests or mountains (1978: 45).

While it seems reasonable to assume that in many cases, these memorates were intentionally mobilised when one needed an excuse for the behaviour that would not meet the approval of their family or the community, one cannot search for direct proofs which would substantiate such an assumption in the narratives themselves, since it was obviously necessary for the narrators to present their story in such a way that the disclosure of what the narratives were aiming to conceal would not compromise them. Nevertheless, some narratives about night witches do indicate that they were likely used when one needed an excuse for returning home late due to excessive drinking. As mentioned above, several narratives suggest that the experience occurred in connection with drinking bouts after fairs or communal work and, contrary to the first-hand narrators, second-hand narrators often expressed the opinion that the person who claimed to have been carried by night witches was in fact drunk. To explain spending the night in the forest as a consequence of drunkenness as being "witches' work" was certainly a suitable and handy explanation that discharged men of any guilt and shame.

Some narratives on nocturnal encounters might have served to conceal sexual experiences, or at least reflected sexual fantasies of young males excited by sexual tension. Narváez argued that narratives from Newfoundland about people being carried away by fairies often expressed youthful tensions with regard to courtship and illicit sexual relations, and served to cover up sexual assaults, the sexual harassment of children, and similar (1991: 354, 357). De Pina-Cabral considers stories of night witches as “comments of the potential threat of female sexuality” and the light that witches carry on their buttocks during their nightly wanderings as pointing to heat in the genital and anal regions, associated with sexual excitement (1986: 90–91). The only two narratives referring to night witches as naked indeed seem conditioned by sexual fantasies. The narrative relating the event which occurred during the period of man’s serving in the army might suggest that tensions due to repressed sexual activity found their release in the narration of the story (see inf. 38, p. 362).³⁷ The following narrative of an encounter with naked witches who allegedly dragged the man all over the forest, through bushes, thickets, and streams, stripping him naked and beating him on his behind, and his peeing into their midst, also includes various elements that might suggest either an attempt to conceal a sexual encounter, or at least a reflection of the subject’s sexual fantasies.

Damn. [laughter] There was one man, they called him J. S. and he was from B. He was the kind of guy who was always dirty and greasy, which is why they called him S. And he went to S. down into the valley, for a day’s work. He was poor, maybe he had kids and a wife, and there was no food, and so he went and helped cutting wood or grass, and things like that. And then down here, a little bit further from our mill—now it is a road but before it was a lane, a muddy farm lane, and another footpath crossed this lane so that you did not have to go through the mud, so that you could walk a little bit better, you know. And then one night, he was a little drunk and in a good mood and he went home in the evening. And he saw that at the crossroads of this lane and the footpath there was a fire. What could that be? And he goes closer and closer, and he saw four women roasting something. He said: I bet my head that they were roasting pig shit. [laughter] Whether they were or not I do not know. And he said: Yes, what else! And he knew them. Well, you fucking witches, what are you doing here? What are you doing here? I’ll show you! You are witches! And he gave a detailed account of who those four women were. Shame on you! And on top of everything you are naked too! I’ll show you! And he had to pee, and he peed into their fire [laughter], so that the fire went out. Then the witches grabbed him and dragged him to B., into the stream below us. And they gave him a terrible

bath: You wait, S., we will show you, we will give you a little wash, so that you won't be so greasy! They bathed him all over his body, and they [laughter] took all his clothes off and then they whipped him with thorn branches, he said, with sticks they beat him on his behind. Of course. And they disappeared. They were gone. And he was left there and he woke up only at the break of dawn ... (149)

Lindow argues that one of the possible explanations for the stories about abductions by supernatural beings looking for a partner from the other world are erotic experiences which are projected onto representatives of the other world, especially when people were forced into longterm isolation due to the nature of their work (for instance charcoal-burning). He also emphasised that the period of highest vulnerability is before the wedding or on the wedding day (1978: 45), and the following narrative indeed seems to point to the bachelor's preoccupation with his own marriage:

- II: All I can tell is that when my father-in-law, I mean my mother's husband came home from B. he used to say that he met an unknown woman who said: Jakob, be careful not to get lost. He said how she knew my name, and then, he said, at the moment that she [the witch] left, I went on, but I suddenly didn't know where I was any more, he said, and he wandered around in circles for two hours until he recognized the place again.*
- F: Where did this happen to him?*
- II: In B., now I do not know ... he said when he was still single he met a pretty woman, and she said: I was at your wedding. And he tried to figure out how that could be since he was still single ... and then that woman said: Be careful where you go home, that's all.*
- F: What did this woman look like?*
- II: Father said she looked perfectly normal, just like us, just a little bit ... well, she said that. She supposedly said to him—when he was still single—and she said to him: Be careful where you walk home (...) and then she pointed into the forest, he said, and then he could not get out for all the world. He only came out after about two hours. (8)*

The following narrative, in which the husband's jealousy is emphasised by a second-hand narrator, might suggest that the subject used the narrative about her experience of getting lost as a "weapon" against her husband who did not let her spend a night at her friends' home, and she, therefore, had to return home at night, risking her and her child's life. The jealous husband who did not let his wife spend the night elsewhere may

have been told this story as a lesson so that she would not be obliged to come back home in any circumstances the next time. If her narrative was told by other female narrators, it could fulfil the same function, that is, warning against their partners' jealousy in their own marital relationships.

- I1: *My husband used to tell this story, that he went with his mother who as a child lived in V., as they say here, if you know where V. is (...) And they walked home one night because her husband was very jealous and did not allow her stay there that night and sleep over there, and they went home on foot in winter, and it snowed as well. And she said: How are we going to make it when there is so much snow? And two men went, they came and then they ...*
- I2: *... they came to G. and they got completely lost, and they did not know where they were.*
- I1: *... and two men ... yes two men went through the snow ahead of them. And they just followed those two men, and they just walked and walked and they came very, very close to here, to a spring (...) And there they did not ... what ... they did not know where to go anymore. And then they finally came, after all they came to a house at half past one or something like that at night. And they stayed there, didn't they?*
- I2: *Yes, the point is they followed two men, didn't they?*
- I1: *Through the entire forest, the entire B. they followed the two men, you know. And those two led the way, and they followed them close behind, didn't they?*
- F: *Did those two men mix them up?*
- I1: *Yes, yes. And this is let's say unusual here that two men would go like this and in winter...*
- I2: *Yes, and at night.*
- I1: *And in the evening, at night, and through the forest, up the hill, don't you know. (53)*

While narratives about night witches (which may have prevented people from going out at night) certainly had a positive economic function in assuring the farm's prosperity—it was necessary for people not to be awakened late at night in order to be well rested for the work that needed to be done in the farm the next day (cf. Grambo 1970: 261)—the reference to witches may have also been evoked intentionally by a worker to have an excuse to stop working after long hours of exhausting work.

I1: *One time we went to do a harvest at night, when it was too hot during the day, but at two o'clock one woman said that she was going home. But I said that we should harvest until two, but she said that she was going home, because*

the witches would come. Soon we saw light after light. Then the woman said that we shouldn't work anymore, because the witches would do something to us. Every night we stopped working at two, and then we went for tea and brandy, and to sleep. (127)

In addition, witchcraft discourse could be strategically employed in discouraging adults from leaving their homes at night to do illicit things, like having clandestine love affairs, thieving (cf. Stewart 1991: 172), and so on, as well as to serve as an educational means in the raising of children, a pedagogic device to scare children from wandering alone in the forests (cf. Lindow 1978: 44; Widdowson 1978: 35; Devlin 1987: 77):

F: *Did they ever scare you, when you were young, not to walk around at night?*
 I1: *Oh, you bet they did!*
 F: *What did they scare you with?*
 I2: *Well, that there are witches, right?*
 I1: *That witches walk around ... (127)*

I2: *Well, I think, when we didn't go anywhere, those were, well you know how children are sometimes, sometimes they are like ... [They would say] so that they [children] wouldn't go out at night, that [witches] are frightening or something like that. Well, sometimes they said that there were witches. (50)*

This wasn't written down, it was more in the evenings when people were husking corn and so. Yes, women used to tell this, but this ... This was more for fun and to frighten youth. (31)

NOTES

1. I use the term “night witch” which partly conforms with Pocs’ C type of witches (“supernatural” or “night” witches), that is, “characterized in the court narratives as the demons of night visions and dreams. These narratives are memorates (i.e. relations of one’s experiences) of the conflict between the human and supernatural worlds, where witches as supernatural creatures attack their victims” (Pócs 1999: 11). In our region, however, night witches are never subjects of dream visions that people would experience during their sleep at home. In addition, *mora*-like beings were not (except for in one narrative) related to witches, but represented a separate category of supernatural beings, called either *smrčjak* or *vozim*.

2. Occasionally, the time of the appearance of night witches is specified in regard to the annual or lunar cycle, such as Midsummer's Eve, the full moon at the end of November, the full moon in the spring and autumn, Advent (Christmas) and Ember Week, but this data is marginal and fairly atypical.
3. When houses are scattered in small hamlets or separate from the serried houses in a village, the village boundary does not play a particular role; instead, it is often rather the boundary of the homestead that is crucial.
4. Hereafter I will use the expression "being carried" as a general expression for the experience.
5. He discusses this in the chapter entitled "Coping with Evil".
6. See Chap. 3, Personal Attitudes Towards Witchcraft.
7. The mention of witches' congregations, dances and feasts in some narratives may reflect traditional rather than demonological notions about journeys to witches' sabbaths (cf. Ginzburg 1984; de Blecourt 2013: 366; Pócs 1999: 73–75). We also recorded a few narratives about witches' meetings in wine cellars, eating and drinking wine (cf. Ginzburg 1984: 46–47; 1992: 89, 158–159), encompassing many legendary motifs (the moment when an uninvited person enters the cellar, witches disappear, and their food turns into horse droppings and so forth), yet these were never narrated as personal experiences.
8. Galician narratives about nocturnal encounters also refer to witches in the form of an animal.
9. Night witches in our region only exceptionally appear in human shape (cf. inf. 8, p. 392; inf. 53, p. 392–393). In addition, witches in the form of women are described as doing the laundry, but in this case their human form is more typically only assumed, rather than being actually seen.
10. This is one of the few narratives in which the light is observed from just inside the house; however, the house of this particular narrator is located at the very edge of a forest.
11. As this is clearly a suggestion imposed on the narrator by the student, I would not take her answer seriously if the narrator did not confirm her conviction by herself again at the end of the interview.
12. In Scandinavian folklore, souls, among other forms, are pictured as assuming the form of light (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1991: 80). In Slavic folklore in general, souls can also take the form of a flame, light, or fire (Tolstaja 2000: 75–76). In Macedonian folklore records, it is

- said that at the moment the soul of a dying person leaves the body, it takes the form of a small flame (Tolstoj 2000: 76).
13. Souls of people who died an “unclean death.” This can be a consequence of incomplete funeral rituals, unclear social status (unbaptised children and unmarried people), untimely or violent death, suicide, or sins committed during life (moving boundary stones, incorrect measuring, or other sins), dealing with witchcraft, and similar (cf. Risteski 1999; Vinogradova 1999: 45–49).
 14. Julian Goodare uses the term “nature spirits” as a generic category within which he sees “fairies” and “brownies” as separate subcategories (cf. 2014). Katharine M. Briggs, on the other hand, uses “fairies” as generic category into which Brownie (hobgoblin) is included as a subcategory of “tutelary spirit” (1967: 25).
 15. This is a Latin term for such a light in European literature (in sixteenth-century English called “foolish fire,” “fool’s fire,” “false fire”; in Italian *fuochi fatui*; in French *feu follet*). Another Latin term is *ignis erraticus* (e.g. the English “wandering fire”, “walking fire”, German *Irrlicht*) (Wells Newell 1904: 44).
 16. Only rarely, for example, in North Carolina, is such a being also heard (cf. Hand 1977: 228).
 17. Very seldom could the “laundresses” also be identified as fairies, and it seems that folklore about fairies doing laundry by the creeks, rivers, and springs at nights, known in the Balkans, overlapped with the narratives about night witches in our region. Legends about fairies being heard doing laundry, beating and hitting with small wooden spades to make it as white as possible, were recorded among Croats in Bosnia even at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Brkić Vučina 2013: 133).
 18. The notion that one is only allowed to disclose the identities of witches when they are dead is also present in a narrative from Prekmurje, a northeastern Slovenian region on the Hungarian border: “It often happens that someone comes back late from another village and goes astray, loses the right path and gets lost, not knowing where to go. Such a man then says that witches were chasing him all over the place and would not let him go home before they made him lose his breath. At the same time everyone says that he knew these witches who chased him very well, but that he had to promise them not to snitch them as long as he lives if he didn’t want to be killed the next time, or get numb” (Kühlar 1911: 56; Kelemina 1997: 88).

19. Translated by Lina Būgienė; handout from the ISFNR congress in Tartu 2006; LTR 5196/172, Text No. 5.
20. I would like to thank Francisco Vaz da Silva for sending and translating the narrative for me.
21. Cf. also other narratives of the Finnish-speaking population: *The forest can mislead. You'll go and come to the same place.* (Unpublished text from the estonian Folklore archives: Ve XVI 157 (1), Kirjamo village—p. ariste, olga Kuzmina and Maria Virolainen (Ingrian Finns), in 1973.)/What does it mean that the forest mislead you?/[A special verb is used in Votic *viipata* to denote misleading.]-*It is said that forest misleads people. That you move round and round [ümperik-koa häiläD]. But you do not reach the road where you intend to reach.* (Unpublished text from the estonian Folklore archives: Ve XVI 68 (56) Mati village—P. Ariste, Maria Boranova, in 1973.) I would like to thank Ergo-Hart Västriik for sending and translating the Votic texts presented in the book.
22. Stark too argues that the experiences of forest cover, similar to those caused by night witches in our region, were sometimes considered a consequence of a spell cast by an evil-minded neighbour (2006: 367).
23. In Serbia and in Kosovo, urine was also believed to help against epileptic seizure: mothers touched their child's mouth with their vagina (after uttering words which are supposed to protect them against further seizures) and urinated into their mouth when they had their (first) epileptic seizure (Plas 2004: 261–262).
24. This conceptualisation has been observed throughout Africa where this-and otherworldly presences or messages are signalled by acoustic differences: the characteristic “sound” of the otherworld is silence, noise, or unarticulated voice, while words and confident noise belong to the human world. Peek actually argues that “the denial of human speech is a fundamental denial of humanness” (1994: 475–478; cf. also Sullivan 1986: 17). In Morocco, for instance, “while words and confident noise belong to the human world, ‘odd’ sounds such as whistling and humming, are thought to be the voices of *jinn*” (Griffin 1991: 216–217). Such acoustic characteristics might explain the strange or humming sounds ascribed to night witches above (cf. inf. 16, p. 357–359) and the “humming” voices of supernatural lights, fairies, and even aliens in other narratives (cf. Hand 1977: 228; Mack 1995: 14, 18–19).

25. Julian Goodare's interpretation (personal communication, 18 august 2015).
26. This could also become detached when a person is attending to one aspect of the environment while being passively transported on a train or a bus.
27. An early explanation of the veering phenomenon was that all organisms, humans included, have an innate spiralling tendency. When lost in forests, snowstorms, fogs, and so forth, the orienting senses are not functioning, and they would start walking in circles—thus when people are unable to orient themselves by using vision, or other senses, an innate mechanism for spiralling is revealed. Further research explained walking in circles by the leg length differences of humans: people were thought to tend to veer in the direction of the shorter leg by about 22 per cent over 100 feet when walking at a normal speed. Further research, however, showed that veering may not be necessarily influenced by physical asymmetry; it can also be related to the body posture, or triggered by the presence of distracting stimuli, such as sounds, by small errors in the angle of the steps, or damage to the vestibular system. Experiments conducted in a German forest and in the Tunisian Sahara, aimed at testing the ability of humans to walk in a straight line through unfamiliar terrain, in which participants walked at night for hours, showed that they were repeatedly walking in circles when they could not see the sun (conversely, when the sun was visible, they sometimes veered from a straight course but did not walk in circles), without any relation to physical asymmetries (cf. Souman et al. 2009; Dudchenko 2010).
28. Some narrators even mentioned that people got lost after they had participated in shared work, which, as discussed above, was the typical setting for the narration of witchcraft stories.
29. Wine may have been occasionally adulterated with psychoactive chemicals (Bever 2008: 130–131), perhaps salamander toxin, yet none of my interlocutors ever gave any indication that could bring me to such conclusion.
30. Yulia Ustinova, in her discussion of mind-altering agents, pays special attention to alcoholic beverages. She gives a survey of the usage of alcohol through history, tracing its origin to the fourth millennium BCE in the eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia, through the end of Neolithic period when first vines were cultivated, and argues that since the Stone Age, prehistoric human beings manipulated their

- minds through the use of psychoactive substances, usually in religious contexts (2011: 50–52).
31. Out-of-body experiences refer to a feeling of separation from one's body and/or viewing one's own body from an external, typically elevated, viewing station (autoscopy), the core of which is a feeling of spatial separation of the observing self from the body.
 32. Illusory (bodily self) movement experiences (IMEs) encompass vestibular experiences (floating, flying, falling, spinning, and elevator sensations) and motor hallucinations (illusory limb movement, sitting, standing, and locomotion).
 33. "Ein supranormales Erlebnis entsteht natürlich nicht aus dem Nichts. Es setzt immer Kenntnis der Supranormalen Tradition voraus (...)"
 34. David Hufford calls the approach that argues that supernatural experiences are either fictitious products of tradition or imaginary subjective experiences shaped or caused by tradition the "cultural source hypothesis" (Hufford 1982: 14).
 35. Stark contradicts Holmberg's claim that "the stress experienced by early modern wanderers in the wilds was the same stress we could imagine ourselves experiencing, and that it arose from the same "causes" by arguing that "while hunger, cold, and fatigue might be assumed to be primarily sources of stress for the modern forest wanderer, these were not unusual experiences for the impoverished early modern rural inhabitant, who was likely to have experienced them relatively frequently and to have been at least somewhat inured to them" (2006: 364). As for many informants from our region who were talking about their own experience of being led by the witches, and for their parents whose experiences they often related, hunger and fatigue were everyday experiences, these factors could not be directly excluded as those that could possibly trigger the experience of early modern Finns—even though I do not claim them to be their true source.
 36. Last but not least, many questions that could have been posed during the fieldwork in order to be able to draw firm conclusions about the exact state of the subject were, unfortunately, missed (cf. Goodare 2013: 170).
 37. This particular narrative might possibly be understood as a cover-up or an excuse for an inadvertent manslaughter, but as this was a second-hand narrative, it is impossible to draw any precise conclusion.

Conclusion

In this book, I have aimed to show the witchcraft in the region of our research in its entirety, encompassing not only relatively distinct layers but also relatively distinct types of witches, all discussed within the context of witchcraft and all called by the same name: a witch. The first layer involves social tensions within the community, and it was neighbours that were typically blamed for the misfortunes that befell people and their households: their envy and malice were considered the main driving force behind the bewitchment. In order to annihilate the bewitchment and overcome the neighbourhood witch's power, the victims either drew upon the repertoire of commonly known countermeasures or sought help from an unwitcher. They usually maintained good relations with their "witches" and did not let them know that they were suspected of bewitchment, yet their behaviour must have at least occasionally conveyed an indisputable message of what they were accused of.

A separate category of witches, that is, village witches, still of the social level of witchcraft but with somewhat different characteristics, were people who had the reputation of a witch throughout the entire community. Apart from those who acquired the reputation due to an increasing consensus about their bewitching activities in the community and who thus cannot be clearly distinguished from neighbourhood witches, there were people who gained the status of a village witch in the community for other reasons, usually several of them combined, such as age, appearance, behaviour, location

of their residence, economic, social and marital status, the transgression of social norms, above or under-average wealth, extra knowledge, possession of a magic book, reputation of their family, and, retrospectively, even the circumstances of their death and funeral. Narratives about village witches placed much more emphasis on the reasons for their reputation as such than on their bewitching acts, and misfortune was not necessarily said to be caused by a village witch's bewitchment. When it was, however, their bewitchment was generally directed against the community as a whole, and they sometimes had the role of the scapegoat in the community. In these cases, people would never address an unwitcher, as they often would in case of a "witchcraft dispute" with an envious neighbour. Occasionally, threats were directed against them, yet the conviction that they could do harm if they bore a grudge against someone usually forced people to handle them with stressed politeness. Nevertheless, since people preferred to avoid women with such a reputation, this sometimes led to their isolation.

In addition to the "social" witches, people also narrated about night witches, who in all their characteristics—appearance, deeds, places, and times of their occurrence and even in protective measures employed against them—are much more closely related to supernatural entities of European folklore than they are to social witches. While narratives about night witches were part of the stock of witchcraft narratives circulating in the region in the time of our research, and at least some of them pointed to their association with human witches, there are nevertheless marked differences between the two levels of witchcraft and the two types of discourses, which clearly distinguish night witches from the human witches of social witchcraft.

Witchcraft in our region, therefore, presents a manifold complex: different types of witches display different characteristics, narratives related to different types of witches report about different types of experiences and ascribe different grounds for their bewitchments, and also reveal different manners of people's behaviour towards different types of witches. Narration of stories related to different types of witches also fulfilled different functions in the rural communities. Why is it, therefore, that all of these witches are called by the same name and all their deeds are considered witchcraft? What is it that unites neighbourhood witches, accused of causing misfortune to their neighbour, village witches accused, if at all, of misfortunes affecting the community as a whole, and night witches, observed in the form of lights and blamed for making people get lost in the forest at night?

We have seen that the neighbourhood witch represented a threat from the outside of the homestead and that it was the (boundaries of the) body and homestead in particular that were deemed vulnerable to her attack. Above all through looking and speaking, more rarely also touching and giving a gift, the witch was able to bewitch the body of a victim through the margins and apertures on the margins of their physical body (eyes, to a lesser extent also mouth and skin). The margins of the house and of the farmstead reflect the same vulnerability as the margins of the physical body—just like transgressing the bodily boundaries, any transgression of the boundaries of a private property was considered suspicious in terms of bewitchment. As physical bodies and their boundaries were protected from witches by the closure of the apertures of the body (one was not allowed to look and talk to the witch, or to eat her food), houses and homesteads were physically closed or symbolically fenced off from witches through various rituals performed on their boundaries.

While the neighbourhood witch transgressed the boundaries of the physical body and that of the homestead, the village witch threatened to transgress the (social) boundaries of the village community. Her socially unacceptable behaviour (she behaved like a man, did not conform to the social expectations of a woman, and was poorer than average or amassed a larger share of wealth than others ...) made her the other in the eyes of the villagers. Moreover, by her old age (as a rule very old, i.e., on the verge of death), her unclear gender status (usually a post-menopausal woman, i.e., neither a woman nor a man) and marital status (often unmarried or widowed, i.e., of an unclear social status), her physical appearance (ugly and animal-like), location of residence (at the boundary of the village, marked by the vicinity of the other world), and her extra knowledge that others did not share, the village witch was additionally marked by otherness, or even otherworldliness.

If the neighbourhood and village witch were Others in the social and territorial sense, night witches represented the ontological Other *par excellence*. Through their form and the experiences they triggered, they embodied the other world and represented its intrusion into the world of humans. Night witches transgressed the boundaries of the human world in liminal time and space, outside the boundaries of the homesteads and the community, outside “this” world. Thus, while neighbourhood witches threatened from the other side of the boundary of the human body and homestead, and the village witches symbolically, socially as well as territorially represented the Others to the village community as a whole, night witches in fact

embodied the other world as such. What united all three types of witches then, was basically their otherness—territorial, social, symbolic or ontological—their transgression of the established boundaries, be it those of the human body, the homestead, the community or the world of humans as such.

*

One may wonder, in the end, what happened in contemporary society that witchcraft is no longer a suitable explanation of misfortune for the majority of the population. Do we no longer fear people that transgress the accepted boundaries of human space, behaviour, and experience and threaten our health, well-being, and prosperity? The improved economic situation, medical care, traffic facilities, and social security have to some extent lessened the feelings of insecurity and precariousness of life in contemporary society, and the lack of the social settings, that is, shared work in the evenings, in which the explanation of misfortune by way of witchcraft was rendered public support, additionally helped in the process of the abandonment of witchcraft for alternative explanations of misfortune. However, these changes, which in our region occurred in the 1970s, went hand in hand with another radical change that occurred in Western society in the late 1970s and early 1980s. If at the end of the Second World War the enemy, and anxiety related to it, was perceived as coming from the outside, in this period, the object of horror was becoming more and more located inside society and especially inside the human body (whereas from the beginning of the new millennium they both started to act together and follow a similar pattern) (cf. Salecl 2004: 4–6). Such a general societal change in the perception of the source of anxiety is clearly reflected in the change of the discourse on misfortune.

In July 2014, I had an opportunity to conduct an interview with a 54-year-old woman, Barbara, living in a modern house in the centre of a densely populated village on flat land, only a few kilometres away from the strict borders of the region under research. In her youth, she studied at the university in the capital, but had to quit her studies just before obtaining a degree due to her family situation. She has since lived as a housewife, taking care of her family, a rather large garden, and some hens. An intelligent and articulate woman, she narrated about her knowledge and personal experiences with witchcraft and the supernatural for nearly two hours. Below I shall present just a part of the interview in which she discussed her own experience with bewitchment, in order to illustrate the changes that the discourse on witchcraft has undergone in the last few decades.

In 2010, Barbara was repeatedly finding eggs buried in her garden, in places where the hens could not possibly have laid them. After a while she mentioned this to her sister-in-law, who explained that the eggs were buried there to cause her harm and suggested that it was her neighbour, who allegedly already had the reputation of a witch in the village, that was burying eggs on her property. Like so many of our interlocutors, she too refrained from accusing her neighbour directly:

When she [the sister-in-law] said that it could be my neighbor [that buried the eggs], I said: I can't ..., I didn't see her, how can I blame someone when I can't be sure it was her?

Unlike our interlocutors, however, she did not first resort to the traditional modes in dealing with the eggs herself, but immediately turned to a specialist for help. She too decided to pay a visit to a specialist outside the boundaries of her region. The specialist she turned to, Sarah, was, however, not a traditional unwitcher, but a New-Age practitioner from the capital. Her website advertises her as a transformative adviser and a soothsayer who is “able to see and dismiss the reasons for the disharmony with the help of angels”; in her practice, she actually combines various kinds of therapies.¹ This is how Barbara described her séance with Sarah:

Barbara: And then I went to see someone in Ljubljana who deals with that ...

Mirjam: A fortune-teller?

Barbara: Kind of, yes ... Well, not only fortune-telling, she also gives angels' blessings.² She has an above average bioenergy confirmed by the Jožef Štefan Institute,³ so there is some truth about it. Well, she told me that this was done by someone living nearby, she told me so, but she was not allowed to tell who that person was. Nevertheless, she could see this person and this person allegedly wished me bad.

Mirjam: Did she describe her?

Barbara: No, that was all she told me. She said she would give me some blessings, of course, I had to pay quite a lot for that, but I must say that since then I haven't found eggs any more, whereas before I kept finding them, whenever I was weeding, I don't know, once a month, three times a year—since I have no time [to weed] any more often—and they were always there.

Mirjam: When did you visit Sarah?

Barbara: This was about three, four years ago. Since then I have found no more eggs, even though we had a dispute [with the neighbour],

so it may have been her or not ... She [Sarah] said she shouldn't tell [who it was] (...) She only told me that it was a woman living nearby.

Mirjam: *Can you tell me how exactly the conversation went on when you went to see her?*

Barbara: *Well, she said: Somebody wishes you evil ...*

Mirjam: *Did you tell her that you had found eggs?*

Barbara: *My daughter is her friend and my daughter told her what was happening. She [Sarah] said: Well you know, somebody wishes her harm, I know about these things, she said, it's best if she comes to me, and she will receive a blessing and that will pass. And it actually did pass. My husband said that I was totally crazy, and how can I even believe in such things. I said: You know what, I'm going, at least I'm going to see what there is in it, there's nothing to lose except for some money. And I did it and there were no more eggs.*

Mirjam: *How did she determine who was doing this to you?*

Barbara: *She sees in pictures, she has these tarot cards and she lays out those cards, and then just turns them over. She just turns one over. But she also put something else in my hand before that, so that I had to turn one over, and then she reads from that one. Such things, for instance. These are sometimes things, that it really gives you the creeps. Things happen that I don't believe, but when you think of some of these facts, when you see this ... Well, I tell you that human intelligence is so limited, we're never going to know what's going on around us. There is something above us, but what it is we do not know ... Some say it's God, some say it's something else, but in my own life I have learned that there truly is something above us. When things happen that you can't [explain] ...*

Mirjam: *But did she at least describe your neighbour?*

Barbara: *No, she just said that it was some woman. She said that she couldn't divulge anything. That she lives nearby. Later, when my sister-in-law told me [that it was the neighbor who was burying eggs], I suspected her, because I get along well with all of my neighbors. And I got on well with her before, she taught me how to bake, I really learned a lot from her, we worked together, and helped each other out and all ...*

Mirjam: *You never had any problems before that?*

Barbara: *None.*

Mirjam: *Why did she do that?*

Barbara: *I have no idea. I have no idea, not a clue! Just that my sister-in-law says that they are exceptionally envious. If someone is doing well, she wanted to do us harm.*

- Mirjam:* Why couldn't Sarah say who it was?
- Barbara:* She says that in her work she is not allowed to tell. There are certain matters which are very sensitive, and they warn you. Protect yourself against this person. Well, she warned me about one person, she said—this person is actually my brother [quietly] ... she said: Your brother is just the type [of person] who doesn't bring certain things. We understand each other, but we have never had any deep connection, you know, birthdays, holidays, at those times we see each other, and help each other out and such, but that there would be any deep relationship between us, that never was [the case]. But there was never any dispute between us either, since I'm not the arguing type.
- Mirjam:* Did you pay in cash?
- Barbara:* In cash, she has her price, and you pay it.
- Mirjam:* Did she offer you the chance to destroy the bewitchment, or for you to find out which woman it was?
- Barbara:* No, she did not give me those opportunities, but she said that that with which she had performed the blessing had destroyed the spell, that there was nothing more on me, whereas before she had seen some sort of negative aura—she has some professional terms for it—above me.
- Mirjam:* Did she use the term witch for her?
- Barbara:* No, no. person. She very specifically said that a “person” lives near you, that wishes you evil ... She only stated a couple of facts, right, so that you could explain it in one way or another ...
- Mirjam:* Did you ever say to that person that you know it was she?
- Barbara:* No, never. I say that if I don't see something, I can't say [anything], it could be anybody. When people are so secretive, you just don't know, if you do not socialise with someone, you don't know what they're like.

The discussion with Barbara reveals many elements that we have already encountered in the bewitchment narratives in our region: the narrator finding buried eggs but claiming that she cannot blame anyone because she did not see the perpetrator; assuring that she “doesn't believe”, yet at the same time swearing that it is more to it than meets the eye; the therapist giving vague suggestions about the identity of her victim's “enemy” (an envious woman living nearby), but is not allowed to reveal her true identity. Just like the label *witch* was not necessarily used by the victims or unwitchers—they would often rather refer to *envious*, *bad neighbours*—the New-Age therapist also referred to her enemy as *someone who wishes her ill*. Moreover, when I later conducted an interview with Sarah myself, when

asked to elaborate on “secret enemies”, she particularly underlined *envy* as the key emotion: “Envy is usually the main emotion of all these ...”.

The procedure of the therapist too in all basic elements mirrors the typical elements of the procedure performed by traditional unwitchers: (1) the *confirmation of witchcraft*: the misfortune (in this case the anticipation of misfortune, i.e., the finding of bewitching object) is declared to have been caused by a person who wishes the client ill (*She told me that this was being done by someone living nearby (...) this person wished me ill.*); (2) the *identification of the witch*: the person is vaguely identified (an envious woman living nearby), whereas the precise identification is left to the client (*Well, she told me that this was being done by someone living nearby, she told me, but she was not allowed to tell who the person was. Nevertheless she could see this person (...) She only told me that this was a woman who lived nearby.*); (3) the *bewitchment is annihilated*: some medicine (angels’ blessings) and probably instructions on how to use it against bewitchment is given to the client in order to annihilate the bewitchment (*She said she would give me some blessings, of course I had to pay quite a lot for that, but I must say that since then I haven’t found eggs any more*).

In spite of all these similarities between the New-Age therapy and traditional unwitching, witchcraft was not mentioned once by the therapist—yet, as mentioned above, it was not necessarily explicitly mentioned by traditional unwitchers either. However, while during the consultation of the client with a traditional unwitcher, the unwitcher as well as the client were both aware that they were talking about witchcraft when the unwitcher declared that “this was done”, even if the word witchcraft as such was not explicitly uttered, the New-Age therapist, although her own discourse in every way resembled that of the traditional unwitcher (she too declared that “this was done”!), denied that witchcraft was at stake and decisively dismissed any assumption of bewitchment:

Sarah: *Plenty come here who have already been visiting a million of other people [therapists]. And I help them at the end, I truly help them! They say they are bewitched. But I tell them they are not bewitched, these are negative thoughts, this [witchcraft] does not exist. When we work on this, purify this, they realise that I was right, because they free themselves of these thoughts, because they are free. They work on themselves at home, meditate, go on with their life, discover the talents they possess and so on.*

There is yet another difference between the procedure of a traditional unwitcher and the New-Age therapist. In their procedure, traditional

unwitchers, as we have seen above, usually gave some advice on hygiene, nutrition, and similar, and perhaps some traditional medicine, and prescribed the exact procedure aimed at annihilation of the bewitchment and the identification of the witch—only when the witch was identified and consequently the misfortunes stopped was the unwitcher’s role accomplished. The identification of the witch in the traditional unwitching procedure was considered crucial for the effective overcoming of witch’s power and the prevention of further bewitchments. The New-age therapist, on the contrary, while also giving advice (which negative emotions to eliminate, how to meditate and pray) and some objects (angels’ blessings), and vaguely confirming clients’ suspicions about their enemies, unlike a traditional unwitcher, redirected the client’s focus of interest from the external perpetrator to themselves:

Sarah: We shouldn’t condemn anybody. We all have secret enemies, nobody has a clear conscience, nobody in this world has one. The background of the situation needs to be disclosed: what is wrong with this soul, what kind of help is it seeking. I work on the principle of self-purification, that is, for people to grow, if you know what I mean. So that they realise that spells and black magic—that these don’t exist. I show them that life energy is within them and that light is stronger than all these negative influences that disturb us from the outside. That they need to have strong energy, which they ought to purify through meditation, since by realizing what you must purify in yourself, by realizing the cause, you get power. Because when you disclose your secret enemy, they lose their power, they automatically fall. The secret enemy can be, for instance, your boss who doesn’t like you.

Mirjam: But how do you know who the enemy is?

Sarah: One realizes that by oneself after a while. One undergoes a therapy with me, I tell them the background, here and there [you must work on yourself], then they work on themselves and function in this domain. These are just energies. Then the source is disclosed. These are just energies.

Mirjam: Do you ever tell them directly: This or that person is your enemy?

Sarah: No, never. I help them by directing them so that they can understand what is going on with them, why they are feeling so bad. Perhaps they need to forgive themselves or others, perhaps they are taking on guilt and have to free themselves from it. (...) No one can harm you by black magic. Black magic does not exist, but envy does and an envious person can destroy your life. But people explain this wrongly. When somebody’s energy is stronger [than yours], they can do you harm. (...) But if your energy is strong enough, a million people can envy you, and yet this will do you no harm.

The protection against evil, and consequently against further misfortunes, is thus in the New-Age therapy no longer achieved by the identification of the enemy threatening from the outside and their counteraction, but ultimately lies *inside* the individual's own body and psyche. The process of personal growth, implying the elimination of negative emotions and the strengthening of one's "energy" with the help of prayer, meditation and therapy, is the process leading to the permanent and ultimate protection against all sorts of "enemies" from the outside. One's life, health, success, and well-being thus ultimately lie in one's own hands and are under the control of each individual:

- Mirjam:* Can one protect oneself against another person's envy? Do you give them something for protection, like an object, or a talisman?
- Sarah:* No, nothing like that. No protection. I was studying this for years and went through several things myself. The best protection is a prayer, a conversation with God, everyone can maximally protect oneself, but one needs to do that by oneself, you alone can protect yourself!

We have seen that the suggestion of a traditional unwitcher to redirect the bewitchment back to its source, that is, to the witch, was seldom mentioned by the interlocutors, and when it was, no one admitted to having accepted the proposal. Barbara did not mention that the therapist offered her this option either. However, this last step of the traditional procedure is carefully "hidden" in the discourse on "personal growth" within the New-Age procedure too:

- Mirjam:* Can one stop envy, harm coming from another person—can you stop such a person?
- Sarah:* They alone stop themselves. When you purify what was being imposed on you by another person, the energy automatically returns to that person and they have so much work with themselves that they forget about envy and everything else. This is called a reversal of energy in Taoism. You just return what was being inflicted upon you to the source.

I have argued above that the main role of the traditional unwitcher in our region was to help relieve the victim of the responsibility for the misfortunes that befell the household, by redirecting the blame to the witches coming from outside the household. The anxiety felt by the victims when the household did not prosper was certainly grounded in economic insecurity, yet

on the other hand, it was strongly related to their social position in the community—when it was threatened, they needed, with the support of an unwitcher, to transfer the responsibility from themselves to an external source. The identification of a witch from the outside was thus crucial for releasing the tension that the victims experienced due to the expectations of the community imposed on them. While in the context of traditional witchcraft the key underlying premise was that the source of misfortune threatened from the outside, this premise, while still implicitly present in the background, loses its crucial importance in the further steps of the “unwitching” procedure in New-Age therapy—instead, the main arena of counteraction against the perpetrator is transferred from the outside to the inside, to one’s own body and mind.

This basic difference between traditional and contemporary procedures aimed at the resolution of personal misfortune, and ultimately, at the release of anxiety, seems to reflect the changes that have occurred in the last few decades in contemporary, individualised neoliberal society, in which individuals are encouraged to look at their own life as an artistic product or an enterprise (Kamin and Ule 2009; Salecl 2011) and to take it into their own hands. Yet, just like specialists of the past who helped people relieve their anxieties in times of misfortune by relocating the blame from themselves to another member of the community, and thus ultimately helped them maintain their social position when it was threatened, contemporary New-age specialists also help people relieve the tensions in times of misfortune by helping them to resolve, or at least to stay in control of, their own anxieties—and thus at the same time, ultimately, to maintain their social position in the society.

“Unwitchers” who adapted to the New-Age discourse and the demands of contemporary society thus continue to be in demand by people in times of anxiety, triggered not only by economic uncertainty but also by the problems people experience with regard to their social roles. At the same time, however, they help protect contemporary neoliberal society at large from any “disturbances” by individuals who are not constantly maximally productive and fully in control of themselves, as society expects them to be (cf. Salecl 2004: 2–3, 7–9). Thus, while in the New-Age therapy the witchcraft discourse is carefully veiled and the process of resolution of the source of anxiety accommodated to the demands of neoliberal capitalism, “witchcraft” has, nonetheless, remained a part of our lives. With one difference only: in times of misfortune, we no longer obtain relief by finding our “witches” on the outside—instead, we have learned to search for them

within, and have become trained to take responsibility for any failures in our lives, health, careers, and jobs—even when “not guilty”.

NOTES

1. In order not to disclose her identity, I have refrained from stating the precise types of techniques that she uses.
2. For more on (post-)New-Age angel therapy and lore as well as angelic amulets see Kis-Halas 2012.
3. Slovenia’s main scientific institute.

LIST OF NARRATORS

1=

I1: male, b. 1933.

I2: female, b. 1937, his wife.

2= male, b. 1928, in the past a miner for a few years.

3= male.

4=

I1: female, b. 1933.

I2: male, b. 1958, her son.

5= female, b. 1931, in the past a shop-assistant and the owner of the inn.

6=

I1: male (see 31)

I2: male, b. 1945.

I3: male, b. 1970, son of I2.

7= male, b. 1933.

8=

I1: female, b. 1955.

I2: female, b. 1920, mother-in-law of I1.

I3: male, b. 1982, son of I1.

9= female, b. 1936, a housewife;

11=

I1: female, b. 1935, a housewife.

I2: male, b. 1930, completed primary school, a peasant, husband of I2.

12=male, b. 1936, primary school.

14=female.

15=

11: female, b. 1928.

12 : male, b. 1949, son of 11.

16=woman, b. 1919.

17=

11: female, b. 1930

12: male, b. 1908, a carpenter.

20=female.

21=

11: male

12: female

23= male, b. 1935, works in the capital.

24= female, b. 1957, a housewife, finished vocational school.

25=

11: female, b. 1938, a housewife;

12: male, b. 1931, husband of 11.

13: female, b. 1938, their neighbour.

26= female, b. 1924, finished primary school.

27=

11: male, b. 1949, son-in-law of 12.

12: male, b. 1931, a carpenter.

28=

11: male, b. 1931.

12: male, b. 1959.

29=female, b. 1925, a housewife;

30=

11: female, retired professor.

12: female, her personal assistant.

31=male, b. 1930, finished three years of primary school.

33=female, b. 1941.

34=

11: female, b. 1927, a housewife, finished seven years of primary school.

12: male, b. 1925, finished primary school, a husband of 11.

35= female, b. 1930, finished six years of primary school.

36= female, b. 1932, a housewife;

37=

11: female, b. 1927.

I2: male, b. 1922, in the past a miner, a husband of I1.

38=

I1: male, b. 1950

I2: male, b. 1912, father of I1.

39=female, b. 1943.

40=female, b. 1956.

41=

I1: female, b. 1925,

I2: male, b. 1960, son of I1.

42=male, b. 1933.

43= male, b. 1940;

44=

I1: male, b. 1907.

I2: female, b. 1922.

47=female, b. 1928.

49=female, b. 1925.

50=

I1: male, b. 1923, in the past employed as a smith and butcher.

I2: female, b. 1930, a wife of I1.

51=female, b. 1919.

53=

I1: female, b. 1955, a housewife;

I2: female, b. 1977, a student.

I3: female, b. 1937, a housewife, the neighbour of I1.

I4: male, b. 1934, husband of I3, the neighbour of I1.

56=male, b. 1932.

57=male, b. 1920, a carpenter.

58=female, b. 1923.

59=

I1: female, b. 1941

I2: male, b. 1932, the husband of I1.

I3: male, b. 1985, the grandson of I1 and I2.

60=female, b. 1931, finished primary school.

62=

I1: male, b. 1936,

I2: female, b. 1941, the wife of I1.

63=

I1: male, b. 1925.

I2: female, b. 1930, a wife of I1.

65= female, b. 1930.

66= female, b. 1923.

67=

I1: female, b. 1929, finished primary school.

I2: male, b. 1928; insurance-company agent.

68=

I1: male, b. 1941, finished primary school.

I2: female, b. 1941, finished six years of primary school, wife of I1.

I3: female, b. 1921, neighbour of I1 and I2.

69=

I1: male, b. 1914.

I2: female, b. 1920, a wife of I1.

70=female, b. 1924.

71=

I1: male, b. 1940

I2: female, b. 1945, a wife of I1.

72=female, b. 1944.

73= female, b. 1925.

74=female.

76=male, b. 1922.

77= female, b. 1940, high education.

78=female, b. 1922.

79=female, b. 1923.

81=

I1: female, b. 1936

I2: male, b. 1931, a husband of I1.

82=male, b. 1921.

83=female, b. 1941.

84=female, b. 1919.

85=female, b. 1916.

86=female, b. 1935.

87=female, b. 1920.

91=female, b. 1948.

92=female, b. 1928.

93=female, b. 1920.

94=female, b. 1930.

95=

I1: male, b. 1924.

I2: female, b. 1932, a wife of I1.

- 96=female, b. 1934.
 97=female, b. 1928.
 98=female, b. 1919.
 99=female, b. 1942.
 101=female, b. 1920.
 104=female, b. 1926.
 105=
 I1: female, b. 1923.
 I2: male, b. 1910, a husband of I1.
 107=female, b. 1925, worked in a factory and at the post office.
 108=
 I1: male, b. 1933.
 I2: female, b. 1959, a daughter of I1.
 110=female, b. 1910.
 111=
 I1: female.
 I2: male, the husband of I1.
 114=female, b. 1927.
 115=male, b. 1921.
 116=male, b. 1933, housekeeper.
 117=female, b. 1928.
 118=female, b. 1937.
 119=female, b. 1934.
 120=female, b. 1943.
 121=female, b. 1920.
 122=
 I1: female, b. 1936.
 I2: male, husband of I1.
 123=female, b. 1920.
 124=female, b. 1926.
 125=
 I1: female, b. 1959
 I2: female, mother of I1.
 I3: female, b. 1925.
 127=
 I1: female.
 I2: female.
 128=
 I1: female, b. 1932.

- I2: male, b. 1923.
129=female, b. 1908, a miller.
130=female, b. 1926.
135=female, b. 1925.
139=female, b. 1933, finished primary school.
141=male, b. 1931, a locksmith.
142=
I1: male.
I2: femal, a hairdresser, the wife of I1.
I3: female, a hairdresser, a daughter of I1 and I2.
146=
I1: female, b. 1919.
I2: female, b. 1920.
I3: male, b. 1922.
148=
I1. female, b. 1937.
I2. male, b. 1930.
149=female, b. 1920, a housewife.
150=
I1: female, b. 1935, a housewife.
I2: male, b. 1925, a husband of I1.
151= female, b. 1932.
152=female, b. 1927, finished primary school.
159=
I1: female, b. 1918.
I2: female, b. 1982, a daughter of I3 and I4.
I3: female, b. 1962.
I4: male, b. 1958.
163=female, b. 1943.
164=male, b. 1958; a technician (a grandson of the fortune-tellers Angela and Jan H.).
165=female, b. 1933.
166=female, b. 1938.
167=female, b. 1960.
169=female, a shop assistant.

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