



In Their Own Voices

Legend Traditions of Icelandic Women in the Late Nineteenth
and Early Twentieth Centuries

Júliana Þ. Magnúsdóttir

Thesis for the degree of PhD

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School of Social Sciences

FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND FOLKLORISTICS

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Til Pálu

Abstract

This doctoral research thesis seeks to examine the legend traditions of Icelandic women living in the Icelandic pre-industrial rural society. The source material of the thesis involves audiotaped interviews that the folklore collector Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson took with 200 women born in the late nineteenth century, interviews which are now preserved in the Folkloric Collection of Árni Magnússon Institute in Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík. Alongside these, the project has also made use of interviews taken with 25 male informants born during the same period, interviews which are drawn on for the basis of comparison in some parts of the research. The research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches as a means of mapping out the main features of women's legend traditions and legend repertoires during this period, simultaneously shedding light on those features of the tradition that seem to be divided on gender lines. The aim of the research was to gain insight into how the spaces, experiences and conditions of Icelandic women in the past influenced their legend traditions and the formation of their legend repertoires. In addition to considering the nature and content of the legends told by women, the thesis considers the roles women played as storytellers, not only in their private households but also in the society at large, underlining among other things the degree to which they were involved and represented in the collection of Icelandic folk narratives in earlier times.

The thesis is built up around four scholarly articles. Three of these have already been published (in the British *Folklore* in 2018, in the Estonian *Folklore* in 2021 and in *Arv* from 2021) and the final one will be published in the *Journal of American Folklore* this spring (2023). The first article examines the representation of women in the different types of folk narrative archives containing material with a background in the pre-industrial rural society of Iceland and considers their usefulness for the reconstruction of women's traditions in the past. The second article considers the spatial aspects of women's storytelling and their legend repertoires, among other things paying attention to their roles in the social landscape of the rural community and the roles they played as storytellers in the central communal space of the *baðstofa*. The third article (that forthcoming in the *Journal of American Folklore*) examines the key differences that can be discerned in the legend traditions of women and men contained in the sound archives, considering how the different experiences, roles and conditions of women may have contributed to some of these differences. The fourth article (that published in *Arv* in 2021) focuses on three women in the sources who have unusually large legend repertoires,

something which provides additional insight and individual context with regard to some of the features examined in the other articles, once again highlighting the relationship between the conditions, environments and experiences women knew and the nature of their legend traditions.

As a whole, the thesis reveals that many of the women encountered in the sources were more geographically mobile than expected, while others evidently had a relatively wide range of social contacts, providing them with a valuable role in the oral narrative traditions of their local communities and not least in terms of the transmission of oral stories between different households and even different regions. The research behind the thesis also reveals that certain aspects of the legend tradition seem to have been more common in the repertoires of women than in those of men. These include a more personal approach to the supernatural tradition, greater emphasis on female roles and characters, and particular interest in certain narrative themes, such as dreams, omens and those dealing with the *huldufólk*. As the thesis notes, these are all themes that seem to be emphasised in the earlier printed collections of folk narratives from the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, giving us good reason to believe that female storytellers played a much greater role in passing on this source material than their official representation in these collections might suggest.

Keywords:

Gender, Legends, Storytellers, Storytelling, Women

Ágrip

Í rannsókninni er leitast við að rannsaka sagnahefðir íslenskra kvenna sem ólust upp í hinu óiðnvædda sveitasamfélagi. Frumheimildir ritgerðarinnar eru hljóðrituð viðtöl sem Þjóðfræðasafnarinn Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson tók við 200 konur sem fæddar voru seint á nítjándu öld, viðtöl sem nú eru varðveitt í Þjóðfræðasafni Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum í Reykjavík. Í verkefninu er einnig notast við viðtöl sem tekin voru við 25 karlkyns heimildamenn safnarans, sem fæddir voru á sama tímabili, en sagnir þeirra eru notaðar til samanburðar í ákveðnum þáttum rannsóknarinnar. Rannsóknin sameinar meginlegar og eigindlegar nálganir til að kortleggja helstu einkenni sagnahefða og sagnasjóða kvenna á þessu tímabili og varpa um leið ljósi á þá þætti hefðarinnar sem virðast skiptast eftir kynjalínunum. Markmið rannsóknarinnar er að öðlast innsýn inn í hvernig rými, upplifun og aðstæður íslenskra kvenna í fortíðinni höfðu áhrif á þjóðsagnahefðir þeirra og sagnasjóði. Auk þess að huga að eðli og innihaldi þeirra sagna sem konurnar segja, fjallar ritgerðin um hlutverk kvenna sem sögumenn og leitast við að leggja mat á hlutdeild þeirra í sögnum sem birtust í þjóðsagnasöfnum fyrri tíma.

Ritgerðin er byggð upp í kringum fjórar fræðigreinar. Þrjár þeirra hafa þegar verið birtar (í breskra *Folklore* árið 2018, í eistneska *Folklore* árið 2021 og í *Arv* árið 2021) og sú síðasta verður birt í *Journal of American Folklore* í vor (2023). Fyrsta greinin fjallar um hlutdeild kvenna í hinum ýmsu gerðum þjóðfræðisafna sem geyma efni gamla íslenska bændasamfélagsins, þar sem meðal annars er velt upp kostum og göllum þeirra fyrir enduruppbyggingu kvennahefða fyrri tíma. Í annarri greininni er fjallað um þær hliðar sagnahefðar og sagnasjóða kvennanna sem tengjast rými, og meðal annars hugað að hlutverkum þeirra í félagslegu landslagi sveitasamfélagsins og hlutverkum sem þær gegndu sem sögumenn í félagslegu rými baðstofunnar. Þriðja greinin (sem væntanleg er í *Journal of American Folklore*) skoðar þann munn sem greina má á þjóðsagnahefðum kvenna og karla í heimildunum með tilliti til þess hvernig ólík reynsla, hlutverk og aðstæður kynjanna kunna að hafa haft áhrif á sagnir þeirra. Fjórdða greinin (sem birt var í *Arv* árið 2021) fjallar um þrjár konur í heimildunum sem búa yfir óvenju stórum sagnasjóðum. Þar er leitast við að veita frekari innsýn inn í suma þeirra þátta sem skoðaðir eru í hinum greinunum með það fyrir augum að draga betur fram samband aðstæðna, umhverfis og reynslu kvennanna við mótun sagnahefðar þeirra.

Í heild sinni leiðir ritgerðin í ljós að margar kvennanna voru landfræðilega hreyfanlegri en búist var við. Einnig kom í ljós að sumar kvennanna áttu í miklum félagslegum samskiptum við fólk í nærsamfélaginu sem ekki deildi

með þeim heimili. Samfélagslegi hreyfanleikinn skapaði konunum mikilvægt hlutverk í munnlegum frásagnarhefðum í heimabyggðum sínum, og styrkti stöðu þeirra sem sögumenn þar sem þær fluttu sínar munnlegu sagnir með sér á milli heimila og jafnvel ólíkra landshluta. Rannsóknin leiðir einnig í ljós að ákveðnir þættir sagnahefðar virðast hafa verið algengari í sagnasjóðum kvenna en karla. Má þar nefna persónulegri nálgun á yfirnáttúrulega hefð, ríkari áherslu á kvenhlutverk og persónur auk sérstaks áhuga á frásagnarþemum eins og draumum, fyrirboðum og huldufólks sögnum. Eins og fram kemur í ritgerðinni eru þetta þemu sem mikil áhersla er lögð á í prentuðum þjóðsagnasöfnum frá seinni hluta nítjándu aldar og fyrri hluta þeirrar tuttugustu. Þessi samsvörun á sagnasjóðum kvenna og prentaðra sagnasafna bendir til þess að konur hafi gengt mun veigameira hlutverki í miðlun þessa efnis en opinber hlutdeild þeirra í söfunum ber vott um.

Lykilorð:

Konur, kyngervi, sagnir, sagnafólk, sagnaskemmtanir

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When I started this project, the source material used in this thesis had not yet been digitalized, something that meant that I had to listen to the various magnetic tapes in the basement of Árni Magnússon Institute in Icelandic Studies at the University of Iceland. During this period the Árni Magnússon Institute provided me with a desk and other facilities along with useful access to a wide range of scholars working in Nordic and Icelandic Studies, many of whom gave support and useful counseling. I am deeply grateful for the hospitality afforded me by the Institute. Particular thanks are due to Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir, a research lecturer at the Institute, who on a number of occasions provided me with invaluable counseling with regard to my source material and many, many stimulating conversations about the folkloric collecting of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson and his informants.

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1 Introduction

In April 1974, a folklore collector walked into Hrafnista, at the time Iceland's largest home for the elderly which had been built in Reykjavik in the 1950s to accommodate old people from the fishing communities situated around the Icelandic coastline. The collector in question was Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (1932-2005) and the purpose of his visit was to meet a 79-year-old, retired housekeeper named Gunnfríður Rögnvaldsdóttir (1895-1987), who came from a farm named Álfafjörður in the Icelandic Westfords. During their conversation, Gunnfríður told Hallfreður an interesting story about the origin of her childhood neighbour's family ghost. During the narration, the setting of the story moved from Gunnfríður's childhood farm in Álfafjörður to the more northerly site of Jökulfirðir, a remote deserted fjord area abandoned in the 1960s. The source for Gunnfríður's story was her mother. She had known a woman who happened to have been a farmhand at the scene of the events in Jökulfirðir and had witnessed the events recounted in the story. The story Gunnfríður told to Hallfreður focused on the ghost of a twelve-year-old boy, who had originally been a pauper on the farm in Jökulfirðir. The pauper had been killed in an accident in a dangerous landslide in bad weather when carrying out an errand forced on him by the farmer. The boy had left in anger, swearing to take vengeance if he did not return alive. He was never seen alive again. However, that same night the family haunting began when something ruined the entire food supply of the farm. The ghost later moved with the farmer's daughter to Álfafjörður, where the family became the neighbours of Gunnfríður and the source of many new stories concerning accidents believed to have been caused by this unfortunate child ghost (SÁM 92/2593).

As many readers have probably noted, the story in question is a legend, a common form of narrative in circulation in the oral tradition. Many will also note that this is a belief legend, dealing with the supernatural tradition of family ghosts, a common feature in Icelandic folklore. The story could also be characterized as being a legend about a fatal accident which occurs on a journey taken in a place where people once lived, or about the abuse of a child by a well-known neighbour when the child is placed in his care (along with an allowance) by the parish, a problem which was not uncommon in rural nineteenth-century Iceland when about 5% of the population belonged to this lowest class of paupers in the community (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 782). In short, it can be said that the legend reflects at once the temporal and spatial dimensions of the narrator's existence, the social

problems that existed in her community, and her psychological fear of supernatural forces.

As noted by the German folklorist Lutz Röhrich (1991: 9-27), one of the defining characteristics of the legend as a genre is precisely this close relationship with the tradition's existence as part of the reality of those passing it on. As Röhrich has rightly observed, like the brothers Grimm (1816-1818, I: v-vi) before him, unlike the fairy tale which takes place in a fictional unrealistic world, legends take place in our everyday world and reflect our external environment and society. Other scholars have noted that, unlike the fairy tale, the legend regularly makes claims to believability, emphasizing its rhetoric of truth (Oring 2008) or what appears to its ongoing debate between its tellers and listeners about belief (Dégh 2001: 97).

As reflected in the legend told by Gunnfríður, legends deal with the characters, places and problems of the living world, and their content therefore needs to be processed within the context of the real, everyday world of those who tell them. Furthermore, it can never be forgotten that legends are stories, and as such they have temporal and spatial components which frame the spatial practices and movements of people that tell them and hear them, thereby transforming spaces into places (see further de Certeau 1988: 115-130; and Tuan 1977: 85-100). By creating and sharing legends, people negotiate, memorize and add value and depth to the places in which they live, the paths they travel along as well as the social spaces and relationships inherent in the community they inhabit (Gunnell 2008: 14-16). Legends such as that told by Gunnfríður in 1974 can thus be said to reflect a community and a place that was once vivid and full of life. All the same, as items preserved in an archive, they can now be said to have passed from the "communicative memory" of their narrators and their contemporary communities into the "cultural memory" represented by the archives, to use the terminology of the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann (2008). Some folklorists might argue legend "die" during their passing into the folklore archives, and are thus no longer of relevance for contemporary folkloristics. The present author, however, believes that this assumption is wrong, and that the archived legend can still offer us a valuable doorway back into the community in which it once thrived, and an opportunity to gain new insights into this community should we choose to enter.

As a source, the legends of Gunnfríður Rögnvaldsdóttir offer valuable insights in several ways. Most important for this thesis is that Gunnfríður Rögnvaldsdóttir belonged to a generation of women who, during their lifetimes, saw greater changes in their political and legal rights than any other generation of women has so far witnessed in Icelandic history. Gunnfríður also belonged to what can be called the last generation of the pre-industrial society of farmers

and fishing farmers in Iceland. As noted by the earlier-mentioned Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (1983: 16), who collected the source material on which this thesis is built, the deterioration of this ancient community which had prevailed in one form or other since the settlement of Iceland started to become apparent around 1900, although the preconditions for this way of life and the culture associated with it did not fully break down until shortly before the Second World War. Despite its demise, the old farming community that Gunnfríður grew up in has left a huge memorial behind it in the shape of two major kinds of folklore archives. The older of these is represented by the printed folktale and legend collections, starting with the collection of Jón Árnason (1819-1888) and Magnús Grímsson (1825-1860) in the 1860s, which by the year 1960 included over 20 published collections (see Steindór Steindórsson 1964). The more recent type of archive, which provided the source material for this study, is that represented by over 2000 hours of audio-taped folklore material (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 54), including legends, which was passed on during interviews taken by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson and other folklore collectors in the latter half of the twentieth century. This material is now stored in the folklore archive of the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic studies.¹ The size of this Icelandic folklore archive is quite remarkable given the small size of the Icelandic population, which has today reached over 370.000 individuals for the first time in its history (see *Hagstofa Íslands: Sögulegar hagtölur*).

The richness of the Icelandic folk narrative archives provides an excellent opportunity for scholars to return to the past with new questions and enterprises, reconstructing various elements of the tradition and reconsidering the role of different social groups that have been overlooked in earlier scholarship. As both the folk narrative archives and various historical records are being digitalized, as has been the case in Iceland (see Part 3), such material provides exciting new research opportunities for those contemporary folklorists interested in folk narrative traditions. Among other things, it offers the opportunity to analyse large quantities of folk narratives alongside each other as a means of establishing various patterns found in the tradition(s) practised by large groups of narrators across not only the local but also larger geographical areas and countries.

The following thesis represents one such attempt, aimed as it is at the reconstruction of key aspects of the legend traditions of Icelandic women in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, in other words, the generation of the

¹ In 2022, the folkloric section of the *Ísmús* database was connected to the *Sagnagrunnur* database containing references to folk narrative material in Icelandic legend collections in print, making it possible search both databases at once: see <https://ismus.is/tjodfraedi/>.

earlier-noted Gunnfríður Rögnvaldsdóttir who, despite seeing more change in terms of legal and political rights than any other generation of Icelandic women, lived most of her life in a similar everyday social reality to that experienced by numerous previous generations of Icelandic women. In Iceland, even in the early twentieth century, this involved conditions characterized by isolated farms, difficult climate and environmental conditions, a lack of roads and transport infrastructure, and not least the dominance of ideas in which the social role of married women was largely limited to that of housewives. This created a situation in which women were particularly confined to the domestic spaces of their households. The fact that the women that are the subject of this thesis told legends, some of them a large quantity of legends, underlines the fact that while many women had little much access to the larger public arenas of their society (see further Chapter 4), and while their lives and social roles were predominantly structured around the domestic spaces of their households, women clearly found various narrative spaces in the Icelandic rural communities in the past, some of them going on to play a highly influential role in these communities.

1.1 The Aims of the Thesis and Research Questions

As noted above, the purpose of this research project is to explore how the legend traditions of women born in the late nineteenth century were both shaped by, and interacted with their gender and life experience, and the places and spaces that they inhabited. Among the main features to be considered in this context are questions relating to the nature of their social spaces and their storytelling; to that of legend transmission and the adoption of narratives into personal repertoires; and finally, the question of how some women managed to become active participants in the legend traditions of their communities. Closely related to the above is the question of how the legend traditions of the past contained in the archives can be studied with the help of new approaches that originated in modernity such as those relating to the perspectives of gender. A key problem here is that in Iceland, the practice of collecting and classifying oral narratives has to this day almost exclusively been carried out by male collectors, something which raises central questions about how women's legend traditions and the topics they deal with have fared in the process. Indeed, the male-dominated collection of Icelandic material means that in order to study women's narrative traditions, we are forced to work with material collected by males, as will be discussed later in the thesis (see Chapter 3 and Article 1).

Considerations relating to the representation of women's legend traditions in the archives naturally involve the additional questions of what kind of legends women found meaningful enough to adapt into their repertoires and share with a collector, and whether their legend traditions differ from those of

their male peers. The question of what “women’s legend tradition” consisted of demands careful classification and analysis of those themes and characters which appear in women’s legends, and the differences between these and those themes and characters which appear in the legends of men, here represented by a small randomly selected group of the women’s male peers (see further Chapter 5). By exploring and labelling the notions of time, place and space that appear in these legends, this project hopes to shed light on the ways in which these notions manifest themselves in the women’s legend tradition, and how they can be seen as being intrinsically related to women’s experiences and spaces in Iceland’s pre-industrial rural communities.

The key research questions can thus be summed up as follows:

- In what way can the material in the Icelandic folk narrative archives be said to reflect the gendered power relations of the nineteenth and twentieth century and to what degree can we use this material for reconstruction of women’s past traditions from the viewpoint of modernity?
- What seem to be the main narrative spaces in women’s legends, and in what ways are their social conditions and experience incorporated into the legends that they tell?
- Which genres, themes and characters dominate in women’s legend traditions, and in which ways do they differ from those of their male peers?
- How did women manage to become active legend tellers in a society and environment that generally excluded women from the public sphere, confining them in the personal space of the home?

These questions all fit under the umbrella of the main research question of the project which can be said to be the following: How did gender, experience, and space influence women’s legend traditions in Iceland’s earlier rural communities?

The hope is that labelling various aspects relating to the content and context of the narratives contained in women’s repertoires, such as the setting, timeframes, spaces, themes, and characters (see Chapter 5.1), will provide valuable insights into the key features of these traditions. Comparison with similar features found in narratives told by a small group of men that come from the same sources will hopefully provide additional insight into how and why differences exist, especially when other aspects such as general socio-historical

conditions and biographical information relating to the individual women are taken into consideration.

My belief is that this project has not only historical value in terms of the information it provides about women's traditions in the past and the worlds that they inhabited, but also more contemporary value in that it provides valuable context for understanding the nature of women's narrative traditions in the present. Indeed, as shown in Chapter 2.2, most of our knowledge of narrative traditions in the present is based on relatively small-scale case studies of individual narrators or small communities of narrators. While such studies provide excellent insight into how the repertoires of individual storytellers come into being and operate, they do not always give us a clear picture of the overall patterns found in the wider tradition practised by social groups such as women in general in a wider geographical context. Although the folk narrative archives of the past may not be perfect in terms of the agendas that lie behind them and the emphases involved in their establishment, I would like to argue that they still have a great deal of relevance as source material for contemporary folklorists, offering not only both a valid means of understanding the traditions of social groups that were marginalized in the past, but also an opportunity to explore tradition from different, wider perspectives than those provided by contemporary fieldwork.

1.2 The Structure of the Thesis and Articles

As noted above, the dissertation centres around four articles, three of which have been published, while the fourth has been accepted for publication in the spring of 2023. These articles are preceded by the present introductory chapter which is made up of five parts discussing relevant scholarship, context, material and methods, and succeeded by a concluding chapter summarizing the project and discussing its key findings. The second part of the introduction outlines the terminology used in the thesis and the current state of research, including chapters on the various types of legend, narrator-based approaches to narrative traditions, the role of archived legends as a source on human geography and the socio-history of narrators, and finally, the role of gender as research criteria for the study of oral narrative traditions. The third part of the introduction goes on to discuss the establishment and nature of the two forms of Icelandic folk narrative archives noted at the start, in other words, the printed archive and that containing sound recordings, placing emphasis on their differing value and usefulness as sources on women's narrative traditions and the selection of source material for the project. The fourth part aims to provide insight into the historical context of these traditions, and the world of Icelandic women in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, focusing on the social roles of women in this period and the changes that were being brought about by new currents in

Icelandic society, not least with regard to women's legal status, although the social status of women largely remained the same, especially in rural Iceland (see Chapter 4.1). This part also includes a subchapter on the Icelandic turf-farm and its communities, in which particular emphasis is placed on the roles of women on the farm. The fifth and final part of the introduction outlines the methodology of the project, which consists of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Chapter six of the thesis is composed of the four articles noted above. The first article (Chapter 6.1), "Gender, Legend and the Icelandic Countryside in the Long 19th Century: Re-Engaging the Archives as a Means of Giving Voice to the Women of the Past" was published in the British journal *Folklore* in June 2018. This article addresses the differing values of the two types of Icelandic folk narrative archive as sources for a reconstruction of women's narrative tradition in the past, exploring both the aspects that complicate their use for such a reconstruction and the opportunities this material can still provide despite its shortcomings. The article argues that while it is important to consider the degree to which male-dominated practices of collecting may have led to marginalization of female storytellers and the roles of women in the narrative traditions of the past, the archives, and especially the material collected by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, still provide excellent opportunities for engaging in such a work of reconstruction. Indeed, they not only have the potential to illuminate the role of women in the traditions of the past but also a means of highlighting exactly which elements of contemporary folk narrative can be seen as truly "traditional" in the sense of having been passed down from one generation to another.

The second article of the project (Chapter 6.2), "Women of the Twilight: The Narrative Spaces of Women in the Icelandic Rural Community of the Past" came out in the Estonian journal *Folklore* in 2021. This article explores some of the spatial aspects of women's legend traditions in Iceland, including both the narrative spaces and platforms used for storytelling as well as the incorporation of space into their repertoires. The article underlines that while the women were largely confined to the domestic spaces of their households in their everyday lives, something reflected in the legends they told, they cannot be considered to have been totally socially isolated or immobile. Indeed, they clearly played a key role in storytelling traditions in their communities.

The third article (Chapter 6.3), "Gender and Legend in Rural Iceland in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century" has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of American Folklore* and, as noted above, will be published in April 2023. This article forms an important part of the dissertation, examining the common features found in the repertoires of the women, and

comparing these to those found in the repertoires of a small random sample group of their male peers in order to establish which (if any) elements differ across gender lines. As elsewhere in this project, the article draws attention to how the women's different experiences and social realities are reflected in the legends they tell.

The fourth article (Chapter 6.4), entitled "Three Women of Iceland and the Stories They Told", was published in *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* in December 2021. It explores the lives and repertoires of three women who can be considered to be exceptional legend-tellers, among other things, focusing on the social aspects of their lives and their role in the formation of these women's repertoires and on the platforms they had for storytelling. This article contains further reflections on many of the issues discussed in the other articles, adding an element of individual context to the project by showing how the various features of women's storytelling traditions appear in the repertoires of the three women in question.

As noted above, Chapter seven in the dissertation draws together the key findings of the project as whole, considering its overall significance and the implications it has for further research. Following the combined bibliography of the dissertation are two Appendices. The first contains the original Icelandic of those quotes only given in English in the articles. The second is a document containing the names, life dates, background and sizes of repertoires of the narrators included in the project.

2 Legends, Gender, and Storytelling

The following subchapters introduce the scholarly context of the thesis in terms of terminology, perspectives and current scholarly knowledge concerning gender and legend traditions. The notion of gender and gendered power relations, examined in more detail in Chapter 2.4, was rarely addressed in folkloric works until relatively late in the twentieth century, although a number of early works certainly touched on women and their narratives. The first subchapter (Chapter 2.1) of this literary review will explore the nature of legend as it has been understood by scholars ranging from the brothers Grimm in the nineteenth century up to the current period, also discussing scholars' attempts to divide it into subgenres based on function, content, and modes of narration. This section is particularly important for the context of the thesis since questions of genre are a key feature of the analysis that takes place in the various articles. The second subchapter (Chapter 2.2) shifts the perspective from genre to storytellers, outlining some of the key features of those narrator-based approaches to narrative traditions that developed out of fieldwork undertaken in the first half of the twentieth century, work that has since been applied to the repertoires of various narrators preserved in Northern European archives, including Iceland. This current study draws heavily on this research, both in terms of framework for analysis and considerations of narrative context. Particularly useful have been those studies of the ways in which legends serve as sociohistorical resources on people's experiences, beliefs, world views and values, and not least human geography which is considered in the following subchapter (Chapter 2.3). The concluding subchapter relating to scholarly context (Chapter 2.4), looks at the notion of gender, its use in folklore research and then narrows the focus down to consider the conclusions reached by those earlier studies that have examined legends and folk belief from the perspective of gender.

2.1 Legends: Form and Nature

A key concept that needs to be clarified for the purpose of this thesis is the notion of legend, a task that has taken up considerable space in folk narrative scholarship. Indeed, over the course of time, folklorists have introduced a wide range of concepts and labels dividing oral narratives into different categories based on how they perceive the nature of legends to be, and the particular interests of their studies. In modern folkloristics, those scholars dealing with narrative tradition have tended to divide stories passed on in oral tradition into two fundamental categories, *folk tales* (or fairy/ wonder tales) and *legends*,

placing all “poetic” tale-type stories under the umbrella of the folk tale and reserving the concept of the legend for stories that are supposed to have taken place in the real world (Grimm and Grimm 1816-1818, I: v-vi). It must nonetheless be borne in mind that when it comes down to it, no clear division between folk tales and legends exists, as can be seen from immediately in works such as Aarne and Thompson’s *The Types of the Folktale* ([AT] 1961; succeeded by Hans-Jörg Uther’s *The Types of the International Folktales* [ATU] 2004) which includes a considerable amount of legend material under the folk tale banner.²

Icelandic folk narrative scholarship is faced with a similar inconsistency in terms of the terminology used for narratives in oral tradition. In Iceland, we find the concepts of *þjóðsaga* (pl. *þjóðsögur*) (Eng. folk stories/ folk tale; Ger. *Volk Sagen*), *ævintýri* (Eng. fairy tale/ wonder tale, but also sometimes folk tale; Ger. *Märchen*) and *sögn* (pl. *sagnir*) (Eng. legend; Ger. *Sagen*). Throughout the history of Icelandic folkloristics (and public practice), the *þjóðsaga* concept has been variously used to include all oral narratives except legends; only legends; or as umbrella term for all oral stories, including both fairy tales and legends.³ This inconsistent understanding of the concept is reflected most clearly in the titles of the Icelandic collections of folk stories which appeared during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These collections, which have included both legends and fairy tales have titles such as *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* (lit. Icelandic Folk Stories and Fairy Tales) (Jón Árnason 1862-1864) and *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og sagnir* (lit. Icelandic Folk Tales and Legends) (Sigfús Sigfússon 1982-1993). Tellingly, the first Icelandic collection of legends, *Íslensk ævintýri* (lit. Icelandic Fairy Tales) (1852) by Jón Árnason and Magnús Grímsson, in fact did not include a single fairy tale as we understand the term today.

The problem of legendary material sometimes falling outside the terminology used for legends can also be detected in several works in which Icelandic scholars discussed the topic in the past. One such work is Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson’s article “Þjóðsögur og sagnir” (lit. “Folk Tales and Legends”) in which he attempts to define the Icelandic concepts in accordance with their international counterparts. Here Jón Hnefill (1927-2010) introduces the

² See, for example, AT 365: The Dead Bridegroom Carries off his Bride (Lenore) (Aarne and Thompson 1961: 127; cf. ATU 365: Uther 2004: I, 365), a migratory legend which can also be found, for example, behind the legend of “Djárninn á Myrká” in Jón Árnason’s collection (Jón Árnason 1954-1961: I, 270-272). Another clear example is the story of The Bear and His Trainer (AT 1161: Aarne and Thompson 1961: 366) (cf. ATU 1161: Uther 2004: II, 54-55) which is also featured in Reidar Christiansen’s catalogue *Migratory Legends* (1958: 144-58) as ML 6015; see further Gunnell (2004).

³ On this question, see further Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir (1988: 14); Jakob Benediktsson (1983: 306-307); and Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson (1989: 228-290).

dichotomy of *þjóðsaga* and *sögn* as being similar to the English dichotomy of folk tale and legend, suggesting that the notion of the *þjóðsaga* correlates to the English *folk tale* and the German *Märchen*, and thus includes all orally transmitted stories under this heading except for *legends* (and myths) (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1989: 233-234). Jón Hnefill's use of the concepts in the discussion that follows nonetheless underlines exactly how problematic this dichotomy can become when dealing with oral tradition, since his *þjóðsaga* concept goes on to include any narratives of unusual or supernatural events, and those dealing with true events which have been circulating in the oral tradition for a long time, and thereby become relatively stereotypical. As he argues, a story of this type: “breytist og hefur sig upp á svið þjóðsögunnar og hverfur þá jafnframt úr sagnaflokkinum” (changes and lifts itself to the stage of the *þjóðsaga* and at that point leaves the category of legend⁴) (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1989: 233). Such an upgrading of some legendary stories (such as international migratory legends) from the category of legend into the category of the *þjóðsaga* or folk tale might be said to reflect of the hierarchy of scholarly interests in folk narrative studies that existed until relatively late in the twentieth century whereby the fairy tale/ wonder tale and its tellers had come to be of the primary interest rather than legends and their narrators.⁵ It might thus be said that, in some senses, over time the notion of the legend came to be a left-over category used for material that those scholars dealing with the longer and more artistic forms of oral narratives did not want to include in their studies, rather than an independent genre worthy of study in its own right.

Despite the problems reflected in Jón Hnefill's article, modern Icelandic popular and scholarly notions of terminology for oral stories have for most part abandoned the rigorous dichotomy separating the idea of the folk tale [*þjóðsaga*] from the legend [*sögn*]. Instead, the modern understanding of the concepts has come to largely reflect the meaning put forward by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1899-1984) in his work *Um Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (1940) (ed., transl. and revised as *The Folk-Stories of Iceland* by Faulkes et. al. in 2003). In this work Einar Ólafur introduced a new wider understanding of the *þjóðsaga* (translated into English by Benedikt Benedikz as “Folk-Story” rather than “Folk Tale”: see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003), as an umbrella concept for all oral stories that have been passed on in the oral tradition, talking of *ævintýri*

⁴ The English translation of all Icelandic quotes in this thesis is by Terry Gunnell.

⁵ In his introduction to the recently published *Grimm Ripples* (Gunnell, 2022a: 1-8), Gunnell suggests that in the early days of folk narrative collecting in Northern Europe, there was more interest in legends than wonder tales since the former were seen as an important tool for the establishment of national identity being classed as “German”, “Danish” or “Icelandic” while wonder tales were seen as being international.

(*Märchen*/ fairy tales/ wonder tales) and *sagnir* (*Sagen*/ legends) as its subgenres (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003: 13-18). This genre division is, in many ways more suitable as means of dealing with legend tradition since it does not set the same rigorous and excluding boundaries to the legend concept, contrasting the legend category essentially with the wonder tale/ fairy tale rather than a broader category of folk tales/ folk stories. In English, however, “folk tale” remains a central term for those types of oral stories that in German are referred to as *Märchen*.

To establish what is meant in this thesis by the term “legend”, something that is central to this current project, we need to take a step back to the nineteenth century, where (as noted above) the brothers Grimm introduced the first main definition of the legend genre by contrasting it to the *Märchen*/ wonder tale. In 1816, they concluded that “Das Märchen ist poetischer, die Sage Historischer” (Grimm and Grimm 1816-1818: v-vi). The different approaches the two genres had to reality would become central to later definitions of the genres such that made by Lutz Röhrich (1922-2006), who took the relationship between legends and reality somewhat further, noting that while both the wonder tale and legends often go beyond objective reality, only the legend demands subjective belief in the story’s reality by (most of) its tellers and listeners (Röhrich 1991: 9). Like the Grimms, Röhrich points out that legends link themselves to reality by often providing a specific time and place and including specific people in the narrative, while the wonder tale takes place in no specific locale, if anything occurring in a “wonder tale land” (Röhrich 1991: 11-12). He adds that while the wonder tale is ahistorical and timeless, the legend takes place in the historical past, in the present or in the immediate past (Röhrich 1991: 12). He also points out that that while both wonder tales and legend include otherworldly elements, only the legend emphasizes them as being something remarkable, mysterious, and overwhelming, while in the wonder tale, the otherworldly appears to cause no shock or demand any explanation (Röhrich 1991: 23).

This element of different psychological consequences of supernatural encounters being encountered in *Märchen* and *Sage* is also stressed by the German folklorist Max Lüthi (1909-1991), who adds that while the wonder tale is one-dimensional and depthless, legends are multi-dimensional and deep, in the sense of characters having both substance and environment (Lüthi 1986: 4-23). In other words, while the supernatural and unusual take place alongside the everyday within one and the same dimension in the wonder tale, something that causes the hero no astonishment or doubt, in the legend, the numinous and supernatural usually belong to a temporal or geographical dimension which is separated from the everyday, making the numinous and supernatural feel truly otherworldly to the person who experiences them.

These elements of reality and believability are also key features of most modern, more performance-based definitions of the legend, such as that given by the Hungarian legend scholar Linda Dégh (1918-2014), who concludes her examination of the genre with the statement that: “Legend is a legend once it entertains debate about belief” (Dégh 2001: 97). The American folklorist Elliot Oring nonetheless suggests that in order to avoid subjective notions of truth and belief, we should simply drop the idea of belief and define a legend rather as a narration that invokes the rhetoric of truth (Oring 2008: 128-129). In line with these definitions focusing on the legend as reality-based oral narratives passed on by their narrators as being true or potentially believable, in the following thesis, I will be including under the heading of “legends” all those oral narratives which are presented by their narrators as being “true” and take place within an environment recognizable as belonging to our everyday real world.

Some scholars have nonetheless suggested other means of distinguishing legends from wonder tales which focus on form rather than the content. As they have noted, while the form of the wonder tale is usually carefully composed and multi-episodic, numerous episodes following one another to create a larger whole, each one having a beginning, middle and end, the legend tends to be short and mono-episodic, mostly dealing with a single experience (see further Lüthi 1986: 38-40; von Sydow 1978: 62-63; and Tangherlini 1994: 7-8; see also Olrik 1965; and Propp 1968). Furthermore, as Tangherlini (1994: 7-8) and Dégh (1995: 226-235) both note, the form of the legend is often more directly linked to its performance context than the folktale, legend-telling commonly taking place interactively as part of conversation in which the teller and audience exchange roles frequently. Bearing in mind this context, however, Tangherlini advises the need for a little caution with regard to defining the legend on the basis of it having a single-episodic form, since it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain where one legend ends, and another begins in a live performance (Tangherlini 1994: 8-9). It might also be added that, as I have noted elsewhere (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008: 45-49), in Iceland at least, legends about well-known individuals, particular supernatural beings, or particular places have a tendency to cluster together as a single body of narratives. This sometimes occurs as part of editorial policy in published collections, but even here reflects an approach by the narrators themselves, when in performance, a cluster of narratives can become a stable unit in the narrator’s repertoire, repeatedly told together in the same order within a framework formed by formulaic opening and closing statements.⁶ Since viewing this kind of account as one legend rather

⁶ Good examples of such clusters of legends can be found in Jón Árnason’s collection in the accounts of the outlaw *Fjalla-Eyvindur* (Jón Árnason 1954-1961, II: 237-245) and the family ghost *Írafells-móri* (Jón Árnason 1954-1961, II: 364-373) which hunts

than many can naturally cause various problems with regard to the comparison of the repertoires of different narrators, in this thesis, such clustered accounts have been broken down into individual units on the basis of the number of experiences recounted in the performance, each new experience or event being seen as a new legend.

Legends, like wonder tales, are naturally variable in form, something that has encouraged folklorists working on narrative traditions to introduce a range of systems for classifying the various subgenres found under the legend heading or bordering it. As is the case with broader narrative studies dealing with the notions of the folk tale in general, the history of legend classification has been closely related to the different approaches scholars have taken in their research, new interests giving rise to recognition of new genres or aspects relating to form. One of the oldest and most common of these sub-classification systems is that found in the various published legend collections of the nineteenth century in which legends are often arranged into chapters on the basis of the collector's ideas of subject matter, such as "legends about *huldufólk*"⁷ or "legends about ghosts." The first such scientific attempt at dividing the legend into subgroups in accordance with the subject matter is found in the Grimm brothers' *Deutsche Sagen* (1816-1818: I, xvi) in which they differentiate between historical legends ("*historische Sagen*") associated with ancient German history, and local legends ("*ortsagen*") associated with specific locales.⁸

Many other scholarly systems relying on different aspects of the content of legends were created by the successors of the early collectors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries including Carl Wilhelm von Sydow (1878-1952) who divided legends into *trofsfabulates*, referring to legends about folk belief; *personfabulates* referring to legends about known individuals; and *aitionsfabulates* which explain features of the environment (von Sydow 1978:

families over the course of generations. As noted above, such accounts are also particularly prone to appear in clusters when told by narrators, as can be seen in the sound archive material used as data for this thesis.

⁷ The Icelandic *huldufólk* (lit. hidden people), sometimes referred to as *álfar* (a word related to but not equivalent to 'elves') are supernatural beings in human form, a kind of nature spirit that is usually thought to occupy hills and rocks in close proximity to farms. On these beings, see Gunnell 2007b, 2014, and 2017d; and Hastrup 1990: 261-265).

⁸ Similar divisions can be also seen in the earliest calls for the collection of material such as those by George Stephens (in 1845: see Gunnell 2022c: 392-398) and Jón Árnason (in 1861), who in his *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* divided the material up on similar subject lines to those used earlier by Konrad Maurer (see Maurer 1860; and Jón Árnason 1862-1864):

67-68). A later more detailed division by Lauri Honko (1932-2002) followed similar lines, distinguishing between *saints' legends* (about saints); *aetiological tales* (about the origins of things and places); *historical legends* (which are both historical and secular); *belief legends* (which are historical and sacred/supernatural); and *joculates* (which are historical and humorous) (Honko 1989a: 27-29). Others, meanwhile, have taken slightly different approaches, breaking legends up on the basis of their function, talking not only about *folk belief legends* and *aetiological legends*, but also *entertaining legends*, *control legends*, and *pedagogical legends*, for example (see, for example, af Klintberg 1987: 54-60; Alver 1967: 66-68; and Pentikäinen 1989a: 183).

Such content- and function-based genre classification systems have nonetheless received criticism from more recent folklorists. Tangherlini (1994: 9-12), for example, in his survey of legend scholarship draws attention to the facts that there are problems of extensive crossover between these subgenres, and that they are based on means of classification which are subjective and largely dependent upon the nature and accuracy of collection and the understanding and interpretation of the performance context. The idea of drawing a division between those belief legends dealing with supernatural traditions and historical legends dealing with secular history has also been criticized for taking too narrow an approach to the nature of folk belief, excluding legends which incorporate folk belief in a more general form (Dégh 2001: 81; Tangherlini 1994: 16; and Mullen 1971). Nonetheless, despite their subjectivity and other shortcomings noted above, some of these legend subgenres have the potential to provide insight into a narrator's tradition orientation,⁹ for example whether they choose to focus on the secular rather than the supernatural. In this current work, I have thus incorporated three of the terms noted above (along with others considered below) to use as tools for content analysis of the narrators' repertoires, all of them coming from Honko's earlier-noted diagram of oral narratives (Honko 1989a: 27-29). The terms in question are *historical legends*, which include those legends that are historical and secular (at least on the surface), and told in a detached narrative style in the sense of the narrator placing distance between himself and the events or persons involved; *belief legends*, including legends which are historical and detached in the same sense as that noted for the previous group, but depict supernatural experiences or beings; and finally *joculates*, which include those narratives that are told as factual and deal with either the storyteller's own alleged experiences

⁹ The notion of "tradition orientation" here is based on the term as introduced by the Finnish folklorist Anna-Leena Siikala (1943–2016) in her study of narrators in the Kauhajoki parish in Finland and refers to the approach to a tradition taken by the narrators themselves (see Siikala 1990: 113-136).

or those of others,¹⁰ but contain humorous and often unrealistic twists, suggesting that they are unlikely to be based on real occurrences (at least in this form).

The other legend subgenres used as analytic tools in this thesis include certain genres that for some time were not considered to belong to the legend label, but are now considered to be subgenres or at least to belong to the larger legend tradition. One such subgenre is the *memorate*, which was introduced by von Sydow in the 1930s as a term to describe a first-hand account of a supernatural experience as opposed to a *fabulate* (see above) which was a legend that had been passed on in tradition (von Sydow 1978: 66-67). Memorates, according to von Sydow, can over time develop into what he regards as a *minnessägen* (memory legend) if it is retold and adopted into tradition (von Sydow 1978: 66-67). Following the example of von Sydow, many Scandinavian folklorists have excluded such personal experience narratives (both those dealing with the supernatural, and other secular forms referred to as *chronicates* or secular personal experience stories) from their notions (and even archives) of traditional legends (see, for example, Honko 1989a: 27-29 and the overview of this matter given in Dégh 2001: 58-73; and Tangherlini 1994: 12-13), even though they recognize the value of the memorate for studies of folk belief traditions (Honko 1989b). As noted by Sandra Dolby-Stahl (1977), who takes a performance-oriented approach to personal experience stories, such narratives were excluded by earlier scholars of narrative traditions mainly because of their assumed non-traditional content, assumptions, which as Dolby-Stahl shows here, were based on subjective and narrow content-based notions of tradition and what it should include. Indeed, in more recent years, the exclusion of the memorate and other personal experience stories from the notion of legends has been further undermined by the studies of those folklorists focusing on contemporary narrative traditions, which have shown that memorates often come to resemble fabulates and vice-versa, as narrators commonly change narrative voices on the basis of audience, tradition or other context-based aspects of legend-telling (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974; Dégh 2001: 66-77; and Tangherlini 1994: 12-13).

To summarize: In this current project, I will be following the example of scholars such as Linda Dégh (2001: 97) in using the term “legend” as an overarching term that includes both “historical” narratives and personal experience narratives, but will also make use of various other terms for legend subcategories wherever needed. As the personal mode of narration, including both supernatural and secular experience narratives, has a great deal to say

¹⁰ In this sense, my use of the concept derives from that of Honko (1989a: 28) who refers to these narratives as both humorous and historical.

about a narrator's tradition orientation (see above), the concept of the personal narrative will be included as an analytic tool in the project. Such personal experience stories are divided into two main categories resembling the division of "historical legends" into historical legends and belief legends, the term *memorates* being used to denote first and second-hand personal experience narratives of the supernatural kind, while the term *personal experience narratives* is used for first- and second-hand accounts dealing with the secular world.¹¹

2.2 Narrator-Based Approaches

To a large extent, this current thesis builds on those approaches that have been developed in earlier works dealing with storytellers, the art of storytelling and formation of oral repertoires. Those approaches relating to the contextual aspects of storytelling can be said to have experienced a polygenesis in Western folkloristics, coming about in two different places at two different points in time. One originated in American folkloristics in the 1960s, in part in under the influence of Lord and Parry's oral-formulaic theory (see Lord 1960). This, however, was followed by and developed with the arrival of the school of "Performance" in folklore which arose in part under the wing of the "New Perspectives" (Paredes and Baumann 1972). The scholars of the New Perspectives saw folklore as being essentially "artistic communication in small groups" (Ben-Amos 1972: 13), emphasising the importance of the immediate situationally bound performance context (see for example Baumann 1984; and Foley 2002). There is little question that the other of the two approaches has a somewhat longer history in folklore scholarship, originating in Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century, and emphasising a broader range of contextual aspects of storytelling that included the life histories of storytellers, their social conditions, and the influence of these on the formation of repertoires and the platforms that were available for storytelling.¹² Since the sources of this project

¹¹ While the legends analyzed as part of this project fall largely into the five main categories of legends used here (i.e. joculars, historical legends, belief legends, memorates and (secular) personal experience stories, 13 of them could not be placed within any those categories. These narratives can best be described as rumour narratives, alluding to (or hinting about) recent events or persons in the narrator's communities which cannot be easily placed in the category of personal experience narratives because of the distance that the narrators very deliberately place between themselves and the events in question.

¹² As noted by Barbara Kirstenblatt-Gimblett (1989: 133) in her examination of the importance of life histories and personal narratives as a form of valuable context in folklore research, biographical and autobiographical studies of singers, and to a lesser extent narrators, were also being carried out by several American folklorists in the

consist of archived material based on narrating for a single folklore collector rather than storytelling *in situ* for other audiences, there is naturally little chance to make detailed observations about the situationally-bound context of storytelling that plays a central role in the American approach to performance. This aspect can nonetheless be said to be explored to some extent in Article 2 which considers the contextual information that can be drawn from those descriptive accounts given by informants about storytelling in the turf-farm and its communities. The project nonetheless makes good use of the broader contextual approach to storytellers and storytelling traditions that was developed in European folkloristics, more precisely as part of earlier Russian and Hungarian studies of storytellers and storytelling.

The notion of storytelling as the art of creative individuals can be said to have been born in Russia in the early twentieth century at a time in which West European folkloristics was predominantly still occupied with text-based approaches, as will be further examined in the following subchapter. The fieldwork-oriented Russian folklorists developed a different approach to storytelling traditions which was based on the notion of folklore as a product of individual creativity, considering, among other things, the personalities of individual storytellers, their world views and their social conditions as important context for their storytelling and the formation of their repertoires. (On this Russian approach, see, for example, Sokolov 1950: 8-11; and Asadowskij 1926: 5-8).

This development might be said to go back to around 1926, when Mark Asadowskij (1888-1954) published his work, *Eine Sibirische Märchenerzählerin*, which examined the Siberian storyteller Natalia Osipovna Vinokurova and her storytelling in German, thereby introducing this Russian approach to West European folkloristics. This pioneering work inspired several early works on individual storytellers and their repertoires in Northern Europe, such as the study of the storytelling repertoire of the Roma storyteller Johan Dimitri Taikon (1879-1949) which was published in 1946 by Carl-Herman Tillhagen (1906-2002), and that of the Irish storyteller Sean Ó Conaill (1853-1931) by Séamus Ó Duilearga (1899-1980), published a year earlier.

It was nonetheless in Hungary that the art of storytelling became established as a school of European folkloristics, something commonly referred to as “The Hungarian School”. While the Hungarian School was in many aspects inspired by the earlier-mentioned Russian studies and their notions of individual creativity within tradition, it added the dimension of society to the contextual

twentieth century, something dating back to at least 1936 when John and Alan Lomax published their monograph on Lead Belly.

approach. Here, emphasis was placed on the relationship between the individual and his or her creativity and then the various traditions of their society, which were moderated through the role of the audiences and their opinions (Ortutay 1972: 268). The pioneer of the Hungarian School was Gyula Ortutay (1910-1978), whose work on the storyteller Mihály Fedics (1851-1938), published in 1940, contained a detailed examination of Fedics' repertoire seen in the context of his personality, world view and life history. This work can be said to have laid the groundwork for the fieldwork approach which became so characteristic of the later research of the Hungarian School into storytellers, emphasising the audiotaping of a storyteller's entire repertoire along with observations about their personality, their living conditions and the individual characteristics of their stories (Ortutay 1972: 226).

West European folkloristics would become more familiar with this approach mostly through the work of one of Ortutay's students, Linda Dégh, who published her key work *Folktales and Society* in English in 1969. Dégh's work was based on long-term fieldwork in the community of the Bucovina Szeklers who had recently migrated to the village of Kakasd in Romania. Among the features examined by Dégh in her research were the conditions and settings of the storytelling, the role played by audiences, and the influences of social variation on the formation and size of repertoires (Dégh 1989: 63-119). Also examined were the various types of narrators, their storytelling, and their specializations in terms of style and theme (Dégh 1989: 165-285). While Dégh's work focused on narrators of wonder tales rather than legends, several interesting observations are made about gender, especially in the context of storytelling. These will be further examined in Chapter 2.4.

As noted above, the Hungarian School placed emphasis on fieldwork and the documentation of context-related information about storytellers and their communities. Dégh lays out this approach involving intensive collecting in *Folktale and Society*, in which she maintained the need for:

- (1) Reliable recording of the material, and the taping of the entire material of the individual narrators;
- (2) gaining a firm conception of the life of the creative narrator based on precise sociological and psychological observations;
- (3) examination of the storytelling community from the viewpoint of the local narrative tradition, close attention being paid to the structure and composition of the community;
- (4) observation of the narrative process involving the simultaneous cooperation of the narrator and his community; and
- (5) repeated recording of this procedure over the course of several years (Dégh 1989: 61).

As noted above, scholars of Nordic folklore became familiar with the emphasis of the Hungarian School on fieldwork and context soon after Lord and Parry's work had appeared in print, and around the same time that the "New

Perspectives”, with their emphasis on performance, were gaining a dominant role in American folkloristics. As examined along with other things in Article 1 in this thesis, this development might be said to have led to a widespread rejection of the material in the Nordic folk narrative archives as valid sources of folkloristic study, since they were considered by many to lack the relevant contextual material so necessary for research.

This was a view expressed by, among others, the Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko, who in 1989 went as far as claiming that that the material contained in the archives took the form of “dead artifacts, arbitrarily limited texts, that were generated under rather special, mostly non-authentic circumstances” (Honko 1989a: 33). Honko would later go on to suggest the need for folklorists to take a “thick corpus” approach to folk narratives, by means of the intensive collecting of the repertoires of one or several informants in a community or region, focusing on the careful documentation of performance situations, audiences and not least the social background of expressions of folklore (Honko 2000: 15-16). However, as the American folklorist Donald Ward (1930-2004) would point out in his criticism of folklorists’ emphases on live performance situations, such situations are not only hard to come by in praxis but also “steeped in a romantic vision of storytellers who were conceived as the bearers of an exclusively oral tradition which they – in delightful storytelling events – passed on to others to keep the tradition alive” (Ward 1990: 34-36).

As noted above, in the twentieth century, such fieldwork-based studies of storytellers, storytelling and the storytelling context predominantly dealt with those narrators specializing in wonder tales rather than legends. This was understandable, given the emphasis placed on the storytelling performance and artistry, as legends naturally tend to be less elaborate and told more interactively in a conversational mode, rather than as part of organized storytelling events in which the roles of narrators and audiences are somewhat clearer (see, for example, Dégh 1995: 226-235; and Tangherlini 1994: 7). In spite of this, a number of fieldwork-based studies based on legend-tellers and their repertoires were produced in the latter half of the twentieth century, such as that by Juha Pentikäinen on the narrator Marina Takalo (1890-1970) and her repertoire (Pentikäinen 1978), in which emphasis is placed on the storyteller’s life history and world view; Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj’s research into variation in repeated storytelling by storytellers (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996); Anna-Lena Siikala’s (1990) examination and categorization of narrators based on their tradition orientation;¹³ Ray Cashman’s (2008) work on storytelling on the

¹³ In her study, Siikala (1990: 171) made a number of interesting observations about the relationship between the narrator’s social background and their tradition orientation, concluding that those who had experienced an easy life and had strong social

Northern Irish border; and not least the work by Henry Glassie work on the folklore (and not least storytelling) in the Irish community of Ballymenone (Glassie 1995 and 2006).

In the late twentieth century, several scholars were nonetheless beginning to emphasise that Honko's notion of the thick corpus could also be applied, at least partially, to the material contained in the folk narrative archives. These studies showed that while this material may have some shortcomings in terms of describing "authentic storytelling performances", many features relating to cultural context can be gained and understood by means of thorough research into other sources that contain information about a past storyteller's life history, environment, and cultural context. Indeed, many aspects relating to the performance context of old texts can be reconstructed by the means of what has been termed "performance archaeology", which involves examining old texts with the help of contextual knowledge provided by contemporary performance studies (see, for example, Gunnell and Rönström 2013; and Gunnell 2020). From this period onwards, we find several key studies that take narrator-oriented approach to archived material. A leading example was the examination carried out by Bengt Holbek (1933-1992) of the wonder tale tradition practised by the informants of the Danish folk narrative collector Evald Tang Kristensen. Holbek's *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1987) can be considered pioneering in this approach, various features of the tradition in question being examined in the context of the narrator's gender and socio-economic standing. It is in this work that Holbek introduced what he called "reflection theory" which was built up around the notion that various symbolic elements of wonder tales conveyed fictionalized emotional impressions of beings, phenomena and events of the real world, providing the narrator with the means to speak about the problems, hopes and ideals of the community she or he inhabited (Holbek 1987: 435). Another fine example of such successful research into the contextual surroundings of narrators and their repertoires by means of archives is Gun Herraren's study of the blind narrator Berndt Leonard Strömberg (1822-1910), in which, various stylistic features and characteristics of the storyteller's

connections had a strong tendency to specialize in humorous stories and jokes, while those who had a more difficult life and tended to be more isolated socially were more commonly oriented towards telling supernatural legends. While Siikala does not speak about gender in this context, her comments about the association between social isolation and supernatural legends are of some interest here. Indeed, a number of studies have suggested that women are more prone to tell such legends than men, as will be further discussed in Chapter 2.4 below.

repertoire and storytelling are examined in the context of his experience and conditions (Herraren 1987; 1989 and 1993).¹⁴

Of particular interest for the subject of this thesis is Tangherlini's 1994 study, *Interpreting Legend*, which directly follows up on Holbek's work in considering the legend tradition of Evald Tang Kristensen's informants in nineteenth century Jutland, carefully reconstructing the biographical histories of legend tellers, placing emphasis on their socio-economic context, their age, and their gender. Among other things, Tangherlini takes a statistical approach in his analysis of narrators' repertoires, viewing them from three different perspectives, gradually moving from the corpus as a whole down to the individual. In the first part of his analysis, Tangherlini examines the entire corpus in terms of the socio-economic conditions that existed in nineteenth century Jutland (Tangherlini 1994: 36-37 and 45-69). The second part then goes on to consider those exceptional legend-tellers who told 15 or more legends, analysing their material on the basis of age, gender, and class (Tangherlini 1994: 37-40 and 75-198). For this current project, Tangherlini's observations relating to gender in this section of his work are of particular interest, and will receive further consideration in Chapter 2.4 of the thesis which deals with gender and legends. Tangherlini's third and final part narrows the focus down still further as he deals with three particular narrators and their repertoires, emphasizing the role of the individual in the tradition, once again highlighting the influence of personality, life history and experience on their narrating (Tangherlini 1994: 40-41 and 207-312). Tangherlini can be said to have produced the most extensive narrator-based research relating to archival legends to this day, providing a number of valuable insights into a wide range of aspects concerning the close relationship between the legend tradition and the social conditions of narrators and their communities. For logical reasons, this current work draws heavily on the methodologies developed by Tangherlini and not least his approach to the reconstruction of a tradition on the basis of archival materials.

In Iceland, folklorists can be said to have taken a slightly different approach to storytelling traditions to those adopted by most European countries in the twentieth century. Indeed, Icelandic folklorists who were interested in storytellers and storytelling have to this day almost entirely tended to build their studies around the rich material contained in the folk narrative archives, rather than on self-collected material obtained by the means of fieldwork. Interests in individual storytellers and the art of storytelling can be said to have only started to bloom in Iceland in the late twentieth century, although a few examples from

¹⁴ On narrators and folk tale repertoires, see also Kvideland (1993) and the articles by various authors in Kvideland and Sehmsdorf (eds), *All the World's Reward* (1999).

earlier years can be detected. One such example can perhaps be found in the introduction written by Sigurður Nordal (1886-1974) for the folk narrative collection *Gráskinna* (1928-1936), in which he and his co-editor Þórbergur Þórðarson (1888-1974) deliberately arranged their material according to informants rather than thematically (as had been done in earlier collections: see above). In his introduction, Sigurður gave space to praise three women in particular who had contributed many narratives in the collection, carefully recounting his experience as a member of the audience at their storytelling sessions (Sigurður Nordal 1928-1936: VI).¹⁵ A similar approach can be seen in Sigurður's introduction to *Sagnakver Skúla Gíslasonar* (1947), which focuses on a nineteenth-century Icelandic storyteller, the introduction giving, among other things, careful consideration to Skúli's biographical history and various stylistic features of his repertoire.

Another Icelandic scholar who might have focused on texts but also showed some interest in the subject of particular storytellers was Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1899-1984) who, in his pioneering work on Icelandic folk stories from 1940 notes the growing interest in the role of the individual in the creation and recreation of folk narratives, following this up with some comments on how the style, taste and experience of storytellers can be said to influence their storytelling (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1940: 57-58; and 2003: 66). While Einar Ólafur was evidently aware of the new narrator-based approaches that were developing in Russia and Hungary at the time, he nonetheless seems to have avoided such an approach in his later studies.

The first person to fully embrace the narrator-based approach in his work was the earlier-noted Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, the collector of the source material used in this thesis, who studied folklore in both Prague and Dublin (see further Chapter 3.2). It was here that he became familiar with the earlier-noted studies that placed emphasis on fieldwork and a wholistic approach to the documentation of storytellers and their repertoires. Hallfreður was a prolific and professional folk narrative collector and collected much of his material with future research into storytellers and storytelling in mind. The subject he was most interested in, but never had the time to develop into scholarly work for health reasons, concerned how stories were preserved and transmitted between generations in the same region. It was with this purpose in mind that he interviewed storytellers in Suðursveit in Southeast Iceland repeatedly over the span of his career, some of these storytellers belonging to different generations

¹⁵ It might also be noted that Sigurður Nordal organized so-called *þjóðsagnakvöld* (folk legend evenings) in his household in Reykjavík, in which these same three women, Theodora Thoroddsen (1863-1954) and the twin sisters Herdís Andrésdóttir (1858-1939) and Ólína Andrésdóttir (1858- 1935) took part (Jón Thorarensen 1971: xiii).

within the same families (see further Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2006: 28). While Hallfreður published several works on narratives in his career (see, for example, Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1993; 1995a and 1995b), his discussion of the narrator Herdís Jónasdóttir (1890-1972) and her repertoire in the wonder tale collection *All the World's Reward* (1999) remains his only published work on an individual storyteller and their stories. Indeed, this work is also the only folkloric work dealing with an Icelandic storyteller to be based on self-collected material,¹⁶ material that was recorded by Hallfreður himself in 1966 and 1967.

Two other Icelandic folkloric works dealing with individual narrators and their repertoires deserve mentioning here, both dealing with narrators that specialize in the legend tradition rather than the fairy tale tradition. One of these is Gísli Sigurðsson's examination of the world view expressed in the repertoire of Eddi Gíslason (1901-1986), an emigrated Icelandic who settled in Manitoba in Canada. It was here that he was interviewed by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson and his wife, Olga María Franzdóttir during their fieldwork tour among Icelandic emigrants in Canada in 1972 (see Gísli Sigurðsson 1998 and 2002). The second work is Terry Gunnell's recent analysis of the stylistic features of the repertoire of Sigurður Guðmundsson (1833-1874), a painter in Reykjavík, who was a friend of the folk narrative collector Jón Árnason, and one of his key sources of narratives (Gunnell 2017a and 2022b). These studies, and other recent works dealing with legend-tellers and their repertoires in other countries¹⁷ underline that while legends may be a less elaborate form of narrative than the wonder tale, there is plenty of room for innovative folkloric observations about legend repertoires and legend-telling.

For the purposes and context of this present project, the most important Icelandic studies to date focusing on the perspective of narrators are Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir's research into those storytellers specializing in the wonder tale tradition (see Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 1998; 2004; 2005; 2011 and 2012). As with this current thesis, Rósa's source material is the audiotaped material housed in the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar), which includes Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's collections. There is therefore a considerable overlap between Rósa's works and this current one in terms of

¹⁶ As noted above, the only possible exception here is the work of Sigurður Nordal: see above.

¹⁷ On other non-Icelandic legend-tellers and their repertoires, see, for example, the examination by Vilborg Davíðsdóttir of the repertoires of the Shetland storytellers Bruce Henderson (1891-1977) and Tom Tulloch (1914-1982) from 2011, and Tangherlini's considerations of the repertoires of "Bitte Jens" Kristensen, Kirsten Marie Pedersdatter, Jens Peter Pedersen, (Ane) Margrete Jensdattar and Peder Johansen from 1994 and 2013.

both source material and informants, the key difference being that of genre.¹⁸ Rósa's approach was to start by analyzing the entire corpus of fairy tales in the sound archives, considering among other things the gender of the narrators, their ages and the sizes of their repertoires (2011: 64-82). Like Tangherlini in his study of Danish legends, she then proceeds to a closer consideration of eight storytellers examining the individual characteristics of their repertoires and the world views expressed in their narrations (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 83-159). One of the most interesting findings to be highlighted in Rósa's research was that not only did the social condition of the storytellers find its way into the fairy tales told by these informants, but also the surrounding landscape (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 144-159). This consideration of landscape connects her study in some respects to the spatial turn in Icelandic legend scholarship which will be considered in the following chapter.

To conclude this overview of scholarship relating to storytellers and storytelling, I would like to mention my own MA study, *Saga til næsta bæjar*, completed in 2008, which gave birth to a number of the research questions that lie behind this current work. In this work, I considered the legend repertoires of around 100 legend-tellers from the region of Skaftárhreppur in Southeast Iceland, including about 30 who had settled outside of the region as adults. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into how the social conditions and environment of narrators influenced their legend tradition, considering among other things the influence of their gender and emigration from the region. This work also considered the development of the tradition, and especially the expression of folk belief over the course of time by comparing the material collected in different periods from narrators both living in and coming from the region. Some of the most interesting findings of this work concerned the aspect of gender which will be further examined in Chapter 2.4 below.

2.3 Legends, Geography and Social History

As noted in the previous chapter, at the time when a focus on storytellers, storytelling and repertoires were becoming established in Russian and East European folkloristics, Northern European folklorists still tended to be occupied with folk narratives from the perspective of the text, such text-based approaches

¹⁸ When analysing these repertoires, however, the number of fairy tales told are also noted (see Appendix 2) to permit later consideration of the ratio between legend and tales in storytellers' repertoires. Since this aspect of the material has already been considered to some extent in Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir's study which concludes that those narrators that told many fairy tales tended to tell very few legends, something that suggests a tendency to specialize in a single genre rather than both (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 123-129), this feature has not been analysed further here.

to folk narrative research commonly focusing first of all on the collection, and then the classification of this material based on content. Over time, this approach came to be closely associated with the field of comparative folkloristics as scholars realized that similar stories could be found in various places in Europe. The approach used in comparative folkloristics was essentially evolutionary, not only attempting to compare similar stories but also place them in a temporal order of development, the aim being to establish its the original, or *Ur-form*. This text-based, evolutionary approach to folk narrative came to be referred to as the “historical-geographical method” (see further Krohn 1926; Wolf-Knuts, 1999; and Goldberg 2005). It gave birth to a considerable amount of academic work which focused on describing and indexing tale types and motifs of European folk tales (and some legends) in the former half of the twentieth century (see Aarne and Thompson 1961; and Uther 2004), something which led on to the indexing of various types of local and international migratory legends in various Northern European traditions (see Christiansen 1958; Bruford 1967; Almqvist 1991; MacDonald, 1995; Jauhainen 1996; and af Klintberg 2010).

In its earliest form, this text-oriented approach to oral narratives seemed to assume the near-automatic distribution of stories as part of shared folk-culture, paying little attention to individual narrators and the role they played in forming and transmitting the stories (von Sydow 1931: 207; Wolf-Knuts 1999: 264-265; and Goldberg 2005: 2-3). This approach, however, began to change and progress as more function- and context-oriented perspectives began to be introduced in the twentieth century, under the influence of, among others, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) who introduced functionalism to ethnographic research. In the 1930s, another functionalist, Carl Wilhem von Sydow introduced the concepts of active and passive tradition bearers, underlining the role played by the individual storytellers and other people within the community in the distribution and transmission of oral tradition (von Sydow 1948: 11-43). In the same period, von Sydow introduced the concept of “ecotype” into Northern European folkloristics, noting the ways in which different environmental and cultural conditions caused different cultural groups to develop their own special repertoires and variants of stories within the broader tradition (von Sydow 1948: 44-59).¹⁹ Both the historical geographical approach and von Sydow’s observations on cultural context can be

¹⁹ As noted by Ronald M. James (2019) in his examination of controversies surrounding Carl von Sydow’s membership of the Swedish Nazi party until 1940 and his earlier sympathy towards Nazi Germany, this controversy tainted von Sydow’s legacy and may have caused many of his theories and methods to be less rigorously applied by scholars than he might have hoped they would.

considered predecessors of two other important and sometimes closely overlapping approaches to legend studies that have been adopted in recent years as ways of dealing with those legends preserved in folk narrative archives. The first can arguably be termed “the sociohistorical approach”, which focuses on the role of environment, social context, and society on legends, while the latter can be referred to as “the spatial approach”, focusing on the spatial aspects of legends, their distribution and their role in “place”-making.

The sociohistorical approach to legend tradition is built on the premises noted above that legends can be used as source materials with regard to a wide range of social and cultural features relating to their narrators’ experiences, and the mentalities of the past, including psychology, notions of history, world view, beliefs, and values. The historical character of the legend, highlighted by, among others, the Grimms, has long given folklorists good reason to explore its value as historical source. Several folklorists have suggested, however, that compared with official documents, legends often tend to be of very questionable historical value with regard to the events they portray, meaning that they should rather be seen as a reflection of people’s view of history rather than authentic historical documents²⁰ (Alver 1989: 137-149; Tangherlini 1994: 13-15; and Gunnell 2001: 147-159). In short, as Tangherlini puts it, they should be viewed as a reflection of the narrator’s external reality, loosely reflecting facts about the material culture and economic and social conditions of those telling and passing on the stories, and, on a more abstract level, their norms and values (Tangherlini 1994: 14). In his key work, “On the Understanding of Folk Legend”, Ulf Palmenfelt takes these notions of legends as sources on the reality, norms and values of legend narrators still further, suggesting that legends, like fairy tales (see above), provide a safe outlet for real world concerns and conflicts, among other things by the means of the fictionalization of these concerns in the shape of legends in which stereotypical legend characters appear in stereotypical roles in relation to each other (Palmenfelt 1993: 154-155).²¹ This means that even stereotypical legends, which unlike personal experience narratives and memorates do not claim to recount directly the experiences, concerns and

²⁰ It should nonetheless be remembered that as Alver (1989: 147) suggested, official documents are themselves not wholly trustworthy as objective sources,.

²¹ Palmenfelt refers to such fictionalization as a rhetorical device used in the telling of legends, and suggests five other such devices, including the *personification* of ideas in the shape of legend characters; *particularization* in which large historical processes are simplified down to significant detail; *temporal distancing* in which painful contemporary problems are situated in the distant past; *temporal approximation* in which stories about the positive qualities of a hero are brought closer to us in time; and finally *temporal-spatial equivalence* in which temporal distance is transformed into spatial distance (Palmenfelt 1993: 154-156).

environment of their narrators, actually reflect on these features indirectly. In his work on Gotlandic mermaid legends, for example, Palmenfelt offers an analysis based on this approach, emphasising among other things how legends about supernatural beings such as mermaids can be understood as metaphorical expressions of human relations and matters that cannot be expressed more openly, for example with regard to the distribution of natural resources and desires and worries about extramarital affairs (Palmenfelt 1999: 261-267). The notion that supernatural legends can reflect real life concerns and interests offers a number of opportunities for exploring these narratives, along with narratives of personal experiences, in new ways, and not least as a reflection of a narrator's experiences, concerns, and desires and the conditions they live within.

Palmenfelt suggests that legends in the archives can be interpreted on three different contextual levels when used as sources on the societies that produced them: the textual level when limited contextual information is provided by the material itself; the collective contextual level in which the legend is compared with other sources about the society and its conditions; and then finally on the individual contextual level in which the legend is interpreted in the context of information dealing with its narrator, if that is available (Palmenfelt 1993: 156-165). As Palmenfelt concludes, these various layers of meaning, the collective and the individual, work together as an inherited text is picked from the collective store and then charged with new individual meaning while still working in a collective frame (Palmenfelt 1993: 166). This means that the same legend can have several different meanings depending on whether it is interpreted within the broader context of the community or that of the narrator.

The most prolific scholar of the sociohistorical approach to Icelandic legend and folk belief traditions is the British folklorist, Terry Gunnell. In his works on legend tradition, he has emphasised the cultural context of the various narratives considering how conditions experienced by Icelandic people in the past have shaped the legends they tell, and, in some cases, altered international migratory legends in such a way that they suit the Icelandic environment and experiences. Among the subjects explored by Gunnell from this perspective are Icelandic versions of migratory legends concerning the Black Death (2001), supernatural journeys and escapes from the Black School (1998), and the arrival of supernatural visitors at Christmas (ML 6015) (2004). Other more localized elements of legend tradition explored by Gunnell from this perspective include his work on legends about enchanted sites (*álagablettir*) (2018); on magicians and raised walking corpses (2012); other corpses washed up on shores (2005); and the role of the seashore as a liminal space in Icelandic legends (2017b). Other successful applications of the sociohistorical approach to Icelandic legend material include Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir's examinations of Icelandic legends

about *huldufólk* (see above) from a gender perspective (Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir 1982 and 1990); Bo Almqvist's works on the drowned in Icelandic legendary tradition (1999), and Icelandic versions of the Midwife to the Fairies legend (ML 5070) (2008); Ólína Þorvarðardóttir's introduction to her book on Icelandic legends about the *huldufólk* and trolls (*tröll*), in which, among other things, she considers the various messages that lie behind the stories (Ólína Þorvarðardóttir 1995); Eva Þórdís Ebenezerdóttir's MA thesis (Eva Þórdís Ebenezerdóttir 2014) on the way in which disability is dealt with in Icelandic legends; Hrefna Sigríður Bjartmarsdóttir's study of Icelandic traditions of the dead as *fylgjur* (following spirits) and guardian spirits in Icelandic tradition (Hrefna Sigríður Bjartmarsdóttir 2011); and Adrienne Heijnen's work on dream narratives in Iceland, past and present (Heijnen 2013)²² The most recent study applying this sociohistorical approach to Icelandic printed legend material, a work which has particular importance for this current project, is Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir's examination of the portrayal of women and their roles in those Icelandic legends collected in the nineteenth century and early 1900s, a period that corresponds closely with the youth of the women featured in this thesis (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020, 2021, 2022a and 2022b and forthcoming). Dagrún's findings, along with various other observations relating to the question of gender in legend scholarship will be given further consideration in the following chapter.

The spatial perspective on legends noted above focuses on the premises that legends are an important tool in people's placemaking processes, adding meaning to the landscape and the wider environment. This approach draws in some ideas relating to human geography and the spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities that took place in the latter half of the twentieth century, in which emphasis was placed on the social creation of places, and not least how stories transform space into places (cf. de Certeau 1984: 118; and Tuan 1977: 85-100). In legend scholarship, this approach has, among other things, been applied to how legends reflect the living spaces and landscapes experienced by their narrators. In his earlier-noted article about legends dealing with washed up corpses in Iceland, Gunnell gives the following description of

²² This is by no means a complete list of studies in which this approach is applied to Icelandic legend traditions of the past. The sociohistorical approach has, of course, been regularly applied to the legend traditions of other European countries: see, for example, Jauhiainen's work on women and sin in Finnish belief legends (Jauhiainen 1989); Simpson's examination of female courage in British and Scandinavian legends (Simpson 1991); Tangherlini's work on trolls and Turks in the Danish legend tradition (Tangherlini 1995); Pentikäinen's work on the dead without status (Pentikäinen 1989b); and Valk's observations on the way in which social reality appears in Estonian legends (Valk 2008 and 2014).

the relationship between legends and landscape, simultaneously emphasizing the ways in which legends have a key role in transforming space into meaningful places and their particular value as sociohistorical sources on the mentality, social reality and values of narrators:

Folk legends served as a kind of map. On one side, they reminded people of place names and routes, and gave historical depth to these surroundings, populating them with ghosts and other beings of various kinds. On the other, they served as a map of behaviour, underlining moral and social values and offering examples to follow or avoid. Simultaneously, they reminded people of the temporal and physical borders of their existence, questions of life and death, periods of liminality, insiders, and outsiders, and continuously, the physical or spiritual division between the cultural and the wild, what Levi-Strauss might refer to as the “cooked” and the “raw”. If the map was followed, you had a good chance of living in safety. If you broke it, you stood an equally good chance of ending up in a folk legend yourself if not on a list of mortality statistics (Gunnell 2005: 70).²³

Another scholar who has applied a spatial approach in her observations relating to Icelandic legend and folk belief tradition is the Danish anthropologist, Kirsten Hastrup. In her examination of the perceptions and world views found in the Icelandic rural communities of the past, (Hastrup 1990: 255-265), Hastrup observed that many of these legends and beliefs had an essential spatial component, in which different categories of supernatural beings were traditionally assigned to different kinds of environment and spaces. While outlaws, trolls (*tröll*) and various lake monsters belonged to the wilderness outside the cultivated space of the farm, in other words “*utangarðs*” (lit. outside of the fence), the earlier-noted *huldufólk* were usually situated in close proximity to the farms themselves, living in various rocks and hills closely associated with cultivated land, in other words “*innangarðs*” (lit. inside the fence). The dead, meanwhile, who were, of course, originally human, but viewed as still inhabiting their graves, were perceived to be spatially independent, moving around at will, in short, both “*innangarðs*” and “*utangarðs*”. As this project will show, this spatial component of the Icelandic folk belief tradition is particularly interesting when considered from the perspective of gender in relation to the rural communities of the past, as women’s everyday lives and experiences were predominantly structured around the domestic spaces of their households, meaning that they too were essentially “*innangarðs*” in Hastrup’s terminology. This aspect of women’s legend tradition is considered particularly in Article 2 of this thesis. As highlighted in both this article and Article 3 of the thesis, stories concerning the *huldufólk* appear to have played a much greater role in women’s legend telling traditions than in

²³ On this approach to space in legends, see further Gunnell 2006 and 2009.

those of men and can arguably be considered to be a women's tradition *par excellence*.

One final aspect of this geographical or spatial approach can be said to have developed to some degree out of the distribution focus of the earlier Historic-Geographic method discussed above. A number of projects in recent years have focused on the geographical (and digital) mapping of not only those places that are mentioned in legends, but also those places that feature in a narrator's residential histories, thereby providing not only immediate insight into the geographical distribution of various themes and story types in tradition (something closely related to von Sydow's idea of the ecotype [see above]), but also, in some cases, the ways in which the settings of the legends told by narrators reflect their occupations and experiences (see further Trausti Dagsson 2014a and 2014b; Gunnell 2016; and Tangherlini and Broadwell 2012). Some aspects of this approach have been adopted as a means of exploring the geographical scope of repertoires of four particular women in Articles 2 and 4 in the thesis. Indeed, observations relating to those spaces and places that occur in the legends told by women, and the overall geographical scopes of their repertoires provide valuable insight into one of the key research questions that lie behind this current project, in other words, that concerning the narrative spaces of Icelandic women and the incorporation of their experiences, conditions and living spaces into the legends they tell.

2.4 Gender and Storytelling

One of the key concepts that lies behind this project is the notion of gender, a theme that has been successfully introduced into a number of contemporary and historically-oriented folklore studies in recent decades. Before embarking on a consideration of these studies, it is important to outline what exactly the notion of gender entails. The concept, introduced in its earliest forms by figures such as Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) in the middle of the twentieth century, refers to the social construction of roles considered appropriate for men and women in society, something different to sex which is a biological category (see, for example, de Beauvoir 1949; West and Zimmerman 1987; and Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011: 51-52). A slightly more complex consideration of the concept was later introduced by the gender-historian Joan W. Scott as part of Scott's theories relating to gender as a tool for historical analysis, in which Scott suggested that "gender is a constitutive element of social relationship based on perceived difference between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationship of power" (Scott 1986: 1067; see also Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011: 153-156). In short, gender is not only a social category assigning different roles to men and women in society but also (in close relation to this) a term that relates to the power relations that exist within a society. In

most cases, power relations based on gender have resulted in a situation whereby women, their roles and perceived qualities are considered to be subordinate to those of men (Ortner 1974).

The application of gender-perspectives and considerations of power relations to folklore materials has brought attention to a wide-range of new issues in folkloristic scholarship. Of particular relevance was the theory of standpoint introduced in the 1970s and 1980s by feminist sociologists. This theory maintained that knowledge stems from social position, suggesting that traditional science was androcentric and that women and their experiences have long been marginalized in both research and the production of knowledge (see, for example, Haraway 1988; Harding 1986; Smith 1987; and Þorgerður Einarsdóttir 2004: 217-227). Drawing on the work of the literary scholars Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn (1985: 1-3), the American folklorist Barbara Babcock placed stress on these ideas in her valuable examination of the intersection between folklore and feminism in which she underlined that gender has regularly been a fundamental organizational category of experience; that sexual inequality is a cultural construct; and that male perspectives have long shaped scientific paradigms and methods (Babcock 1987: 391). To Babcock's mind, there was a need for a dual approach to feministic folklore scholarship, the first of which would involve destabilizing and deconstructing male cultural paradigms and biases, while the other would involve reconstructing female perspectives and experiences (Babcock 1987: 391).²⁴

Questions relating to gender and its role in the creation, performance, collection and preservation of legends have nonetheless only comparatively rarely been taken up in studies of earlier storytelling traditions. To a certain extent, this can be said to reflect the overall situation that existed in folklore scholarship until late in the twentieth century. In an endnote to M. Jane Young and Kay Turner's work on collecting and research on women's folklore, "Challenging the Canon" (1993: 22), the authors sadly note the fact that while a considerable amount of folklore dealing with women exists, those studies dealing with it tend to say little about the influences of gender on the creation and performance of this material. This relative lack of consideration of gender as signifying feature of power relations in earlier folklore scholarship is somewhat understandable given the fact that the gender perspectives noted above only found their way into folklore scholarship at about the same time as the arrival of the earlier-noted "New Perspectives" (see Chapter 2.2 above), in other words, not until late in the twentieth century. This meant that those folklore studies that did adopt gender-perspectives have for the main part tended

²⁴ On the intersection between folklore and feminism, see also Farrer 1975; Hollis et al. 1993; Jordan and Kalcik 1985; Kousaleos 1999; and Mills 1993.

to focus on the folklore of contemporary communities rather than on the older material found in the archives and the repertoires of those female informants preserved there.

For this present study, and indeed, any study of the material contained in the folk narrative archives, the question of representation is of paramount importance. In her introduction to *Women and Folklore* (1975), one of the pioneering works to adopt a gender perspective in folklore studies, Claire R. Farrer (1936-2020) outlines what she sees as being the main difficulties caused by male-dominated folklore collection with regard to the preservation and research of women's folklore. The first problem, to Farrer's mind, concerns the expectations many male folklore collectors had of their female informants. As she suggests, while folklore collectors often spoke of the importance of women's cultural expression, these expressions were only acknowledged and given legitimacy when they appeared in pre-established categories of genres that were seen as being in harmony with the dominant ideas relating to femininity and womanhood, such as magic, strange customs and beliefs, home remedies and the retelling of folk tales. The second problem that Farrer notes follows on from this. As she demonstrates, collectors regularly sidestepped women as sources unless their studies involved those "feminine" genres noted above, or if male informants for other types of genres happened to not be available. The final problem, according to Farrer, is that scholars and folklore collectors have constantly tended to prioritize and place higher value on the performances of men in the public arena than on women's performances within the private arena of the home or domestic space (Farrer 1975: v-vi). As Farrer stresses, all of these problems need to be kept in mind by anyone attempting to reconstruct women's traditions by means of the archives, not least because the biases noted here naturally have the potential to skew the representation of women in the material, limit observations of their performances, and minimize the appearance of their repertoires.

Such male perceptions of women in the early days of folk narrative collecting may also be to blame for a certain paradox that presents itself whenever one looks into the representation of women as storytellers. It is apparent that many folk narrative collectors in the past considered women to be the ultimate source of narratives, since throughout history, they had "nursed the narrative tradition on their knees." Such was the view of Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1954: xxxvii-xxxviii), one of the editors of Jón Árnason's first major folk narrative collection published in 1862-1864.²⁵ Guðbrandur was not unique in his

²⁵ Similar views are expressed by other Icelandic scholars in the nineteenth century such as Jón Sigurðsson (1811-1879) who describes oral narratives as being "small flowers" that lived under the tongue roots of our mothers and foster mothers (Jón Sigurðsson

opinion. As a number of scholars have noted, the archetypal image of storytellers in both Europe and Iceland in the past tended to be female (Carter 1990: x; Dagrún Jónsdóttir 2022b: 33; Valdimar Hafstein 2014: 12; and Gunnell 2017c: 228), emphasis often being placed on their roles as narrators for children. However, as several studies have shown (see Tangherlini 1994: 69; Köhler-Zülch 1991: 101; Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008: 91-121 and 143-148; Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2010: 167; Chapter 3.1; and Articles 1 and 3 in this thesis), such early ideas of women being ideal storytellers did not lead to a high representation of female storytellers in most of the archives in which men tend to outnumber women as storytellers.

As Tangherlini (1994: 69) observes in his consideration of the informants of Evald Tang Kristensen, the emphasis placed on male storytellers by folklore collectors such as Tang Kristiansen may have something to do with the better access that male folklore collectors had to male informants as opposed to female informants. It may also be that informants felt more confident expressing themselves in the company of collectors of their own gender. Indeed, my own study into the informants of the sole female Icelandic folk narrative collector Torfhildur Þorsteinsdóttir Hólm (1845-1918) (see Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2010: 167-168) revealed that a large majority of Torfhildur's informants were women, something which lends weight to the idea that a gender bias also existed in terms of the earlier folk narrative collectors' choice of informants. Similar biases have been shown to have been apparent in the collection that took place in other semi-Nordic communities such as Shetland. As the historian Lynn Abrams notes (Abrams 2005: 36), even though most sources relating to Shetland suggest that oral stories were predominantly passed on by women in earlier times, and even though women tended to dominate both the wider social landscape and culture of Shetland, collectors of folk narratives in the twentieth century, and especially those from outside Shetland, tended to focus primarily on male storytellers. All in all, the fact that women rarely participated in the folk narrative collection of the past appears to have led almost automatically to the marginalization of women as storytellers in the archives.

There are, however, several other possible explanations for the aforementioned paradox relating to the presentation of women as ideal storytellers in their communities and their low representation in the archives. Folk narrative archives, and not least those in Iceland, include large numbers of

1860: 191). In his analogy, Jón Sigurðsson was contrasting these oral stories to the earlier written Icelandic saga literature (which was naturally presumed to have been written by men), material which, in Jón's analogy represented the "oak trees" of Icelandic culture. His choice of words can be argued both to demean the role women's storytelling while simultaneously glorifying it.

narratives which lack the names of sources in the records of the collectors, sometimes because the male collector is recording what he considered to be part of his own repertoire, or simply because he could not be bothered to document his sources.²⁶ It is probable that both factors affected the representation of women disproportionately, women commonly being viewed as tradition-bearers rather than creative figures.

Indeed, as Joan Scott (1996) and others have noted, in Europe in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, women were not granted with the same standards of individuality granted to men with regard to political and intellectual discourse. The same may have been the case with regard to the exclusion of women from the notions of authorship which were developing at the same time. Indeed, this is something implied by, among others, Valdimar Tr. Hafstein (2014: 12), who has noted that while women were idealized as storytellers by earlier collectors, they also tended to be credited more with memorizing and passing on stories rather than with creating them. It is therefore quite possible that large numbers of those legends in the earlier printed archives of Icelandic legends that are not credited to named storytellers in fact originated with women rather than men. Some of this material might potentially be identified as being “women’s stories”, but this naturally depends mainly on the generalised classification of narratives on the basis of themes and other characteristics, something that this thesis is hoping to shed light on (among other things). Such an approach has been taken by, among others, Elizabeth Minchin (2007: 246-280) in her excellent research into storytelling and gender in the Homeric epics, in which Minchin makes use of knowledge stemming from contemporary research into gender-difference and storytelling, and predominantly that of Jennifer Coates (see below), to establish whether these ancient stories are more likely to have been told by men rather than women. As my study deals with known narrators whose gender has already been established, this particular approach has not been taken up in this current project. It would nonetheless be an excellent tool for a similar kind of research into the material contained in the Icelandic printed folk narrative archives for which the narrators and their gender are unknown. Hopefully, some of the observations made in the following project will provide additional aid for such an examination which would hopefully involve yet further attention being paid to the dominant themes and characteristics in Icelandic women’s storytelling past and present.

²⁶ *Sagnagrunnur*, the Icelandic digital database of folk legends in print includes a little over 11.000 legends, of which 4055 are listed as documented as having come from male storytellers (or the male collector himself) and 1882 by female storytellers. Close to half of the material lacks accreditation.

Moving from the gender-related aspects of collection to the storytelling traditions themselves, it is important to note a number of central observations that have been made by folklorists and scholars of related fields in recent years, all of which demand closer examination. One such observation relates to the storytelling platform itself and the question of whether men or women tend to dominate as storytellers in their communities. Studies of storytelling traditions such as those made by the Russians and the Hungarian School in the former half of the twentieth century (see Chapter 2.2 above) argued that men's storytelling took place predominantly in the public arena, while that of women essentially occurred in the private sphere of their households (see Dégh 1989: 91-93 and 1995: 62; and Holbek 1987: 154-157; and on women's storytelling in the private sphere, Yokom 1985). As more recent research has shown, the traditional dichotomy in which the public sphere tends to be associated with men and private sphere with women, something which forms the basis of many earlier works on gender and storytelling, needs at least some degree of refinement. There is reason to believe that this binary approach may not fit the traditional rural Northern European countries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as it did the more industrialized and urbanized countries that were coming into being elsewhere in Europe (Abrams 2005: 192-194 and 2008; and Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011: 48-49, 80-84 and 2018; and Guðmundur Hálfánarson 2008; on this, see further Chapter 4). Indeed, it is hard to apply such hard divisions between arenas when it comes to the storytelling sessions that took place in the Nordic countries, Scotland and Ireland, areas in which the private household rather than public places functioned as the primary storytelling arena for both men and women.²⁷ This applies especially in Iceland, a country which was almost entirely lacking in public arenas (and public houses) until well into the twentieth century, something that is further examined in Article 2.

One of the first studies to make use of the earlier-noted dichotomy of public and private arenas in the context of oral storytelling was Linda Dégh, in her earlier-mentioned study of the Bukovina Szeklers and their storytelling traditions (see Chapter 2.2). In this study, Dégh points out that men tended to share stories during their work which largely took place outside the realm of the home. Dégh suggests that, in general, men had better opportunities to tell and learn stories in association with both their work and leisure than women, whose repertoires tended to be smaller and their stories less colourful than those of

²⁷ See, for example, the accounts of the *ceilidh* gatherings that took in Ballymenone, Ireland in Glassie (1995: 35-129; and 2005: 53-114); and those of similar gatherings in Scotland, Hebrides and Shetland in MacDonald (2007: 43); Saxby (1932: 73-88); and Vilborg Davíðsdóttir (2011: 127).

men (Dégh 1989: 91-93 and 1995: 62-63). In her later essay on the nature of women's storytelling, Dégh also maintains that in traditional communities in Europe, women were commonly more creative in lyrical genres whereas men excelled in the fields of elaborate epics and fairy tales and other storytelling traditions, concluding that storytelling, not only in such traditional European communities but also those in Asia and other territories with cultural contact, can be considered a *par excellence* male occupation (Dégh 1995: 62). She claims furthermore, that the earlier-noted image of women being natural storytellers in Europe in spite of the fact that their stories, to her mind, tended to be plain, naïve, unremarkable and unpretentious, was largely the result of the childhood memories of elite authors, and their experiences of the everyday storytelling of wet nurses and domestic servants (Dégh 1995: 63).

More recent gender-oriented studies of women's traditions by folklorists have nonetheless shown that the earlier emphasis on the idea that men's storytelling tended to take place in the public sphere, and on the patterns and styles of male narration, may have resulted in an general underestimation of the role of women, their repertoires and the nature of their more collaborative storytelling which took place in the private domestic sphere (Farrer 1975: v-vi; Jordan and Kalcik 1985: ix; and especially Coates 2013: 11, 15-17 and 127-138). Indeed, in her study of the everyday talk of men and women, Jennifer Coates (2013 15-17) notes that while men's personal stories tend to deal with danger, violence, and conquest, the focus of women's stories (at least in the context of their collaborative storytelling with friends), tends to be on less life-threatening or dangerous events.²⁸ To Coates' mind, this, along with the more domestic setting of women's storytelling, may help explain why women's narratives have been undervalued: in short, folklorists working with the male tradition may have simply seen this material as being boring and unexciting (Coates 2013; 15).

Closely related to the topic of different narrative styles of men and women is the question of genre, that is, what forms of narratives tend to dominate in the repertoires of men and women. As noted by Dégh above, the fairy tale tradition was considered to have been a male genre in Eastern Europe in earlier times, and to have survived into the modern era in women's domestic storytelling after its decline in the public arena (on this, see also Holbek 1987: 154-157). While it must remain questionable whether fairy tales originated in the public arena or the domestic sphere and which arena should be considered to be their primary platform, studies suggest that from at least the middle of the nineteenth century,

²⁸ This, however, does not mean that women do not experience and talk about life-threatening events such as those connected to childbirth and domestic violence. On this, see, for example, Callister (2004) and Lawless (2000).

women tended to be more prominent tellers of wonder tales in Europe (Dégh 1995: 66; Holbek 1987: 154-157; Kiliánová 1999: 104; and Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 64-66). As for the more reality-based narrative genres, researchers have implied that women tend to be more prominent tellers of supernatural legends, and especially ghost stories, while men tend to be more prominent tellers of humorous stories, anecdotes and personal experience narratives (Dégh 1995: 66-68; and Kiliánová 1999: 103-104). The assignment of the personal experience narrative to the domain of men may nonetheless be the result of the earlier-noted biases of folklorists towards men's storytelling in earlier times and the undervaluation of the collaborative storytelling of women in private arenas. Indeed, more recent studies have suggested that, at least in the middle-class culture of the contemporary urban world, women tell far more personal experience stories than men, implying they have somewhat wider ideas as to what can be seen as being tellable (Coates 1996: 115 and 44-45; see also Minchin 2007: 47-48). There is, however, a fundamental difference in terms of both the subjects of these narratives and how men and women place themselves within them. While men's narratives tend to focus on heroism and achievements (see above) and be largely self-oriented, serving to build up the teller's own image, women's narratives tend to focus on frightening and embarrassing events and be "other-oriented", underplaying the role of the protagonist (Coates 2013: 20-27). It is therefore quite possible, that women's personal narratives failed to live up to the standards of earlier folklorists as to what should constitute a "personal experience narrative" especially in its secular form in which it lacked obvious connections to the pre-established cultural categories of folk belief that would raise it to the standard of being classed as a memorate (see above Chapter 2.1.)

Another aspect that has been gaining the attention of folklorists in recent years is the role of the gender of the audience in storytelling events, and the effect that this can have on both the genre and the content of the narratives chosen by the storytellers. Studies have shown that humour and jokes tend to have a strong gendered dimension (Kotthoff 2006), something which has been emphasized in a number of folkloric studies on folk narratives which have indicated that women in both the past and the present have tended to tell more humorous and personal experience narratives in all-female environments than they do in mixed-gender spaces (Green 1977; Kiliánová 1999: 102-104; and Dégh 1995: 66-68). Studies of storytelling in earlier traditional communities (see, for example, Apo 1995: 145; Holbek 1987: 405-406; Swan 1955: 437-438; and Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 148-151) have also shown that while women tended to tell tales involving male and female protagonists in equal proportion, men tended mostly to tell stories about male protagonists. This gender difference related to the choice of characters has been connected not only to the

different storytelling platforms experienced by men and women but also the different audiences involved in the storytelling sessions in which men mostly learned stories from other men outside the domestic sphere, telling them mostly to all-male audiences, while women told their stories domestically to audiences of both genders. All the same, as Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir has shown, these patterns may not always be explained by the gender of audiences. There is also a possibility that they have more to do with the personality and attitude of the storyteller, something which may have a background and the influence this has on what kind of stories they choose to adapt into their repertoires (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 150 see also Apo 1995: 139-143).

Tangherlini's study of the Danish legend tradition practised by the nineteenth-century informants of Evald Tang Kristensen provides some valuable context for the gender differences that can be detected in the legend traditions of earlier rural communities. As Tangherlini notes, the earlier-noted gender-conforming choices and roles of characters is also evident in the Danish legend tradition. As he observes (Tangherlini 1994: 147-148), while male humans appeared in similar proportions in those legends told in Denmark by men and women, female humans appeared in significantly more legends told by women, something which reflects the androcentric attitude of the nineteenth century when men tended to devalue the role of women in interactions, recounting events in male terms, while women placed more value on the roles of women in their legends. Tangherlini also notes the different spheres of economic activity experienced by the different genders, pointing to the way the extra-domestic environment was dominated by men, and the fact that the domestic environment of women included individuals of both sexes. As in Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir's observation noted above, Tangherlini suggests that these patterns may have something to do with the way in which legends were incorporated into repertoires, women deriving meaning from legends about both women and men, even to the point of reassigning female or male roles to different characters to make the legends more meaningful to themselves (Tangherlini 1994: 147-148).

Other important observations relating to gender in Tangherlini's work concern both the sizes of repertoires and the form of narratives. His research into these features underlined that there was actually no obvious difference in terms of the sizes of the legend repertoires of men and women in Denmark, although descriptions and jokes, two categories generically related to the legends, were shown to have a higher representation in men's repertoires (Tangherlini 1994: 145). As Tangherlini suggests himself, the higher proportion of jokes in men's archived repertoires could naturally be explained by the gender of the collector, something that reflects the trends noted above whereby men and women tell more humorous stories among those audiences consisting

largely of their own gender. Tangherlini's source material nonetheless showed no significant gender differences in the use of stylistic devices, such as personal names, thematic elements, the use of verifying tags, or references to time, although men appeared to refer to place names and the time of year in slightly higher proportions (Tangherlini 1994: 146).

The most significant difference between men's and women's repertoires in Tang Kristensen's material seems to be their personal involvement in the legends, women telling more such personal experience legends and legends about known others, friends and relatives, while the men appeared to prefer a more detached narrative style, telling more legends about unknown third parties (Tangherlini 1994: 146). To Tangherlini's mind, this may have been caused by the Danish *Jantelov*, in which people in nineteenth-century Denmark were encouraged not to position themselves as the centre of attention, something which affected men to a greater extent than women (Tangherlini 1994: 146-147). The greater degree of women's self-involvement in Danish legends and their personal approach to the tradition is particularly interesting for the present discussion, and is explored in, among other places, Article 3 of the thesis. All the same, as the article notes, it needs to be kept in mind that the Icelandic material under consideration here differs dramatically from that of Tangherlini, and not least in terms of the nature in which it was recorded, and the approach taken by the collector to documentation. Indeed, in Iceland, various forms of secular personal experience narratives were recorded, material that many earlier folklore collectors had not collected because (as noted above) it had failed to comply to their standards of traditionality, or was seen to lack relevance.

The evidence relating to Icelandic women's personal approach to the legend tradition that came to light in my own earlier-mentioned study of male and female narrators from the Skaftafell district of Southeast Iceland from 2008 was particularly interesting and reflected many of the scholarly arguments noted above. One of the most markable differences between the legends told by the men and the women from this region was the higher representation of first- and second-hand supernatural memorates in the women's repertoires, both men and women appearing to tell similar proportions of first- and second-hand secular personal experience stories (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008: 160-161). Men also appeared to take a generally more secular approach to tradition than women, telling proportionally more secular historical legends than the women (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008: 162). This research, of course, only included storytellers from one region in Iceland while Article 3 explores similar trends found in data relating to storytellers from all over the country. The more personal approach of women to supernatural experiences is also reflected in the recent quantitative research undertaken into Icelandic folk belief in the early years of this century, which indicated that women were not only more likely to admit their belief in

the supernatural, but also more likely than men to admit to having experienced encounters with it (Gunnell 2007; and Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds et al. 2008). The same thing was encountered in almost every category of folk belief, including dreams, omens, *huldufólk*, encounters with the dead, and hauntings. A similar trend is found in considerations of gendered discourse in Western societies, which have argued that rationality and reason have tended to be considered as male traits, while those relating to emotions and feelings have been regarded as being more female (see, for example, Lloyd 1979 and 1984; and Pavco-Giaccia et al. 2019). It is therefore highly plausible that Icelandic men in both the past and present should have tended to be more reluctant to admit experiencing and belief in the supernatural than women simply because they felt a greater degree of societal pressure to distance themselves from such “irrational” behaviour and belief.

Other interesting gender differences that are of concern for this current project became apparent in my 2008 study. First of all, in line with the observation made by Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir in her study of Icelandic fairy tale tradition (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 148-151), and by other scholars elsewhere (see above), it was apparent that men appear to avoid using female characters in their legends. While men made up around 50% of all the characters appearing in those legends told by the women, only about 20% of the characters appearing in the legends told by the men were female. Interestingly, there was little change in this difference in emphasis in the material collected in the early twenty-first century despite the greater participation of women in the public arena, suggesting that the absence of women in men’s narratives may have another reason than the mere absence of women in the male sphere of activities and experience (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008: 173-175). Considering this in terms of gendered power relations, this can be seen to emphasize the virtue of a society dominated by hegemonic masculinity, in which male (and, to a lesser extent, female) discourse tends to focus predominantly on the virtue and achievement of men, simultaneously marginalizing women and their roles (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).²⁹

Another feature that came to light in my earlier study related to those narrative themes chosen by the storytellers. As noted in other studies from Iceland and abroad (see above), while men told proportionally more legends about place names, journeys, ghosts in general and sea and lake monsters, women appeared to tell more legends about the *huldufólk*, family ghosts,

²⁹ Hegemonic masculinity according to Connell is a specific form of masculinity that dominates in any given historical or contemporary society, and legitimates the unequal gender relations that exist between men and women, between masculinity and femininity and, to some extent also between different types of masculinities.

dreams, and omens (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008: 206, 218, 228-229, 247-248, 264 and 268-269). As noted above, it is important to remember that the study in question was limited to the legend tradition of narrators from the Skaftafell district in South-east Iceland. The present, much wider project takes things further, considering whether these gendered patterns can be said to hold true for Iceland as a whole, and forms one of the main focuses on Article 3.

Other studies dealing with spatial aspects of Icelandic oral tradition have produced some valuable observations regarding the different spatial aspects found in men's and women's repertoires. Among other things, these studies have pointed to the fact that when explored from the perspective of the place names that occur in the legends told by men and women, women's repertoires tend to have a more limited geographical scope than those of men, the siting of the women's legends commonly clustering around the domestic spaces of the household while those of men often reflect the routes they travelled as part of their work (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008b: 755-757; Trausti Dagsson 2014a: 8-9; and Gunnell 2016: 30-32). As Articles 2 and 4 of the thesis point out, this does not mean that all women were geographically isolated and bound to a single domestic space. Indeed, their biographical histories show that many of them moved quite a bit over the course of their lifetimes.³⁰

Several Icelandic scholarly works dealing directly with questions of gender and storytelling are worth mentioning here. Worth particular notice are the works of the literary scholar Helga Kress, one of the first Icelanders to pay attention to gender in the context of narrating and storytelling. Although her works (see Helga Kress 1993; 1996; 2002 and 2009) deal mostly with the Icelandic saga tradition and a period that predates the material discussed in current project by several centuries, Helga's research has some relevance for current project because it deals with both the oral tradition and questions of gender. Helga Kress's works build on the perceived premises that the ancient Icelandic literature recorded by men lies on top of the suppressed oral tradition of women, a process she refers to a "*uppskafningur*" (a term originally used for manuscripts in which that original text has been scraped off in order for the parchment to be reused for a new text). In her work, Helga makes various attempts to reveal the erased or muted female voices that can be detected behind the written texts, pointing to, among other things, particular narrative styles and

³⁰ Closely related to this observation is the equally interesting observation that, as I have noted elsewhere (Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir 2008b: 756-758), women tend to tell more legends relating to the *huldufólk*, something that would appear to be explained by the traditional belief that the *huldufólk* lived on the borders of the farms, in other words, in close proximity to the domestic space of the Icelandic turf-farms. (See further Article 2.)

traits that she sees as being mainly associated with women (Helga Kress 1993: 11-15). Among the most interesting features that Helga identifies as being as particularly feminine in nature are the grotesque narrative style, something especially visible in narratives about troll women (Helga Kress 1993: 119-135), and then the use of laughter and gossip as means of criticizing men (Helga Kress 1993: 136-160).

Other Icelandic studies that examine narrative traditions from the perspective of gender have mostly focused on the portrayal of women in fairy tales and/ or legends, and the gender-related messages that lie behind these narratives, in other words, gendered discourse. When dealing with the narrative traditions of the past, several scholars have warned that even in those stories told by women, the images of women may seem somewhat negative from a modern perspective, since women in patriarchal communities commonly appear to have felt drawn to subscribe to male-dominated values as part of their tradition (see, for example, Carter 1990: xiii; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2022b: 38-39, and 2021 291-292; and Helga Kress 1993: 14).³¹ This is something that needs to be kept in mind in any examination of the Icelandic narrative tradition, not least because many of the stories were recorded in the nineteenth century, when a combination of a patriarchal societal structure, a male-dominated literary tradition and the male-driven process of documenting oral stories are likely to have left strong marks on the nature of the preserved material (on this process, see further Chapter 3.1. and Article 1). As in many other countries, Icelandic women, in their storytelling in the earlier rural communities had to negotiate their experiences, their values and their ideas about the nature and role of femininity with both the dominant patriarchy of their wider society and their male audiences who were writing the stories down for posterity. Printed collections, and especially those dating back to the nineteenth century, have tended to be in the foreground of almost all of those studies of the images of women and their roles in Icelandic fairy tales and legends which will be examined below, studies which have nonetheless revealed a number of interesting features relating to earlier Icelandic ideas about women and femininity. While the women focused on in this current project came of age about half a century later than the time at which the earliest Icelandic folk

³¹ It should be borne in mind that not all European communities of the past followed a patriarchal societal structure in which the role of women in the legend tradition was undervalued. As Lynn Abrams has shown in her study of Shetlandic society and storytelling in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Abrams 2005: 24-31 in particular), in the past, women in Shetland played a dominant role democratically, economically, and culturally, regularly telling stories that placed great emphasis on complimentary female archetypes, such as the tragic woman, the heroic woman and the crofting woman.

narrative collections were published, and while they experienced in their lifetimes more changes in terms of women's suffrage than any other generation of women before them (see further Chapter 4.1), in many aspects, they still grew up in the same androcentric culture as that which produced the printed material in question, something which may well have left shadows on their repertoires.

As noted above, those Icelandic studies that have touched on gender and gender-roles in Icelandic narrative traditions have focused not only on early Icelandic literature (particularly the work of Helga Kress: see above), but also fairy tales and legends. Among those who have considered fairy tales from this viewpoint is Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir who has looked at the role of the stepmother in Icelandic fairy tales, as well as class-based violence against women in Icelandic medieval literature (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 1995 and 2014).³² The earliest studies that consider gender aspects of the legend tradition were carried out by the folklorist Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir (1939-1988) who, among other things, used this perspective to consider Icelandic legends dealing with the *huldufólk* from this perspective, highlighting how these legends tend to contain strong female roles and focus on women's experiences and subject matter relating to their world (Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir 1982; 1988: 21-23; and 1990). Guðrún's studies are of particular interest for this thesis, since, as noted above and examined further in Article 3, in Iceland women also appear to be significantly more prominent tellers of legends about the *huldufólk* than men, something which may explain the strong emphasis on women's experiences and roles Guðrún finds in these stories.

Another scholar who has examined the Icelandic legend tradition from perspective of gender is Ólína Þorvarðardóttir, who has, among other things, paid attention to the gendered messaging that can be found not only in stories about the *huldufólk* but also those dealing with *tröll* in her introduction to a collection of these legends (1995). In another study, Ólína has examined the attitudes towards troll women and their desires in Icelandic legends (1997).³³

³² As has been noted by Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir (2022b: 34) among others, the fairy tale tradition has received more attention than legends when it comes to questions of gender, possibly because of the alleged close association between fairy tales and female storytellers (see above). International scholarship has, of course, seen a number of high-quality studies dealing with women and their roles and images in fairy tales: see, for example, Bottigheimer 1987; Carter 1990; Tatar 1992; and Warner 1994.

³³ There have, of course, been many interesting studies in international scholarship dealing with the portrayal of women in legend tradition, such as that by Jauhainen (1989) on what was considered to be sins of women in Finnish belief legends; that by Simpson (1991) on mixed messaging relating to women's courage in legends; those by Hauge (1949) and Lindow (2009) on legends about the strong housewife; that by af

Elsewhere, in his detailed research into the Icelandic versions of the migratory legend about the midwife to the fairies (ML 5070), the Swedish folklorist Bo Almqvist (1931-2023) observed (like others) the way in which legends of this kind often played a key role in the occupational narratives of rural midwives, some of whom told such narratives in the form of memorates about themselves as an explanation for how they came to be midwives, possibly as a means getting the local community to have more trust in them (see Almqvist 2008: 307-314; and Elsa Ósk Alfreðsdóttir 2013: 79-84). As Almqvist notes (something supported by this present study), women appear to have been the most prominent narrators of such stories in Iceland (Almqvist 2008: 307).

The most recent research to deal with gender discourse, and in particular with the portrayal of women in Icelandic legends is the PhD research of Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir, work which was carried out largely in the same period as this current project. In her work (see Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020; 2021; 2022a and 2022b; and forthcoming), Dagrún focuses mostly on the material in the earlier-noted collection of Jón Árnason, collected during the middle of the nineteenth century, but also considers other later material from those folk narrative

Klintberg (2016) on legends about women who do not want to have children; and that by Conrad (2021) on legends about the *bergtakning* of women in Norwegian tradition. The closely related fields of anthropology, sociology and history have produced a number of excellent works focusing more broadly on women, their social spaces, and their roles, beliefs and culture which deserve mention here. These include those studies by various scholars on women's images, roles and social reality published in Dubisch (ed.) *Gender & Power in Rural Greece* (1986); and the work by Tilly and Scott (1989) on the history of women's work and the changes in their status in England and France from 1750 until modernity. Studies on witchcraft discourses and the history of witchcraft in Europe naturally also provide excellent insights into notions of femininity, gender-roles and women's experiences and spaces, two valuable examples being that by de Blécourt (2000 and 2013) considering the spatial dimensions of witchcraft discourse in Flemish-speaking Belgium and the gendered discourses involved in Dutch witch cases; and that by Eilola (2006) on the similar gender discourse in Finnish and Swedish witchcraft court records. It is worth noting here that Icelandic witchcraft and beliefs in magic evidently took a very different form than in Europe, being predominantly associated with men rather than women both in historical reality and in the legend tradition in which the image of devil-worshipping female witches is almost entirely absent. This is also the case in the source material used in this dissertation in which magic has very thin representation and is predominantly associated with well-known male figures (priests and folk healers) from earlier centuries. In Iceland, women were accused in only about 10% of the historical cases of witchcraft (Ólína Þorvarðardóttir 2000: 315-318). This gender difference in witchcraft discourse is an excellent subject for further research, not least from the viewpoint of women's spaces, since it indicates women's conditions in rural Iceland and/ or their roles in the social organization must have been somewhat different. (My thanks to Mirjam Mencej for drawing my attention to these sources.)

collections published during the late nineteenth century and early 1900s. Building on, among others, the theories of R. W. Connell and Mimi Schipper relating to hegemonic femininity and pariah femininity, Dagrún examines a number of recurring themes in Icelandic legends, including the way in which they treat femininity and women's gender roles. Among other things, Dagrún considers those legends in which women who assume the roles of men, noting how the women in question tend to be portrayed in a positive fashion when their assumption of the masculine role is only temporary, but become pariahs when such transformations are more permanent (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2021). Elsewhere Dagrún notes how legends about gender-based violence against women were predominantly told by women, but retained an androcentric view of this violence in some cases, showing greater sympathy for women of a higher social class than for those of a lower class who were arguably more likely to experience such violence (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020). Dagrún also considers those legends about women who choose not to have children or to leave their new-born babies outside to die of exposure, noting once again how in the legends women of a lower class tend to be judged somewhat harder than women of a higher caste (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2022a). Elsewhere in the articles behind her thesis, Dagrún takes up those legends dealing with supernatural women, *huldukonur* and *tröll* who seem to challenge the dominant ideology relating to women, among others questioning those ideas relating to sexual freedom and femininity (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir forthcoming). One of Dagrún's main conclusions is that those women who contest the dominating hegemonic ideas relating to femininity in the Icelandic legends of the past tend to be presented as threats to the social order, commonly ending up being either punished or marginalized as pariahs in their communities (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2022b: 197-209). As she shows, these legends seem to have served to reinforce such hegemonic ideas, passing them on to future generations of both men and women.

Dagrún's research has brought to light an issue which is not addressed in the articles in this current project, partly because much of her work was still not available to me (we were both writing articles at the same time), but it is nonetheless something that is well worth further examination in the future. The issue in question relates to how the legend themes analysed by Dagrún fared as they were passed on to the next generation of women featured in this current project, in other words, those women born late in the nineteenth century at a time when the somewhat stagnant androcentric rural community of Iceland which centred around subsistence farming started to be replaced by the more urbanized society of the twentieth century in which there was a greater degree of gender equality. The legends examined by Dagrún in her study are predominantly somewhat stereotypical fabulates, either unique Icelandic

migratory legends (such as those dealing with the *huldufólk*, *tröll*, and outlaws) or Icelandic versions of international migratory legends (such as “taming of the shrew” and those dealing with the ghosts of exposed children), legends that tend to have more obvious moral messages than the more idiosyncratic locally-created and locally-shared legends discussed here. As noted in Article 3 in this project (among other places), the legends of those narrators featured here take place overwhelmingly either in the lifetimes of the narrators or during the lifetimes of their parents and grandparents. For some reason, stereotypical migratory legends like those which were very common in the folklore collections of the nineteenth century, legends which tend to lack personal connections to environment of narrators, have little to no presence in the repertoires of those women examined here, except in very fragmented forms.³⁴ The question remains whether the apparent disappearance of such fabulates from the repertoires of Icelandic women was brought about by their publication in the nineteenth century (which meant the stories could now be read and no longer had to be learned and told orally), or by the somewhat less androcentric societal culture of the early twentieth century in which earlier ideas relating to femininity were now being challenged, something which would have rendered these legends less relevant for later oral repertoires.

As has been shown above, this thesis and the articles at its heart, among other things adopt the notion of gender as a social construct in which power relations serve as an analytical tool. In the thesis, gender serves as an essential organizational category of experience, particular attention being drawn to those elements of women’s traditions that have roots in gender and gender-relations. In line with the some of the earlier works dealing with gender or considering folklore from gender perspective, the thesis attempts to engage in the double task of uncovering how and where male perspectives and male paradigms may have served to marginalize women’s voices and perspectives, simultaneously attempting to reconstruct and highlight women’s traditions and experiences.

³⁴ Legends of this kind (and fragments of such legends) were noted as part of the process of marking up the archival material used in this present project. Only 60 such legends were found in the entire corpus of over 2200 legends. The majority of these narratives were highly ecotypified, personalized accounts of the Midwife to the Fairies legend (ML 5070: see above) which, as has been noted above (see Almqvist 2008: 307-314) seems to have attained a new role in the narratives told by Icelandic midwives, explaining the background of their art, something that helped secure the relevance of the legend into modern times.

3 Sources

Any reconstruction of the narrative tradition of a past community depends on whether there is enough high-quality source material available to embark on such a reconstruction. Any study taking a narrator-based approach to the oral tradition is bound to be particularly reliant not only on good source material but also rich context-related information about narrators, their backgrounds and their environment. The material for my study also needed to be fairly symmetrical in terms of collection methods and goals, and preferably collected by a single collector or team of collectors using similar methods. It naturally also needed to include many women as storytellers, good information about their personal histories and surroundings, and reliable documentation of their oral legend repertoires. The time frame also needed to be right, in other words, the women had to be representatives of the pre-industrial rural community of Iceland, which went into decline in the first half of the twentieth century and came to an end during the Second World War (see further the start of this work and Chapter 4). This meant that the women in question preferably needed to have been born during the nineteenth century and to have come of age in the early 1900s, at a time when Iceland was still relatively untouched by the process of urbanization and industrialization.

As noted in the very beginning of this work, two different forms of archive containing oral narratives told by individuals living in the rural communities of the past exist in Iceland. One consists of the printed collections of folk narratives published in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. In recent years, detailed information about this material has been made available in digital form in the *Sagnagrunnur* database, in which effort has been placed on reconnecting the narratives with their original narrators (if they can be established) and their local geographical surroundings (see further Trausti Dagsson 2014a and 2014b; and Gunnell 2010 and 2016). This work (containing information on over 11,000 legends) has opened up possibilities of taking new approaches to the old written records, and among other things, the chance to be able to focus more on storytellers and their repertoires, local narrative traditions and beliefs, and lines of distribution. The other Icelandic folk narrative archive is the large collection of audiotaped folkloric material contained in the sound archives of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík, material which dates from the mid-twentieth century. Like the written archive, this recorded material has recently gone through the process of digitalization, making the earlier recordings available to be listened to online (for scholars and public alike) as part of the now integrated *Ísmús-Sagnagrunnur* database (see

<https://ismus.is/tjodfraedi/>) (on the original *ísmús*, see Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2013). In the following chapter, I will discuss the features of these two different forms of archive, focusing on the degrees to which they suit my research goals and why the project came to focus on the audiotaped material collected by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson.

3.1 The Archive of Icelandic Legends in Print

Icelanders embarked on the large-scale collecting of oral folk narratives somewhat late compared with other countries (see Gunnell 2010b and 2022c), although they can be said to have later made up for this delay with the unusually large volume of material that came to be collected and published during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the former half of the twentieth. Over 20 small and large published folk narrative collections appeared in Iceland in the first 100 years (Steindór Steindórsson 1964: 13-25), resulting (as noted above regarding the material in *Sagnagrunnur*) in a total over 11.000 legends in print. The first Icelandic collection (the single volume collection *Íslenzk æfintýri* published by Jón Árnason and Magnús Grímsson: see Chapter 2.1) did not come out until 1852, almost four decades after the publication of the Grimm brothers' *Deutsche Sagen* (1816-1818) and Theile's *Danske Folkesagn* (1818-1823) and almost two decades after the appearance of Faye's *Norske Sagn* (1833). As noted earlier in this thesis, this first Icelandic collection was followed by the two-volume work *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* produced by same collectors in 1862-1864 (an extended six-volume edition of all the collected manuscripts being later published by Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson in *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* in 1954-1961). This collection³⁵ represents the largest collection of Icelandic folk narratives collected in the nineteenth century, containing a total of about 2,700 legends and 100 wonder tales.

For the task of reconstructing the legend tradition of women in the pre-industrial rural community of Iceland, Jón Árnason's collection would at first glance seem to have one obvious advantage. It contains material collected in around 1860, at a point in time in which the pre-industrial rural community of Iceland was still in full bloom, relatively untouched by the process of urbanization and industrialization. However, on closer examination, this collection had several serious disadvantages for the kind of storyteller-based approach to women's narrative traditions that I intended to carry out. For one thing, most of the material was not collected by the main collector himself, who was based in Reykjavík and relied on a network of friends, relations and

³⁵ It might be noted that both the printed versions and the original manuscripts now form part of the *Sagnagrunnur* database.

colleagues (many of them clerics) living around Iceland to collect the narratives rather than undertaking field work in person (Gunnell 2010b and 2012). To some extent, this complicates the reconstruction of context because many different collectors mean different emphases and methods, all of which would need to be considered.³⁶ As with all the material documented by male collectors in written form in the past, there is also good reason to suspect that the process of documentation also involved some degree of reorientation and retelling of stories, which would potentially highlight those elements the male collectors were more interested in, simultaneously undermining the position of women and their roles, albeit unconsciously. Of even more concern, however, was the fact that despite the strong emphasis that was being placed on women and their roles as storytellers at this time (see further Chapter 2.4 and Gunnell 2022d: 37), very few legends appear to come from female narrators in this first major folk narrative collection in Iceland. Indeed, a search in the *Sagnagrunnur* database turns up only 248 legends in this large collection that are recorded as having come from women. In short, while it is possible to find several women in the collection who have fairly large legend repertoires, such as Sesselja Jónsdóttir (1801-1866) from whom over 30 legends were recorded by her adult son, and Guðríður Eyjólfsdóttir (1800-1878) from whom 27 legends were recorded by a Páll Pálsson, a young boy in her household, the number of women included still turned out to be too few for any large-scale study of women's storytelling and legend repertoires.

Another collection from the latter half of the nineteenth century that merited serious consideration was that of Torfhildur Þorsteinsdóttir Hólm (1845-1918), *Þjóðsögur og sagnir*, previously mentioned in Chapter 2.4, the only published collection to be made by an Icelandic woman until relatively late in the twentieth century. This collection, however, was not published until 1962, more than 40 years after Torfhildur's death (Finnur Sigmundsson 1962). As I have noted elsewhere (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2010), this collection is a rare and valuable source on women's storytelling for female audiences, and there is little question that the stories in the collection tend to emphasise women's experiences, roles and concerns more strongly than any other collection from the same period. Nonetheless, while this collection contains a far larger proportion of female informants than any other published Icelandic folk narrative collection (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2010), two thirds of the narrators being women, it still turned out to be too small for the purpose of this study,

³⁶ Admittedly Jón Árnason set out guidelines for collection and lists of relevant subjects in his call for papers (Jón Árnason 1861). Nonetheless, one can still expect a range of different methods to have been employed by the different collectors who all had individual interests (see also Gunnell 2012b).

offering only 177 stories told by women and 33 told by men. Another feature that worked against using this material was the fact that it was predominantly collected among Icelanders who had emigrated to Canada, albeit somewhat recently, raising questions of exactly how representative this material was as a source on the storytelling traditions and social reality of women at home in Iceland.

Several other small folk narrative collections include material collected during the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, such as *Þjóðsögur og munnmæli* (1899) by Jón Þorkelsson (1859-1924); *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (1895) by Ólafur Davíðsson (1862-1903); *Huld* (1890-1898) by Hannes Þorsteinsson (1860-1935), Ólafur Davíðsson, Jón Þorkelsson, Pálmi Pálsson (1857-1920) and Valdimar Ásmundsson (1852-1902); and *Þjóðtrú og þjóðsagnir* (1908) by Oddur Björnsson (1865-1945). All the same, the legends recorded from women in these collections are once again limited, ranging in number from 18 to 74, almost all of these collections yet again containing far fewer legends recorded from women than from men.³⁷ This means that none of these collections can be said to be particularly good sources on women's legend traditions either. In addition to this, many of these collections once again raise concerns relating to the authenticity of the versions of the narratives, some collectors sometimes citing two or more sources for individual narratives in their collections, occasionally even going as far as blending oral narratives and written sources (see, for example Jón Þorkelsson 1956: 118; 142 and 177).

Several collections, large and small, followed up during the first half of the twentieth century, representing material collected from the early 1900s up until the middle of the century. Among the collections considered from this period were *Gráskinna hin meiri* (1962, an extended version of *Gráskinna* which was earlier published in 1928-1936) containing narratives collected by the earlier-mentioned Sigurður Nordal and Þórbergur Þórðarson; *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og sagnir* (1982-1993, an extended version of *Íslenzkar þjóð-sögur og -sagnir*, earlier published in 1922-1958) by Sigfús Sigfússon (1855-1935); *Rauðskinna hin nýrri* (1971, an extended version of *Rauðskinna* earlier published in 1929-1961) by Jón Thorarensen (1902-1986); *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (1932-1947) by Einar Guðmundsson (1905-1991); *Íslenzkir sagnaþættir og þjóðsögur* (1940-1957) by Guðni Jónsson (1901-1974); and *Gríma hin nýja* (1964-1965, an extended version of *Gríma* published by Oddur Björnsson in 1929-1950) by Þorsteinn M. Jónsson (1885-1976). Most of these collections once again

³⁷ Figures based on records in *Sagnagrunnur* which notes the gender of storytellers. The lowest proportion of legends told by women as opposed to men was found in the collection of Ólafur Davíðsson, which includes 74 legends told by women and 477 told by men.

included far more legends told by male storytellers than female,³⁸ suggesting that even in this period, even though the male collectors of folk narratives may have had high ideas about women as storytellers (see Chapter 2.4) they generally failed to deliver on these ideals.

A rare exception is the collection of Sigfús Sigfússon, who cites women as being the source of almost as many narratives as men. The strong emphasis on women's narratives in Sigfús' collection may have had something to do with different methods he used in collecting narratives: unlike the other collectors who relied more or less on manuscript records of oral accounts written for them by friends and colleagues around Iceland, Sigfús collected almost all of his material himself *in situ*, while working as a farmhand and later as a teacher on various farms in East Iceland (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1993: 154-155 and 178). The high proportion of women's narratives in Sigfús' collection gives good reason to suspect that a fieldwork-based methodology for collecting oral narratives was somewhat better suited for collecting stories from women in the rural community of the past rather than using oral narratives recorded in writing, a method which, as has been noted elsewhere, was probably one of the most significant characteristics of Icelandic folk narrative collecting in the past.³⁹ As noted above, the male editors of most folk narrative collections tended to rely on written records sent to them by personal networks of friends and acquaintances living in other places in Iceland, friends who were predominantly male, and who, in many cases, cared relatively little about citing the names of their oral sources, male or female (if their sources themselves had any wish to be cited).

³⁸ According to the *Sagnagrunnur* database, Einar Guðmundsson's collection includes 35 legends told by women as opposed to 58 told by men; Guðni Jónsson's collection, 109 legends told by women as opposed to a huge 550 told by men; Jón Thorarensen's collection, 45 legends told by women as opposed to 81 told by men; Sigurður Nordal's and Þórbergur Þórðarson's collection, 106 legends told by women as opposed to 164 told by men; Þorsteinn M. Jónsson's collection, 173 legends told by women as opposed to 389 told by men; and finally, Sigfús Sigfússon's collection, 576 legends told by women as opposed to 597 told by men. These collections, of course, also contain many legends that come from unknown sources, meaning that the higher proportion of legends told by men than women here may also have something to do with a failure to give women credit in line with the patriarchal gender system of the past, something which may have resulted in many legends told by women being disproportionately credited to an "unknown author": on this question, see Chapter 2.4 above.

³⁹ This feature of Icelandic folk narrative collecting is nonetheless very understandable given the unusual conditions in Iceland, including the lack of road infrastructure and public transport which made travelling around Iceland very difficult until the latter half of the twentieth century.

While Sigfús Sigfússon's collection of folk narratives evidently provides an excellent number of narratives told by women in the Icelandic rural community of the past, it also has some serious shortcomings which rendered it unsuitable as a source for the present narrator-based study. For one thing, Sigfús' collection was limited in geographical scope, for the main part containing narratives told by storytellers in East Iceland. More problematic, however, is his treatment of the material. Indeed, as he notes in his introduction to the collection written in 1922, many of the narratives in the collection were memorised and then retold and re-styled by him because of what he perceived to be a serious decline of the art of storytelling from his own youth (Sigfús Sigfússon 1982, I: xxii-xxviii). Furthermore, Sigfús' written records show no attempt to separate sources, often mixing material from two or more oral sources and sometimes even adding information from written sources to the narratives.⁴⁰ This means it is impossible to establish exactly which elements of the stories were included in the original versions told by his female informants, and which come from other sources.

All in all, my examination of the Icelandic archive of published legend material and the written records that lie behind them failed to produce a good contender for the large-scale examination of women's legend traditions that I intended to carry out in this project. While many features of women's legend traditions can certainly be reconstructed using such sources (for example, the work of individual storytellers or forms of messaging and gendered discourse, as has been demonstrated in the work of Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir noted in Chapter 2.4), none of the sources examined above offers particularly good resources for a reconstruction of the broader patterns that lie within women's legend-telling and repertoires and the context of their storytelling. The shortcomings of the printed folk narrative collections outlined above thus led me at an early point in my research to consider using the second type of folk narrative archive, not least because, to some degree, its timeframe overlaps that of the printed material. The audiotaped folkloric collection of the Árni Magnússon Institute will thus be the subject of next chapter.

3.2 The Icelandic Audio Archives

A change of tide occurred in the middle of the twentieth century when audiotaping became the new norm for the collection of folklore in Iceland. Something else that changed at this time was the purpose behind collection.

⁴⁰ Sigfús Sigfússon's treatment of the material, which included the retelling and mixing of sources, was criticised by, among others, Sigurður Nordal: see Sigurður Nordal 1928-1936, I: viii.

Earlier collections of folk narratives in Iceland had been carried out by individuals from various backgrounds who had the aim of publishing the material, making it available to the public in written form, something which would also help finance the work. The recording of folklore material in the latter part of the twentieth century, however, had at last become something that was state supported and professionally carried out, the aim being to provide raw scientific data that could be used in the future by other scholars who had not necessarily been involved in the process of collection (Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1983: 19; Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 54-55).⁴¹ Indeed, it was in this same period that folklore was finally beginning to be accepted as an academic subject in the University of Iceland (see Gunnell 2000).

The Second World War had accelerated the decline of the traditional rural community and simultaneously accelerated the process of urbanization that had begun in the twilight of the nineteenth century (Árni Björnsson and Kuhn 2003: 22-37; Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 292-294), and will be given further consideration in Chapter 4. By the late 1950s, it had become clear to everyone that Icelandic culture and social organization had undergone a radical transformation. As in neighbouring countries, the collection of folklore was still focused on safeguarding the potentially disappearing oral traditions that had lived in, and reflected the world views of the pre-industrial rural society. In the mid-twentieth century in Iceland, the need for such collection was felt to be more important than ever. This goal, among others, is clearly described by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in his writings about the purpose behind the recording of folklore in this period:

Margra sjónarmiða hefur gætt í íslenskri þjóðfræðasöfnun á þessari öld, en megin takmark hennar hefur verið að bjarga sem flestum menningarminjum hins forna þjóðfélags bænda og útvegsbænda, sem stóð með ýmsum tilbrigðum um aldaráðir allt frá landnámsöld. Hrönnun þessa þjóðfélags hófst að marki um síðustu aldamót, en atvinnulegar forsendur bændamenningarinnar brustu endanlega um 1930 syðra og í Eyjafirði og í

⁴¹ As has been noted by Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (2001: 133; and 2011: 55), the Icelandic effort of collecting folklore with the aim of creating an archive of data that could be used by scholars and other interested parties took place ironically in the same period that many European folklorists were beginning to abandon the use of archives following the new emphasis on fresh self-collected material as the only proper source for study (on this, see also Gunnell et al. 2013). Luckily, this approach never gained firm ground in Icelandic folkloristics during the twentieth century, this recorded material demonstrating its value as a fruitful source of study for both scholars and their students. With its digitalization as part of the *Ísmús* database (<https://www.ismus.is/tjodfraedi/hljodrit/>), this material it has come to be a much-loved source of knowledge and entertainment, not only for scholars but also the general public, and not least for the descendants and acquaintances of the informants involved.

öðrum landshlutum nærfeilt áratug síðar. Samt hefur verið unnt að finna heimildamenn um þjóðfræði, sem alist hafa upp að verulegu leyti í hugmyndaheimi þess enda hefur þróunin verið misjöfn í ýmsum héruðum. (Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1983: 16).

(Many points of view have been expressed about the collection of Icelandic folklore during this century, but the main aim has been that of preserving as many cultural remnants as possible from the ancient rural society of farmers and fishermen which had survived, in various forms, for centuries, right back to the time of the Settlement [in the late ninth century]. The gradual crumbling of this society began to take place in earnest around the turn of the last century, the provision of employment by the farming society finally collapsing in around 1930 in the south and in Eyjafjörður, other parts of the country following suit around a decade later. It is nonetheless still possible to find informants on folklore who have largely experienced an upbringing in this world, something helped by the fact that developments have taken place at differing speeds in differing areas.)

The central objective of this kind of collection naturally meant that it would be primarily focused on old people and the traditions they knew in their childhoods, the oldest informants being born in the late 1860s and early 1870s.

The bulk of the recorded folklore material now stored in the Folkloric collection of Árni Magnússon Institute, and available on the *Ísmús* internet database, was recorded by three collectors. These collectors travelled either alone or in pairs around Iceland in the early 1960s and onwards, recording material from their informants, usually in the informants' homes or in elderly people's and nursing homes in villages situated around Iceland and in Reykjavík. The collectors were Jón Samsonarson (1931-2013), a philologist, and Helga Jóhannsdóttir (1935-2006), an ethnomusicologist, a couple who predominantly collected oral poetry and wonder tales between 1963 and 1973, and then the aforementioned Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, a folklorist and research scholar at the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, who collected large number of oral narratives along with other folkloric material between 1958 and the late 1990s, either alone or in the company of other collectors.⁴² The material collected by Hallfreður is the largest single collection in the audio archives of the Árni Magnússon Institute, including about 1,100 hours of taped folkloric material taken from over 1,100 informants.

While Helga Jóhannsdóttir and Jón Samsonarson did not focus on oral legends, they still recorded a considerable number of such narratives. As a result of this, their collection was given serious consideration as a potential source material in the early stages of this project, because it had the advantage of

⁴² Hallfreður's wife, Olga María Franzdóttir, collected material from Icelandic emigrants in Canada with her husband in 1972. The Danish scholar Svend Nielsen sometimes joined Hallfreður in Iceland in between 1964 and 1971: see Nielsen 2022.

having been collected in part by a female collector, and therefore had the potential of giving a better picture of women's storytelling for a female audience. However, on closer investigation, it turned out that the legends told during the interviews by Helga and Jón entered the recordings somewhat sporadically. The earlier-noted fact that the collectors were not particularly interested in collecting legends also meant that very few female informants with large legend repertoires could be found in their source material. Furthermore, since almost all of the legends in this collection turned out to have been told during interviews carried out by the couple together, rather than on occasions when Helga visited informants alone (as she sometimes did when collecting ethnomusicology), the possible advantage provided by her gender was lost. I therefore decided to focus instead on the work of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, whose collection not only contained an abundance of narrators who told legends along with careful and extensive documentation about their repertoires, but also a wide range of descriptive accounts that provided invaluable contextual information about oral storytelling in Iceland at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early 1900s.

Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson started recording folklore material in 1958, the year in which he finished his Cand. Mag. in Icelandic studies. That summer he travelled to the Icelandic West Fjords where the Icelandic Ministry of Education and the Icelandic national radio funded him to record *rímur*⁴³ poetry (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2006: 25). That fall Hallfreður went to Prague, where he studied folklore for the next four years (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2006: 25). This is where he is likely to have become familiar with the Russian and other East European work on storytelling noted in Chapter 2.2 (see, for example, Ortutay 1972 [1. ed. 1940]; and Dégh 1989 [1. ed. 1969]). Hallfreður returned home from Prague in 1963, and in the summer of 1964, started to collect material on behalf of the Árni Magnússon Institute (then *Handritastofnun Íslands*), travelling with Svend Nielsen around South-east and East Iceland as well as the Snæfellsnes peninsula where they predominantly recorded *rímur* and other forms of folk poetry (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2006: 25; Árni Björnsson 1964: 7).

Although gender had not yet become a subject of much interest in folkloristics, Hallfreður made some interesting observations about questions of gender when collecting his material, giving a reporter who was writing about his collection trips in 1964 the following explanation for why men rather than women tended to dominate as informants:

Það er yfirleitt miklu erfiðara að safna efni hjá konum en körlum, meðal annars vegna þess, að þær eiga oft mjög annríkt. En það þyrfti að gera meira

⁴³ *Rímur* are traditional epic Icelandic poems, similar in form to ballads: see further Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1975; and Nielsen 2022.

að því að spyrja konur en hingað til. Ekki sízt vegna þess, að mér virðist þær kunna aðra hluti en karlar. Þær kunna meira af þulum en þeir, ennfremur af gamankvæðum. Og þær kunna æfintýri, en engir karlar, þótt spurt væri. En sú list að segja æfintýri var svo fágæt talin fyrir nokkrum árum, að ég hélt satt að segja, að æfintýri væru ekki lengur til í munnlegri geymd á Íslandi. Samt hitti ég tvær gamlar konur, sem kunnu þessa list og mætti sjálfsagt finna fleiri, ef vel væri leitað og nákvæmlega. Önnur konan var komin á tíræðisaldur og sagði okkur tvö æfintýri, hin kunnir tvö líka. Eitt þeirra var stjúp móðursaga, annað bráðskemmtilegt afbrigði af sögunni um Ásu, Signýju og Helgu. Og er vissulega mikill fengur að þessum upptökum, því við höfum næsta fáa vitnisburði um það, hvernig æfintýri voru sögð á Íslandi (Árni Björnsson 1964: 46).

(It is generally much more difficult to collect material from women than from men, partly because they are often very busy. But much more needs to be done in terms of asking women [for information] than has been done up until now. Not least because, to my mind, they seem to know about other things than men do. They know more *þulur*⁴⁴ than men, and also comic verses. And they know fairy tales, which does not apply to men, even when they are asked about them. The art of telling fairy tales was seen as being rare just a few years back, and, truth to be told, I thought that they no longer formed part of the oral tradition in Iceland. All the same, I met two old women who still knew this art, and think it might be possible to find more if a careful, detailed search was carried out. One woman in her nineties told us two wonder tales. The other provided us with another two. One of the narratives was an evil stepmother story, another a highly amusing version of the story of Ásu, Signý and Helga.⁴⁵ Getting hold of this material is no small gain, because we have next to no information about how fairy tales were told in Iceland.)

In this rare example of considerations of gender finding their way into discussions of sources folklore collection in Iceland, Hallfreður touches on another key issue which may lay at the heart of the marginalization of women in the folklore archives of the past: in other words, the role of women in running the household which would have limited their ability to demonstrate their role as performers, not least when outsiders such as folklore collectors come visiting. This may be one of the main explanations for why women came to represent only around 40% of Hallfreður's informants, even though there were far more old women than old men living in Iceland in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁶ Also interesting here are Hallfreður's observations about gender-differences in the traditions he is recording, and especially his comment in the

⁴⁴ *Þulur* are a form of traditional Icelandic poetry, close in form to nursery rhymes: see further Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir Yershova 2020.

⁴⁵ On these fairy tales, see Jón Árnason 1954-1961: I, 427-445.

⁴⁶ According to the Icelandic national statistics database (*Hagstofa Íslands: sögulegar hagtölur*), there were about 200,000 people living in Iceland in 1967. Of the Icelandic population that year, 6,319 were 75 years of age or older, 3,603 of these being women and 2,716 men.

same interview about men tending to dominate in the performance of *rímur* poetry while women play a more central role with regard to the performance of *pulur* and wonder tales.

In the winter of 1965-1966, Hallfreður Örn went on to study Irish and folklore in Dublin under mentorship of Séamus Ó Duilearga who had published an early work on Irish storytellers in 1946 (see Chapter 2.2), and when he returned, he was once again hired as a folklorist by the Árni Magnússon Institute, his main duty being that of collecting folkloric material of various kinds (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2006: 25; and Gísli Sigurðsson 2005: 302-303). As Ó Duilearga's main field of study focused on Irish storytellers and narrative traditions, it is likely that Hallfreður's acquaintance with Ó Duilearga and his research in Ireland had increased his interest in narrative traditions and storytelling.⁴⁷ Indeed, it was only after this period in Ireland that Hallfreður started placing a strong emphasis on oral storytelling in his collection work, this subject going on to become a key focus in many of his scholarly works (Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1970; 1971b and 1971c; 1978; 1979; 1980; 1990; 1993; 1995a and 1995b; and 1999).

As this current project focuses on narrators born during the nineteenth century, it primarily uses material recorded by Hallfreður during the late 1960s and in the 1970s rather than that which came later, Hallfreður's earliest account being recorded in 1964 and the most recent in 1985. It is worth noting that if Hallfreður came across an informant with a large repertoire, he would often visit them repeatedly over the course of several years, the aim being not only to record as much of his informants' repertoires as possible, but also to record material which could be used as sources on variation in repeated storytelling. As Hallfreður noted himself in his writing about his recordings of folklore between 1950 and 1980 (Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1983: 19), his collection of material in this period was, among other things, aimed at providing data for later research into storytellers and their storytelling performances, their repertoires and degrees of variation in narrating.

These last features can be said to be something that really sets Hallfreður's material apart from other archived material dealing with storytelling in the past.

⁴⁷ As noted by Gísli Sigurðsson (2005: 302-303), *Handritastofnun Íslands*, which would later become the Árni Magnússon Institute in Icelandic Studies (*Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum*), was during this period headed by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, a scholar of Old Norse literature and a friend of Séamus Ó Duilearga who also had an interest in Icelandic folk narratives and folk belief (see further Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2005). As noted in Chapter 2.2, Einar Ólafur's work *Um Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, published in 1940 (extended and translated in *The Folk-Stories of Iceland* in 2003) is one of the first major works to deal with Icelandic legends and folk beliefs, and arguably remains one of the best sources available on this subject.

Perhaps because of his work with Ó Duilearga, Hallfreður was very conscious about the performance contexts associated with storytelling and not least his informants' social context. In another note about the collection of folklore written in 1971, he outlines his approach in the following words:

Nútímafræðimenn eru spurullí, og oft eyða þeir eins miklum tíma í að safna margvíslegri vitneskju um fræðin, aðallega um útbreiðslu þeirra, aldur og annað, sem getur veitt frekari vitneskju um efni þeirra og hlutverk, auk vitneskju um fræðapúlina sjálfa. Áhuginn hefur beint í þá átt að rannsaka samband munnlegra fræða við umhverfið sem þau eru sprottin úr (Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1971a: 7).

(Modern scholars are inquisitive, and often spend much time in collecting all sorts of information about the subject, mainly about the distribution [of narratives], their age and other things that can bear witness to their subject matter and role, as well as information about the tradition-bearers themselves. Attention has begun to focus on researching the connections between the oral tradition and the surroundings that have given birth to it.)

As has been examined in Chapter 2.2, it was during this period that fieldwork-based studies were becoming the new norm in European Folkloristics, more interest now being placed on the social context of storytelling than had been the case in earlier approaches, and as Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (2011: 55; see also above) has noted, it is likely that Hallfreður was familiar with these new demands after his studies in Prague. He starts most of his recordings with conversations about his informants' biographical histories,⁴⁸ among other things asking about his informants' years of birth, their parents, and their residential history. Autobiographical accounts are, of course, a valuable source of context when working on storytellers (see, for example, Kirstenblatt-Gimblett 1989). Such accounts not only provide insight into what the storytellers perceive as being important aspects of their life histories but also help provide a fuller picture of the places in which they lived during their lifetimes, an aspect that written genealogical sources and documents tend to give only sporadic information about. As noted in the following chapter and Article 1 of the thesis, this is something that applies in particular to women, who tend to have only a thin presence in written sources. Hallfreður's inquiries about the backgrounds of his female informants turned out to be very important for the reconstruction of women's residential histories for this project, among other things enabling exploration of the close relationship between the active participation of women in the legend tradition and their geographical mobility (see especially Articles 2 and 4). A good example of this is the case of Þórunn

⁴⁸ Occasionally, Hallfreður's recordings start spontaneously with a narrative or another type of performance by his informants. In such cases, however, Hallfreður usually ends his recordings with documentation relating to his informants' biographies.

Ingvarsdóttir (1888-1981) from Grímsey in North Iceland, who was interviewed by Hallfreður in the 1960s. If one limits oneself to the genealogical information on Þórunn's residential history offered by the genealogical database *Íslendingabok.is*, and her appearances in censuses and church books, all we would be able to say about her is that her childhood home was in Grímsey, and that she lived in Hólsfjöll, where she was a housewife in the 1920s, and then in Stöðvarfjörður and finally Reykjavík. However, as her recorded account shows, she lived in far more places than that during her lifetime:

Ég var í Grímsey til 17 ára aldurs. Þá fór ég til Húsavíkur og var að læra að sauma hjá konu sem að tók stúlkur til að kenna. Ég var ein af þeim, saumaði mér kjól og svona. [...] Um vorið fór ég í Kelduhverfi og var kaupakona þar yfir sumarið. Svo var ég nú að flækjast hingað og þangað eftir því sem að manni bauðst nú vinna í þessu og þessu plássi, en svo fór ég nú heim aftur og var ár heima, norður í Eyju. [...] Ég bjó á Nýjahól í Hólsfjöllum í Norður-Þingeyjarsýslu. [...] Við bjuggum þar í fimm ár, þá dó hann, ég missti manninn. Og þá fór ég til Seyðisfjarðar. [...] Meðan ég var á Hólsfjöllunum, þá fór ég hingað til Reykjavíkur 1922 að læra ljósmóðurfræði. Og svo kom ég og tók við Hólsfjallaumdæminu, ég var þar rúmt ár eftir að ég lærði, en missti manninn um sumarið. [...] Og svo fór ég til Seyðisfjarðar en var ekki nema nokkra mánuði á Seyðisfirði, við áttum dóttur og hún var fimm ára, og ég fór með hana þangað til Seyðisfjarðar, og svo fór ég og tók Djúpavog. [...] En svo var ég þarna á Djúpavogi á fimm eða sex ár, en svo fór ég til Stöðvarfjarðar og var þar í fimm ár. Og svo fór ég til Reykjavíkur, 1936 var ég sest að hér í Reykjavík. Ég fór upp í Laugardal, tók að mér Laugardalinn um tíma og bjó á Laugarvatni, ég var svona þrjú ár í dalnum, á Laugarvatni (SÁM 89/1751).

(I was in Grímsey until the age of 17. Then I went to Húsavík where I was learning to sew with a woman who took in girls to teach them. I was one of them, and sewed myself a dress and so on. [...] In the spring I went to the Kelda area and was employed there over the summer. And then I was wandering here and there depending on where I was offered work in one place or another, and then I went home again and was there for a year, up north in Eyja. [...] I lived in Nýjahól in the Hólsfjöll area in Norður-Þingeyjarsýsla. [...] We lived there for five years, and then he died, I lost my husband. And then I went to Seyðisfjörður. [...] And while I was in Hólsfjöll, I came here to Reykjavík in 1922 to learn how to be a midwife. And then I came back and took over the Hólsfjöll area; I was there for around a year after I completed my studies, but I lost my husband in the summer. [...] And then I went to Seyðisfjörður but I was only in Seyðisfjörður for a few months; we had a daughter and she was five years old, and I brought her to Seyðisfjörður, and then I went and took on Djúpavogur. [...] And so I was there in Djúpavogur for five or six years, and after that I went to Stöðvarfjörður and was there for five years. And then I came to Reykjavík, in 1936 I had settled down here in Reykjavík. Ég went up to Laugardalur, and took on Laugardalur for a while and lived in Laugarvatn, I was around three years in the valley in Laugarvatn.)

Hallfreður also asks numerous questions about his informants' experiences of storytelling in their youth, about good storytellers and those occasions when storytelling took place, and then about whom his informants learned their stories from. As noted above, these descriptive accounts of storytelling in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s are one of the main features that set his collection apart from all other sources on Icelandic storytelling, and form a particularly valuable addition to the material contained in the legend repertoires of his informants which this current project focuses on.

Hallfreður's professionalism regarding material from his informants becomes immediately clear when one listens to his recordings. One notes how he listens patiently to his informants, gives them plenty of space to get used to the tape recorder, and waits until his informants have finished their narrating before he asks additional questions for further explanation. In his obituary about Hallfreður, Gísli Sigurðsson, who was Hallfreður's colleague in the Árni Magnússon Institute from the 1990s, provides the following lyrical account about Hallfreður's methodology for collecting material:

Hallfreður var veiðimaður og renndi oft fyrir silung. Hann lýsti því fyrir mér hvernig hann bæri sig að þegar hann kæmi að stöðuvötnum, færi þá að öllu sem rólegast og leitaði að lækjum sem rynnu út í vatnið, kastaði þar ofurvarlega út í strauminn og léti agnið berast hægt út þar til það stöðvaðist. Á því augnabliki væri um að gera að vera ekki of bráður heldur láta það liggja svolitla stund – og bíða eftir tókunni. Þessari sömu aðferð beitti hann við þjóðfræðasöfnunina, fór um sveitir og leitaði uppi fólk þar sem vænta mætti rennandi sagna- og kvæðalinda. Fólkið nálgast hann með hægð og af lotningu, vissi að hann mætti ekki styggja væntanlega heimildarmenn sína, og settist svo niður með þeim í rólegheitum þegar hann taldi hæfilegum undirbúningi lokið. Eftir að kveikt var á tækinu vissi hann líka sem var að asi myndi ekki skila miklu. Munnleg sagna- og kvæðaskemmtun er tímafrek listgrein og þegar svo virtist sem viðmælendurnir væru þagnaðir sat Hallfreður alltaf hljóður svolítið lengur án þess að grípa fram í. Þá gerðist það oftar en ekki að sagan kom. Þegar viðmælandinn fann að tími væri nógur og safnarinn ekki á hraðferð í næstu sveit, hóf hann frásögnina og tónfallið breyttist. Hallfreður hafði fengið töku og varð nú að bíða rólegur þar til hann landaði sögunni á upptökutækið. Hann greip hvorki fram í né lagði fólkinu orð í munn heldur náði frásögninni á band eins og fólkið sjálft vildi hafa hana. Eftir á gat hann spurt nánar um einstök atriði (Gísli Sigurðsson 2005: 299-300).⁴⁹

(Hallfreður was a fisherman and often went fishing for trout. He told me how he behaved when he came to a lake, taking everything in a relaxed fashion, searching for those streams that ran into the lake, and there he cast his line up into the current, letting it carry the bait slowly out into the water until it stopped. At that moment, it was important not to react too quickly but rather

⁴⁹ On Hallfreður's methods for finding informants and recording their material, see also Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2006: 26-27.

to let it rest there for a while – waiting until the bait was taken. He used the same approach in his collection of folklore, going around the countryside looking for people who might be expected to be likely sources for stories and poems. He approached these people slowly and with respect, knowing that he must not frighten his potential informants away, and then quietly sat down with them once he felt that the necessary amount of preparation had been completed. Once he had turned on the equipment, he also knew that any form of agitation would be unlikely to produce any results. The performance of oral narratives and poetry is an art that takes time, and when it seemed that the informants had gone silent, Hallfreður would always sit silently for a while making sure he did not interrupt. Then more often than not, a story would be produced. When the informant felt that there was enough time, and that the collector was in no hurry to get to the next part of the country, they would embark on the story, and the tone would change. Hallfreður could see that the bait had been taken and would wait until he landed the catch on his recorder. He never interrupted or put words into his informants' mouths, but rather got the narrative on tape in the form that the people wanted to have it. Later on, he could ask about particular details.)

The recordings bear witness to this methodology in many ways. Hallfreður commonly refers to previous conversations during the recordings, suggesting he has spent some time with his informants before he starts taping, figuring out what she or he knew and would be able to perform. It is also clear from the recordings that (as noted above) he placed a great deal of emphasis on collecting the full repertoires of his informants, visiting some of them many times over the course of several years. His custom of letting his informants lead the way and talk more and less uninterrupted has proved to be very beneficial for this current study dealing with the narrative traditions of women, not least because he regularly gives his female informants' the chance to express their interests and viewpoints, something that a less patient collector might have omitted.

To summarize: Several key features made Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's collection ideal source material for this current project dealing with the legend traditions of women in the pre-industrial rural society of Iceland. Particularly important was the number of his informants, who include 200 female legend tellers, something that provides an invaluable opportunity to explore various wider patterns within the legend repertoires of women. While this material was recorded when the old rural community was no longer in existence, Hallfreður's focus on older informants rather than younger people, and on the traditions of the pre-industrial rural communities rather than those of the present time has made his work an excellent means of understanding the legend tradition as it was practised during the period in which the communities in question were declining, in other words in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth. This same emphasis nonetheless means that the material in question cannot be said to provide any insights into the age-related aspects of legend

repertoire formation; in other words, it only reflects the legend repertoires of narrators who are at the end of their life spans, rather than those of narrators of various ages.

Hallfreður's emphasis on attempting to record the entire repertoires of his informants rather than just individual stories also means that his source material tends to be more complete in nature. It is not coincidentally or selectively recorded like much of the material contained in the printed collections. This is naturally very important for many aspects of this current project, which, among other things, considers the nature of different kinds of material contained in a narrator's repertoire, and especially those of active participants in the legend tradition who have particularly large repertoires (see Chapter 5.1 and Article 4). While the situational performative context of this source material when collected does not reflect legend-telling as it was originally performed *in situ* on the turf-farm, but rather legend-telling deliberately performed for a solo visiting folklorist in the 1960s and the 1970s, Hallfreður's recordings still allow many features of the original performance context to be effectively reconstructed. This is because, as has been noted above, Hallfreður regularly focused on gathering information about the transmission and performance of their narratives, something that led to the fact that his source material includes numerous accounts of the storytellers and storytelling experienced by his informants in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, as well as a great deal of valuable information about the previous narrators of many of the narratives told by his informants.

The final and most important feature of this material is the fact that unlike the printed source material noted in Chapter 2.1, the source material recorded by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson provides us with the sound of women telling legends in their own voices, with their own emphases, their own rhythms, and their own points of view. This is particularly valuable considering how androcentric the process of collecting folkloric material used to be in Iceland in the past, something that left some serious questions regarding the degree of loyalty shown to women's narratives, and their points of view. This feature of Hallfreður's work is naturally invaluable for my current research which, among other things, aims to shed light on those figures, spaces, elements and themes that commonly appear in the narratives in question, features that may have been viewed as unimportant by many of the male collectors who recorded and edited the oral narratives of Icelandic women in the past. The use of recorded rather than written material naturally means that those aspects which may have previously problematised the reconstruction of women's traditions can now hopefully be largely circumvented.

3.3 Bibliographical and Historical Sources

Any attempt to reconstruct of legend traditions of the Icelandic women of the past by means of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's collections naturally needs to consider the social and historical context of the narratives, the world experienced by the informants and their surrounding communities. A central part of this involves the careful reconstruction of biographies of the various storytellers. This is not an easy task even today. Several decades ago, however, such a project would have been even more difficult. In the past, the only biographical sources available to scholars were old handwritten church records and censuses (which had to be dug out of various dusty boxes held in the National Archives of Iceland) or published genealogical works and biographies, works which until up until recently have tended to focus on men rather than women. Indeed, considerations of *women's* cultural practices in the past rather than those of men are bound to involve an additional layer of difficulty because of the earlier-noted gender-related marginalization of women in these sources (see Chapter 3.1). This marginalization also applies to the nature of historical scholarship in the past, which, as has been noted by several scholars of women's history, has meant that, up until quite recently, women, their roles and their experiences have been largely overlooked in overviews of history, in biographical and genealogical collections, and in the local histories of various places in Iceland (Inga Huld Hákonardóttir 1980; Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2004).

In the last few decades, however, a number of developments have taken place that have provided new opportunities for the reconstruction of women's life stories and the social context surrounding women in the Icelandic rural community of the past. Since the 1980s, a range of innovative studies focusing on the history and social history of women in Iceland have provided us with valuable new insights into various aspects of women's experiences, roles and contributions that have been previously overlooked (see, for example, Vilborg Bentsdóttir et al. 1980; Helga Kress and Rannveig Traustadóttir 1997; Anna Agnarsdóttir et al. 2001; and Irma Erlingsdóttir et al. 2017). Among the most useful sources providing context for the history of Icelandic women and their social reality in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s are several compendia dealing with milestones in the history of Icelandic women (Anna Sigurðardóttir 1976; Guðrún Erlendsdóttir 1980; and Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Dís Jónatansdóttir 1998). Alongside these are studies of women's literacy and education (Valborg Sigurðardóttir 2005; Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011, 2003a and 2003b) and the history of women's professions (Sigríður Th. Erlendsdóttir 1980; Helga Þórarinsdóttir 1984; and Steinunn Finnbogadóttir et al. 1984; Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010); works focusing on the differing social

realities experienced by various groups of women, such as single women and widows (Sigríður K. Þorgrímsdóttir 2001; and Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson and Ólöf Garðarsdóttir 1997); and several studies dealing with views of women and their roles in the past (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011; and Sigríður Matthíasdóttir 2004). Some of these sources will be discussed in more detail in the following subchapter which deals specifically with women's roles and social reality in Iceland at the end of the nineteenth century and in the former half of the twentieth.

Alongside the works noted above are a range of other valuable contextual sources such as those dealing with the Icelandic turf-farms and the rural communities that were associated with them, and the social developments that were taking place during the late nineteenth century and early 1900s (see below). Historical statistics, such as those provided by the on-line database Statistics Iceland (*Hagstofan: sögulegar hagtölur*) and the published work *Hagskinna* (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997) meanwhile provide invaluable additional insights into a number of relevant economic features, such as the process of urbanization, ways of life, housing, and the make-up of the work force on farms.

With regard to the turf-farm, the most extensive scholarly work to focus on the architecture of the buildings is that written by Hjörleifur Stefánsson in 2013. In terms of the cultural practices that took place on the farm and in the community that surrounded, of particular value is Questionnaire 7, “Kvöldvakan og hlutdeild heimilisins í íslensku þjóðaruppeldi” (On Evening Wakes and the Role of the Homestead in Cultural Upbringing), sent out by the National Museum of Iceland in 1962, at around the same time that Hallferður Örn Eiríksson was collecting his material, and now available on the digital database *Sarpur* (<https://sarpur.is/>). Much like the narrators in Hallfreður's collections, the people who answered this questionnaire were mostly born during the last decades of the nineteenth century. This particular source provides important personal insights into the nature of the cultural space of the turf-farm as it was experienced by people at this time, a space in which most of the informants in Hallfreður's collections lived for most of their lives, and most particularly, invaluable insight into the storytelling practices that took place during the winter in the *badstofa* (living room) of the farm. The answers to this questionnaire went on to form the basis for the only major study that has been carried out into the Icelandic *kvöldvökur* (evening wakes), in other words, Magnús Gíslason's *Kvällsvaka* (1977). These *kvöldvökur* which are so central to this present thesis (see further Chapter 4.2) were ancient work-related cultural practices somewhat similar to the Irish *ceilidh* gatherings described by Henry Glassie (see Glassie 1995: 35-129; and 2005: 53-114), involving readings,

storytelling and verse performances, which used to take place in the winter on almost every farm in Iceland up until the 1930s.

For this present project, when autobiographical information from the women themselves was lacking in the recordings, or was too sketchy, the reconstruction of the narrators' biographies and residential histories had to be based on Iceland's rich source of biographical and genealogical books and archives. While some of these works are somewhat problematic in terms of their treatment of women, something noted above and examined among other things in Article 1, others provide women with both space and coverage under their own names, rather than those of their fathers, husbands, brothers or sons.⁵⁰ The fact that the church books and censuses have now been digitalized and placed in databases which can be searched using individual names, addresses and/ or years of birth has also been a great advantage. With regard to the reconstruction of the biographical background of those narrators considered in this current study, the most helpful of such sources have been the genealogical database *Íslendingabók* (established by deCode Genetics and Friðrik Skúlason) (<https://islandingabok.is/>) and the census database *Manntöl* run by the National Archives of Iceland (<https://mantal.is/>). The 1890, 1901, 1910 and 1920 censuses, which are now all available in the latter database, are naturally of particular interest here, offering among other things valuable insights into the nature of the people living in the various narrators' households, in other words, their potential audiences.

Also helpful in building bibliographies have been the obituaries published in Icelandic newspapers (also now digitalised and available on <https://timarit.is/>) which offer additional insight into the lives of many of the narrators focused on here. The publishing of obituaries in newspapers has been a long tradition in Iceland. While those published in earlier times dealt primarily with officials and other forms of elite, in the latter half of the twentieth century, many newspapers, such as *Morgunblaðið*, *Íslendingaþættir Tímans* and *Þjóðviljinn* started to publish articles of this kind dealing with the common people as well. Unlike obituaries in many other cultures, those found in Icelandic papers tend not to be written by professional journalists but rather by individuals who knew the deceased personally and thus, along with biographical information, often include remarks dealing with personality, talents, and interests (see Koester 1995: 159-160; and Arnar Árnason, Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson and Tinna Grétarsdóttir 2003). All the same, it is noteworthy that while such practices were evidently becoming common in many parts of Iceland by the 1970s and 1980s at the time when many of the narrators under discussion passed away,

⁵⁰ An excellent work of this kind is Björn Magnússon's *Vestur-Skaftfellingar 1703-1966* (1970-1973).

several parts of Iceland (such as the east) appear to have come somewhat latecomers to this development, especially regarding those obituaries dealing with women.

4 Historical Context

The following chapter will consider a number of the key features of the historical context and social conditions experienced by Icelandic women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particular attention being paid to the turf-farm, its social organization and surroundings. It is important to bear in mind that in most respects, Iceland was still lagging behind the rest of Europe in terms of the transformation that was taking place as stagnant pre-industrialized rural agricultural societies encountered the process of modern industrial urbanization, a transformation that in Iceland cannot be considered to have been complete until the middle of the twentieth century (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2018: Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 2). In her detailed examination of the conditions of women in Iceland viewed from the perspective of some of the grand narratives in gender history, Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir (2018) notes that this belated process of urbanization meant that some of the more conventional theories of gender history which have focused on the experiences of women in the growing urbanized middle classes of Britain, France and Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries do not offer a close fit to the Icelandic situation. One of these grand narratives emphasises the notion of two separate spheres associated with men and women (see Chapter 2.4) and the hierarchy of power relations that these entailed, in which men were seen as belonging to the public spheres of work, commerce, politics and sociability, and women to the private sphere of the domestic, the running of the household and reproduction. This, Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir suggests (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2018: 160-161) does not translate well into the rural society of Iceland in which the vast majority of households functioned simultaneously as production and consumption units throughout the nineteenth century.⁵¹ Furthermore, as has been noted above (see Chapter 2.4), in countries such as Iceland and Shetland, it seems evident that gender roles were less sharply defined than they were elsewhere in Europe, women regularly assuming the role of men when they were absent during the fishing season (Abrams 2005: 193-194; and Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011: 48-49 and 80-84).⁵² The special circumstances and

⁵¹ In most places in rural Iceland, this situation continued well into the twentieth century.

⁵² Indeed, as has been shown by Lynn Abrams (2005), the subordination of women in these areas in earlier times cannot be considered to be a given matter, since, in Shetland at least, women commonly played a leading role in not only the family but also the economy and culture, simultaneously challenging accepted ideas of where the power resided in rural communities.

conditions experienced by Icelandic women are important to bear in mind when one considers the historical context of the women focused on in this project. This chapter will start by providing a brief introduction to Icelandic history in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s. It will then proceed to examine the role of women in Icelandic society during this period, the perspective finally narrowing down to consider the space and culture of the Icelandic turf-farm in which these women were born and raised, and where many of them continued to live as adults.

As has been noted earlier, this particular generation of Icelandic women experienced a number of key changes in both culture and society during their lifetimes. Around the time that many of them were born, earlier social legislation that had made the ownership of land a prerequisite for marriage was at last being abolished. Also vanishing were other laws such as the so-called “*vistarband*” (abolished in 1894) which had forced all landless people to work as servants on farms (see Vilhelm Vilhelmsson 2017) and other laws relating to the *Purrabúð* (abolished in steps between 1888 and 1907), which had prohibited people from settling down in cottages by the coasts. The number of cultivatable farms in Iceland had been restricted by natural conditions, and these earlier regulations, essentially aimed at providing farmers with cheap labour and maintaining the structure of the rural society, had actively forced a large proportion of the Icelandic population to remain unmarried (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1988: 90-117). Overpopulation stemming from better living conditions and improved health care, along with an unusually cold climate in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the large eruption of the Askja volcano in East Iceland in 1875 (which had placed added restrictions on the availability of land) increased the pressure on people still further. From 1870 to 1914 these conditions resulted in a large wave of Icelanders emigrating to North America from 1870 to 1914,⁵³ most of them settling down in Manitoba in Canada where they established the Icelandic colony of Gimli (Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 236-237). The overpopulation in rural Iceland had also meant that after 1880 it had become increasingly difficult to enforce the social legislation noted above, even when it was still in place, meaning that new villages had started to

⁵³ According to Gunnar Karlsson (see above), an estimated 17,000 Icelanders moved to North America during this period, an extremely high number given the fact that the Icelandic population in 1901 was made up of only around 78,000 souls (see also *Hagstofa Íslands. Sögulegar hagtölur*). The Icelandic emigration to Canada is one of the features discussed in Article 4 as part of the examination of the life and repertoire of Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir (1887-1971) who was left behind in Iceland as a child when her parents and siblings moved to Canada in the late nineteenth century.

form, especially around former trading posts and fishing stations (Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 224-233).⁵⁴

When urbanization finally began taking place in Iceland, progress was fast: in 1890 less than 15% of the Icelandic population were living in localities with 200 inhabitants or more,⁵⁵ but by 1910 this percentage had risen to 34% (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 120-123).⁵⁶ The new urban centres that were coming into existence also introduced new job opportunities for both men and women in not only the fishing sector, but also the trade, service and emerging technology sectors in the early 1900s, causing among other things changes in the turf-farm demographics in rural Iceland, as unmarried relatives increasingly replaced unrelated servants and farmhands as labour on the farms (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlagsson 1988: 159-160; Anna Lía Rúnarsdóttir 2007: 40-41; Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 287-301; and Árni Björnsson and Kuhn 2003: 104-117). In spite of this, as noted above, in rural Iceland, life in the first third of the twentieth century largely remained as it had been in the latter half of the nineteenth century, characterized by subsistence farming, an absence of any public places of leisure⁵⁷ or services, and a lack of transportation infrastructure (Árni Björnsson and Kuhn 2003: 150-185; and Guðmundur Þorsteinsson 1990: 183-189 and 210-219).

⁵⁴ In Iceland, the fishing sector (and various technological improvements associated with it) had led the way with regard to the process of urbanization and industrialization, something which has led to this period of history being referred to as “the age of motorboats” (Hastrup 1998: 26).

⁵⁵ This figure includes those who lived in the capital of Reykjavík at this time, who numbered 3,886, about 5% of the total population in Iceland.

⁵⁶ This figure once again includes the inhabitants of Reykjavík, who accounted for 14% of the Icelandic population at the time.

⁵⁷ All the same, during the period between 1880 and 1930, a strong social wakening had been taking place in rural Iceland, something which followed on from the example of those in educated societies such as the so-called “Kvöldfélag” (Evening Society) in Reykjavík (see further Karl Aspelund and Gunnell 2017). The same period saw the establishment of a number of similar educationally-oriented popular associations in the countryside including youth societies (*ungmennafélög*), farming associations (*búnaðarfélög*), reading societies (*lestrarfélög*) and even women’s societies (*kvenfélög*): see Ingi Sigurðsson and Loftur Guttormsson 2003. These associations and societies were not only important in terms of their influence on popular education and cultural production in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s. They were also responsible for increased social interaction between individuals outside the traditional realm of the farm and its household. During the first half of the twentieth century, these associations and their activities gradually led to the construction of new community centres (*félagshimili*) in rural Iceland, (Jón M. Ívarsson 2007: 71-73), something that gave rise to another form of public space in the rural community.

The period of the youth of the women in this project also saw a number of important democratic developments taking place in Iceland, both in terms of increasing independence from Danish rule and growing democracy for the population. In 1874, Iceland received its own constitution and home rule regarding its internal affairs, and in 1904, this home rule was expanded to include the appointment of an Icelandic Prime Minister, Hannes Hafstein (1861-1922). In 1918, Iceland went on to become a sovereign state in union with Denmark and the Danish king, something that nonetheless meant that Denmark retained responsibility for Iceland's foreign affairs and defence (Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 267-272).

Voting rights for the public increased in several stages between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1930s. Wealthy male farmers aged 25 and over had been given voting rights in 1843, and during the latter half of the nineteenth century, these rights were gradually expanded to include other males that were not servants or dependent on others. In 1882, tax-paying widows and single women who were not servants also gained the right to vote at a municipal level although they were not eligible to take office themselves. Further large changes in the laws relating to voting rights then occurred in 1915, at last giving voting rights to everyone above age of 25 that was not receiving a poverty allowance, including women and servants. It was nonetheless decided that this change should take place in several stages, meaning that in the beginning, only those new voters who were 40 years old and older could vote. When a new constitution for Iceland came into effect in 1920, these prerequisites at last effectively expired, granting voting rights to everyone age 25 and above (see, for example, Anna Sigurðardóttir 1976: [2-6]; Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Dís Jónatansdóttir 1998: 146-150; and Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 261-284).

While the women in this project experienced a great deal of progress during their lifetimes, they also had their share of global and local disasters. These included the two world wars in 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 (Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 308-318; and Gunnar Þór Bjarnason 2020). The latter took place alongside another local disaster in the shape of the large eruption of the Katla volcano in South Iceland which covered large sections of the country with black ash (Gísli Sveinsson 1919). This double disaster in the fall of 1918 followed another local disaster that had taken place during the preceding winter of 1917-1918, something memorized in Icelandic history as “frostaveturinn mikli” (the Great Frost Winter) when temperatures had repeatedly dropped to -30°C , and arctic sea-ice blocked the Icelandic coastline around most of the country (Gunnar Þór Bjarnason 2016: 301-302). This generation of Icelandic women also lost children and other family members to

an unusually vicious epidemic of tuberculosis that occurred in 1911-1925, something that caused about 20% of all the deaths that occurred in the country during this period (Jóhanna K. Jóhannesdóttir 2000: 56).⁵⁸ Many women (like their predecessors) also lost their husbands and other men in their families as a result of accidents at sea. While fishing in the first half of the twentieth century had become less hazardous than it had been in the latter half of the nineteenth century because of the arrival of larger and better ships, 50-60 men were still drowning at sea annually in the early years of the twentieth century (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 195).⁵⁹ This, of course, was one of the reasons for why there was a considerable surplus of women in the Icelandic rural society, something which, as will be considered in the following chapter, offered few employment opportunities for single women and widows.

Other things that the women in this project experienced during their lifetimes was a great deal of progress in terms of civil and democratic rights. When they were coming of age in the early 1900s, access to education for women was increasing, as were new opportunities for work in the new urban communities that were coming into being along the coasts. New legislation from 1880 relating to the education of children gave girls the same rights to primary education as those that had previously been held by boys (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Dís Jónatansdóttir 1998: 146), and in 1886 women were at last given access to the *Lærði skólinn* (Latin school) in Reykjavík, the only college in Iceland, which, among other things, was responsible for the education of doctors and priests (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Dís

⁵⁸ Tuberculosis spread rapidly in Iceland during the early 1900s, at a time when it was declining elsewhere in Europe, something which meant that the death rate from the disease in Iceland was one of the highest in Europe: see Jóhanna K. Jóhannesdóttir 2000: 56.

⁵⁹ During the latter half of the nineteenth century, when fishing was predominantly carried out in open rowing boats, approximately 70 men drowned every year (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 195). As noted by Frederik A. Bergsöe and Sveinn Skúlason (1853: 65), men's accidents at sea had also played a key role in explaining the dominance of women in the demographics of Iceland in earlier times. Also influential in this situation were the other hazardous activities of men on land connected to their travels and work in the Icelandic wilderness. In 1910, there are 44,120 women in Iceland, as opposed to 41,119 men (*Hagstofa Íslands: Sögulegar hagtölur*), even though as in other countries at this time, slightly more males than females were being born each year. If one considers the 15-65 age group at this time, one notes that it included 24,607 men and 26,885 women, something that suggests that this demographic imbalance was already apparent in early adulthood. In this respect, Iceland resembles the society of Shetland during in the same period, where the dominance of women was also partly explained by how many men drowned at sea (Abrams 2005: 65-80).

Jónatansdóttir 1998: 146-147). Women, however, were still not eligible to hold such offices after graduation. Nonetheless, the establishment of the University of Iceland in Reykjavík in 1911 gave women full access to the same education, scholarships, and offices as men (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Dís Jónatansdóttir 1998: 149).

The twilight of the nineteenth century and the early 1900s saw the establishment of a number of new secondary and occupational schools, including agricultural schools, special schools for women,⁶⁰ a school of navigation, a school of trade, and a craft school (Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 257-260; and Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011: 121-170). In 1912, the School of Midwifery was also established in Reykjavík, following up on the formal training that had been available to midwives since 1761 (Helga Þórarinsdóttir 1984: 19). All the same, it was not until 1933 that a school of nursing was opened in Reykjavík. Prior to that, those women who had wanted to pursue a nursing career had to travel to Denmark (Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010: 29). Formal training for teachers had meanwhile begun in the secondary school of Flensburg in Hafnafjörður in 1892 (the secondary school here having been established in 1882), later moving on to another special school for teachers that was established in Reykjavík in 1908 (Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 257; Loftur Guðmundsson 2008b: 70). As will be examined in the following subchapter, a number of these schools provided new opportunities for women both in the growing towns and the rural communities.

4.1 Women and their Roles

As has been noted above, for centuries, the pre-industrial rural society of Iceland had offered very few social roles for women. If they were married, they assumed the role of the housewife on their farms, while single women were allotted the roles of the farmworkers.⁶¹ If, for some reason, the women could not provide for themselves because of health issues or old age, or live in the care of their family, they became paupers who were placed on farms (and moved between them), a system that persisted until a state-run social security system gradually began to take shape in the first decades of the twentieth century (Gísli

⁶⁰ These women's schools offered some general education to women alongside practical training for the role of housewife, and were an important scene of debates as to what women intended their roles to be in the society of the late nineteenth century, as has been shown by Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir (2011).

⁶¹ The fact that these two basic classes of women were based on farms does not mean that their work was simple and easy. As Anna Sigurðardóttir (1985) has shown in her examination of Icelandic women's work over the centuries, farmworkers and other unmarried women commonly took on many tasks regularly associated with men's sphere of activity (see above), such as fishing and other outdoor work.

Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1982: 179). In a category closely related to the social class of paupers were the tramps, which included a number of females (termed *förukonur*) who travelled independently between various farms and regions in Iceland, staying on farms for the three nights allotted by the unwritten Icelandic rule of *gestanætur*, often repaying hospitality with storytelling and news from other places in Iceland (Jón Jónsson 2018: 87-89 and 224). Another closely related class of female traveller in the Icelandic rural society up until 1900 were the so-called “*orlofskonur*” (lit. holiday women), who were predominantly older women of the lower economic stratum who no longer had household responsibilities and therefore had time to travel and socialize with relatives, friends, neighbours and former masters, all of whom were supposed to reward visits from them with generous gifts (Jónas Jónasson 2010: 249-251).⁶² As emphasised in Article 2 in the thesis, such *orlofskonur* played an important role in the storytelling traditions of rural Iceland during the younger years of those featured in this project, but disappeared from the scene in the early 1900s.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century and early 1900s, new understandings of womanhood were also gradually taking hold in Icelandic society. In her study of the construction of gender in Iceland in 1850-1903, Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir (2011) examined how ideas about the images of the social roles of women were shaped by means of the regular debates about women’s education and women’s schools that were taking place in this time. Erla Hulda distinguishes between three different main types of discourse relating to this subject that were encountered during this period: the radical liberation discourse which demanded the recognition of women’s civil rights and their right to education and jobs; the traditional discourse of the old agrarian society which emphasised the importance of home and society for women’s role as housewives; and finally the contemporary European bourgeois discourse which presented men as breadwinners and women as “the angels of the house.”⁶³ While both the traditional and the bourgeois discourse emphasised the importance of women’s domestic role, they also placed emphasis on different kinds of virtue. While the former emphasised women’s responsibility for raising children and maintaining the welfare of the household, the latter focused on those qualities that were seen as being more suitable for the new industrialized urban society, such as language and artistic skills (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir

⁶² According to Jónas Jónasson (1961: 249), women dominated this tradition of *orlofsferðir* which Jónas refers to as thinly disguised begging trips.

⁶³ The notion of women as “angels of the house” originated in the title of a popular poem by the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) (1863) in which the poet presented his wife Emily as a model for all women: meek, passive, graceful and self-sacrificing. With regard to similar ideas about female virtues in the Icelandic context, see also Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2022b: 53-55 and 59.

2011: 340-341 and 350-352). While the traditional agrarian society appears to have been rather positive towards women's rights and their participation in the public life in the nineteenth century,⁶⁴ the early 1900s saw a backlash against the participation of women in the public sphere which took the form of the so-called "*húsmæðrahuggja*" (housewife ideology) which became the ruling ideology on womanhood at the time, emphasising the social importance of women's roles as housewives and mothers rather than as active participants in public life (Sigríður Matthíasdóttir 2004: 364-267 and 373-374). This meant that although women had been granted legal access to many of the roles and spaces solely occupied by men in earlier periods, up until the mid-twentieth century, the social role of women remained predominantly associated with the domestic sphere. One feature of this enduring ideology, which can clearly be seen in the biographies of the 200 women who are the subject of this thesis, is the fact that although these women were often employed in various fields when they were young and single, most of them abandoned their profession following marriage.⁶⁵

It needs to be borne in mind that the new employment opportunities that came into being for women in the services, manufacturing, and the emerging technological sectors during the first half of the twentieth century (see above) were mostly confined to women living in urban communities. In rural Iceland at this time, there were still few employment opportunities for single women other than being farmworkers or housekeepers⁶⁶ on farms which were often owned by their relatives. During this period, the agrarian sector was having trouble competing with the emerging fishing industry with regard to the male workforce, something which resulted in farms increasingly becoming the place

⁶⁴ As examined by Gunnar Karlsson (2004), men in Þingeyjarsýsla in the nineteenth century, for example, appear to have seen women, such as widows, being eligible to sign a royal petition (*bænarskrá til konungs*) if they headed their own farms, suggesting that for them, social hierarchy was based on an economic model rather than ideas relating to the different virtues of men and women.

⁶⁵ In reality, those poor women living in urban communities found it hard to live up to this housewife image. Indeed, sources suggest that many Icelandic women living in the urban communities around in Iceland maintained their part-time jobs (such as work in seasonal fish processing, cleaning and sewing) after they got married: see, for example, Sigríður Th. Erlendsdóttir 1978.

⁶⁶ The role of the housekeeper, mostly confined to the *sel* (mountain dairies) and *ver* (fishing huts) in earlier centuries became more common in the twentieth century, initially when female relatives occasionally assumed the role of housewives in households run by single or widowed men, and then later (especially in the second half of the twentieth century) when this employment opportunity became a popular solution for single mothers who could bring their children to the farms they were working on: see Dalrún Kaldakvíst Eygerðardóttir (2022).

of women, the farm work that was originally done by outsiders of both genders now increasingly being carried out by female outsiders or female relatives who assumed the roles of farmworkers, or more temporary *kaupafólk*⁶⁷ (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1988: 159-160; Árni Björnsson and Kuhn 2003: 37; and Anna Lísá Rúnarsdóttir 2007: 35 and 58).

It is important to bear in mind that the androcentric gender system of the rural society of Iceland may well have resulted in women having different relationships with the places in which they lived in the past. Until relatively late in the twentieth century, there was a common assumption that farms had to be headed by men. Although women had secured equal legal rights to men with regard to inheritance in 1850, and equal autonomy over farms in 1917, farms still tended to be more often passed on to sons rather than daughters (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson and Ólöf Garðarsdóttir 1997: 153; Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Dís Jónatansdóttir 1998: 144 and 149-150; and Hjördís Sigursteinsdóttir and Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir 2009: 36-44). This is something that is echoed in the residential histories of the women focused on in this project, many of whom appear to have settled down on farms owned by their husbands' families which were often located in different parts of Iceland than those they themselves had grown up in.⁶⁸ Evidently, their roles in life were not necessarily secured for life upon marriage: if woman became a widow at a young age, she often had to give up farming and find both a new form of employment and a new home.⁶⁹ When looking into the autobiographical

⁶⁷ *Kaupafólk* were temporary workers who were usually only hired for the haymaking season during the summer.

⁶⁸ The pattern of men's and women's residential histories following marriage in the pre-industrial rural society of Iceland has yet to be studied from a historical perspective. Nonetheless, the biographies of the women of this project offer some degree of insight into this aspect of people's lives in the past. As emphasised in Article 2, more than 45% of the 200 women featured in this project lived as adults in other regions than those they grew up in. In most cases, these women settled down in the home regions of their spouses, many of them appearing to have gotten to know their husbands when the latter were working on fishing stations as young men. Of the married women featured in this project, only 17 lived as adults on farms that they grew up on, as opposed to 35 who appear to have lived on farms their husbands grew up on, emphasising the degree to which farms tended to be passed on to men rather than on to women in the past. Furthermore, while about half of the 42 single women discussed in this project continued to live on their family farms over the course of their lives, they usually did this in the role of housekeepers or farmhands for their male relatives rather than heading the farms themselves.

⁶⁹ In their study of how widows and widowers fared with regard to keeping hold of their farms after the deaths of their spouses, Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson and Ólöf Garðarsdóttir (1997: 153) found that only 23% of widows under 50 were still running their own farms in 1901, as opposed to about 40% of widowers of same age.

accounts of the women in this project, such as that of Þórunn Ingvarsdóttir (examined in Chapter 3.2), it is hard to ignore the different relationships that men and women have to the places they inhabit. While the men tend to settle down in the regions they grew up in, enjoying both the benefits of their cultural roots and the support of relatives, the women are often outsiders in their communities, both in their roles as housewives, or, as in the case of Þórunn Ingvarsdóttir, as farmworkers and midwives. In short, when it comes down to it, women rather than men are the more geographical mobile gender, at least at this point in time, especially if we consider their residential histories over the course of their lives rather than their everyday activities.

During the period in question, it is evident that the new occupational schools were also offering new roles for women as children's teachers, nurses and midwives, something that applied not only to the emerging villages and the capital of Reykjavík, but also rural Iceland. All the same, in the early 1900s, the prevailing ideas relating to womanhood noted above still influenced which types of work and careers were seen as being suitable for women. These were careers that were situated within the domain of children's education, and the humanitarian and nursing sector, careers that were viewed as lying on the borders of the public and private arenas and therefore non-threatening to those understandings of what was seen as being the essential femininity of women (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011: 344). The oldest of these professions was naturally midwifery (see above). The laws dealing with midwifery from 1875 had stated that trained midwives should be appointed to certain districts, and that the cost of their education and work should be paid by the state (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Dís Jónatansdóttir 1998: 145), something which may have made this choice of career particularly appealing to women from the lower economic stratum. All the same, midwifery was not considered as being a full-time job, which meant that midwives were often poor (Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010: 155). It was, however, one of the few types of employment available to women at the early 1900s that women were not considered to need to give up following marriage (Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010: 155). Twelve midwives can be found among the 200 women featured in this project,⁷⁰ and, as noted in

⁷⁰ The women in question are Björg Jónsdóttir (1900-1992); Elín Árnadóttir (1886-1973); Guðrún Vigfúsdóttir (1888-1973); Helga Bjarnadóttir (1896-1979); Helga Sigurðardóttir (1888-1971); Ingveldur Magnúsdóttir (1891-1985); Kristlaug Tryggvadóttir (1900-1981); Ragnheiður Benjamínsdóttir (1882-1971); Ragnheiður Rögnvaldsdóttir (1886-1980); Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir (1892-1982); Þórunn Ingvarsdóttir (1888-1981); and Þórunn M. Þorbergsdóttir (1884-1975). Of these women, Þórunn Ingvarsdóttir and Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir are of particular interest, the former because of her extensive residential history (considered in Chapter 3.2), and the second because of her unusually large repertoire, which is examined in Article 4.

Articles 2 and 4, it is apparent that these women tend to have particularly large legend repertoires. As pointed out in the examination of the repertoire of Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir (1892-1982) in Article 4, midwives were unusually mobile for women (in their own areas) throughout their lives, often having to travel long distances on foot in the Icelandic wilderness as part of their work. Their local mobility naturally meant they were unusually well connected socially in their communities. Midwives therefore not only had a better opportunity to experience memorable incidents themselves as part of their work but also had a good chance to learn and share narratives outside the realm of their own homes (see further Almqvist 2008; and Elsa Ósk Alfreðsdóttir 2013: 81-84).

Nursing was another career that was open to women in the early 1900s, something that differed from midwifery in several ways in terms of social conditions, social respect and surroundings. Until 1933, any woman in Iceland who wished to become a certified nurse had to travel to nursing school in Denmark, although some parts of the training could take place in various Icelandic medical institutions (Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010: 21-59). This meant that the only women likely to complete this education in this period came from the higher economic stratum, although others might go through the initial stages (Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010: 29). Unlike midwifery, nursing was viewed as being a full-time job. Nurses were also considerably better paid and received various benefits such as free housing in the institutions in which they were employed and free clothing (Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010: 132-137). Something that further distinguished nurses from midwives was the fact that they were also generally meant to be single (Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010: 129-132).⁷¹ Among the 200 women examined in this thesis, four were qualified nurses.⁷² Three of them were single for their entire lives, and one, Oddný

The other women are not examined individually in the articles or the thesis but are nonetheless examined as a group in Article 3.

⁷¹ As noted by Margrét Guðmundsdóttir in this context, nurses were usually given rooms or beds in the hospitals in which they worked, and appear to have had generally very limited right to private lives, something which may be one of the reasons for nursing being accompanied by the unwritten rule of celibacy: In many European societies (including Iceland), the first nurses had been nuns, and in many countries' nurses were called "sisters", just like nuns (on this, see Ólafía Jónsdóttir et al. 2015). It is not unlikely that the demand for nurses to remain single even in the twentieth century was in some ways a throwback to the earlier image of women devoting their lives to their work and sacrificing their family lives for this.

⁷² The women in question are: Halldóra Bjarnadóttir (1895-1987); María Maack (1889-1975); Oddný Guðmundsdóttir (1889-1975); and Rannveig M. Stefánsdóttir (1885-1972). As most hospitals were situated in urban settlements rather than in rural Iceland, only one of these women, Oddný Guðmundsdóttir, can be considered to have been a

Guðmundsdóttir (1889-1975), married a doctor who was based in rural Iceland and went on working beside him following their marriage (see further Anna Loftsdóttir 1976: 22-23). Like the midwives noted above, the nurses had good opportunities to experience memorable events, and also the chance to adapt new narratives into their repertoires, and to pass on legends from their repertoires to others as part of their everyday lives.

The third career opportunity available to women in the early 1900s was that of becoming a teacher. As noted above, formal education for teachers in Iceland began in 1892, and, from the start, women were eligible for this job if they had graduated from secondary school (*gagnfræðaskóli*),⁷³ farming schools, or the earlier-discussed women's schools (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Dís Jónatansdóttir 1998: 32). Of the 200 women featured in this thesis, 15 were educated as teachers.⁷⁴ While some of these women taught in the so-called *farskólar* (sing.: *farskóli*; itinerant schools) still common in rural Iceland at the early 1900s,⁷⁵ others taught in the new full-time schools that were beginning to appear in the emerging villages of Iceland or in the capital. Unlike the midwives, most of the female teachers in question appear to have retired from teaching upon marrying and establishing a family. While several of these teachers also have relatively large legend repertoires, most notably Sigríður

nurse that worked in a rural environment. The women in question do not feature individually in the articles, but all of them have wonderful repertoires which in many aspects reflect their roles as nurses, something that, like many of the midwives in this project, would make them excellent subjects for further examination into the occupational aspects of women's legend traditions.

⁷³ For most of the nineteenth century, the Latin school was the only school in Iceland to offer secondary education (as well as college level education). In the late nineteenth century, however, new secondary schools were established in Iceland, including in Möðruvellir in North Iceland (1880), and the earlier-noted Flensborg in Hafnafjörður in South Iceland (1882) (Loftur Guðmundsson 2008: 67-68).

⁷⁴ The women in question are Amalía Björnsdóttir (1891-1984); Anna Jónsdóttir (1893-1979); Áslaug Gunnlaugsdóttir (1900-1980); Guðbjörg Bjarman (1895-1991); Guðrún Jóhannsdóttir (1891-1989); Herselía Sveinsdóttir (1900-1984); Hólmfríður Jónsdóttir (1896-1982); Hulda Á. Stefánsdóttir (1897-1989); Ingibjörg Finnsdóttir (1880-1972); Jónína Eyjólfsdóttir (1887-1989); Katrín Kolbeinsdóttir (1897-1982); Málfríður Einarsdóttir (1899-1983); Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir (1893-1975); and Sigurbjörg Björnsdóttir (1886-1984). Twelve of these women married, and only four appear to have continued their employment following their marriage, that is Hulda Á. Stefánsdóttir, Guðrún Jóhannsdóttir, Katrín Kolbeinsdóttir, and Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir.

⁷⁵ *Farskólar* were a form of homeschooling whereby travelling teachers lived and taught for a certain period on farms (usually the larger and richer farms in their region), children from the neighbourhood farms coming to attend the classes (sometimes staying: see further Loftur Guðmundsson 2008: 62-65 and 117-123).

Guðmundsdóttir (1893-1975) from Dýrafjörður in the Westfjords, who taught in Reykjavík for most of her adult life and had a repertoire of just over 50 legends, large repertoires of this kind seem to be less common among teachers than they were among midwives and nurses. The difference may have something to do with the tendency of those women who chose this career in the early 1900s to withdraw from the public sphere following marriage (Loftur Guttormsson 2008a: 137). While these teachers do not feature as independent subjects in the four articles that form part of this thesis, they are briefly noted in Article 3 in the context of the forms taken by legends in the repertoires of women.

The regular retirement of women from their working careers following marriage in this period is easy to understand given how time-consuming and wide-ranging household management was in Iceland, at least until the middle of the twentieth century. This applied particularly in rural Iceland where households on the turf-farms were often large, the farms in question being essentially subsistence farms in the sense that each farm produced most of the goods consumed by the household themselves. It might also be borne in mind that in 1920, around the time that most of the women in this project were having children, the average number of live births per woman in Iceland was four (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 179). All the same, it was not uncommon that women had more than 10 children, especially in rural Iceland. Indeed, 13 of the women featured in the thesis had twelve children or more.⁷⁶ As we will see in next subchapter which considers the turf-farm, its surroundings, its social organization and culture, the role of the farm housewife of the past was very different from the role of housewife in modern society for

⁷⁶ The number of children given here includes foster-children and stepchildren. Those women in this project who had so many children are: Anna Tómasdóttir (1878-1974: 14 children); Bjarney Guðmundsdóttir (1893-1974: 13 children); Erlendína Jónsdóttir (1894-1974: twelve children); Guðrún Kristmundsdóttir (1892-1978: twelve children); Guðrún Ólafsdóttir (1897-1987: 16 children); Gunnþóra Guttormsdóttir (1895-1988: 14 children); Halldóra Helgadóttir (1884-1984: 13 children); Jófríður Ásmundsdóttir (1881-1977: 16 children); Kristín Jónsdóttir (1886-1976: 15 children); María Ólafsdóttir (1880-1970: 15 children); Oddný Hjartardóttir (1898-1971: 13 children); Sigrún Jóhannesdóttir (1892-1989: 15 children); and Þórunn M. Þorbergsdóttir (1884-1992: 17 children). None of these women make the list of unusually active legend tellers with a repertoire of 20 legends and more, something which may suggest that having large number of children did little to enhance the ability of women to become active participants in the legend tradition. Further studies nonetheless need to be carried out to establish whether the difference between women is significant or not. It is quite likely that these women simply did not find the time (or energy) to tell stories for children (or others), having to manage such a large household and look after so many children. However, as shown in discussion of the case of Þuríður Árnadóttir (1888-1982) in Article 4, examples can certainly be found of women who had many children and concentrated on legend-telling for the younger generation.

whom the domestic space has become a much smaller consumer unit involving only a few people, something quite different to the large self-subsistent production units known in earlier centuries.

4.2 The Turf-Farm and Its Social Organization

This subchapter will explore one of the key features of the pre-industrial Icelandic agricultural community, the turf-farm, something which in modernity has come to symbolize the “old days” in the minds of many Icelanders. The turf-farm, its vernacular architecture and its development over the course of the centuries has been subject of numerous archaeological and ethnographical studies, central works being those by Hjörleifur Stefánsson (2013), Hörður Ágústsson (1987), and Anna Lísá Rúnarsdóttir (2007). The following discussion of the turf-farm’s architecture and organization is largely based on information drawn from these works. The considerations of the everyday life, work-culture, gender-roles and social organization of the turf-farm, meanwhile, are predominantly based on various ethnographical accounts by individuals that either experienced life in the turf-farm community, such as Jónas Jónasson (1856-1918) frá Hrafnagili (1961), Guðmundur Þorsteinsson (1901-1989) frá Lundi (1990), and Guðmundur L. Friðfinnsson (1905-2004) frá Egilsá (1991), or foreign visitors, such as the Danish ethnographer Daniel Bruun (1856-1931), who travelled around Iceland in 1902, and the British folklorist Sabine Baring Gould (1834-1924), who toured the country in 1862. These sources, along with answers to the questionnaire concerning the *kvöldvaka* (lit. evening wakes) in the Icelandic turf-farm community sent out by the Icelandic National Museum in 1962 (ÞÞ), provide detailed insights into the physical and social environment of the Icelandic turf-farm in the past and its everyday activities.

The wider surroundings of the Icelandic turf-farms were made up of several different types of landscape. As Daniel Bruun notes in his description of Icelandic farms, around 1900, while Icelandic farms often encompassed a much greater area of land than those in Denmark, much of this land took the form of rocks, cliffs, mountains, gravel beds and/ or other types of landscape that was of little use (Bruun 1987: 353). The usable land, meanwhile, was classified by Bruun into three main categories: cultivated home fields or *tún* which surrounded the farms; uncultivated meadows (*engi*) and marshes (*mýri*) could be found right across the farmland and were mown every summer; and then home pastures (*úthagi*) in which livestock such as horses, cows, and milk-producing sheep (*kvíær*) were kept during the summer when they were not sent off to the *afréttur*, the communal pastures up in the highlands (Bruun 1987: 353). While the cows were often kept in a building that formed part of the turf-farm structure itself, or in a separate building close to it, the sheep shed was

usually situated farther away from the farm in the *úthagi* where the sheep would be pastured (Bruun 1987: 211-212; and Jónas Jónasson 1961: 99-102).

With regard to food production, until early 1900s, sheep milk formed a central part of the Icelandic diet, something which had led to the practice of “*fráfætur*” (separation) during which lambs would be separated from some of the ewes in order for their milk to be used. This process would initially take place only at nights, during which time the sheep would be milked in sheep pens (*kvíar*) in the morning before they were reunited with the lambs. In June, the lambs would be permanently separated from the sheep and herded up into the highlands where they would pasture until the fall, at which point they would be rounded up along with other mountain-pastured sheep in the communal act of *göngur* (Eng. walks) and *réttir* (Eng. round-ups) (Bruun 1987: 366-376; and Guðmundur L. Friðfinnsson 1991; 13-18 and 234-239). Some farms would also have *sel* (Eng. dairy farms/ sheilings) in the mountains where sheep and cows would be pastured during the summer, and their milk transformed into *skyr* (Eng. curds) and cheese (Bruun 1987: 367-370; and Jónas Jónasson 1961: 62-64). As in other neighbouring countries, these *sel* were one of few places in the highlands that would be traditionally populated by women, in other words, the dairy maids responsible for processing the milk, and for logical reasons, as elsewhere, they play a strong role in the Icelandic legend tradition (see, for example, Jón Árnason 1954-1961: I, 63-70).⁷⁷

The sheep were the most important livestock for the Icelandic turf-farm community, producing three essentials: wool, meat, and milk. The importance of sheep is clearly reflected in the numbers of livestock in Iceland in 1900, when there were 22,569 cattle, 469,477 sheep and 41,654 horses in the country (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 277). In his travels around Eastern-Skaftafellssýsla in 1902, Daniel Bruun notes that the average farm in this area had about four milk-cows, ten to twelve horses, 90-100 sheep for milking and around 100 other sheep, occasional farms also having a bull and a stallion (Bruun 1987: 442). The low proportion of cattle in Icelandic farming is understandable given the conditions in Iceland which did not favour large herds of cattle which would have demanded more grass than could be gathered on most farms. Sheep needed less care and feeding than cows; they could be

⁷⁷ Another occupation that brought women into the highland areas in the early summer, shortly before the harvesting season, was the collection of *fjallagrös*, (Iceland moss) which was used for both food and medicinal purposes (Jónas Jónasson 1961: 64-65). Like the *sel*, these trips are often mentioned in the Icelandic legend tradition, most particularly as a setting for women’s encounters with outlaws (see, for example, Jón Árnason 1954-61 II: 189-194 and 215-217).

pastured in the highland *afréttir* (pl.) during the summer, during the time when the herd was unusually large because of the newly borne lambs. Horses were, of course, essential animals on Icelandic farms, their high numbers reflecting the fact that all transportation had to be done on horses, Iceland still being unusually rural with hardly any infrastructure such as roads and bridges until well into the twentieth century.

The turf-house structure itself was the heart of the turf-farm, and the centre of social organization in rural life in Iceland. Around 1900, the *burstabær* (Eng. gable-farm) was the dominant style of turf-farm, in which the individual units of the farm formed a line with several wooden frames or *gaflar* (Eng. gables) at the front, a format which was replacing the older form of the *gangabær* (Eng. tunnel/ corridor farm) that usually only had one wooden frame at the front and then a long tunnel or corridor leading back from the front door connecting all of the living spaces running to the back of the structure. Both styles made use of the same material, in other words, turf and stones built around a wooden frame, but had a slightly different arrangement. In the nineteenth century and early 1900s, there were two dominant styles of *burstabær* in Iceland, one of which was common in South Iceland, and the other in North Iceland. The former had most of the living spaces in the front, including the communal living room of the *baðstofa* (Eng. living room) in which most of the residents both worked and slept, the aim being to make use of the light from the windows that were usually placed in the wooden gable. The other type also had wooden gables in the front but otherwise retained the organization of the older tunnel/ corridor farm, in which the *baðstofa* was at the very back of the structure. In some areas, and especially in Southeast Iceland, the *baðstofa* was commonly built on a platform on top of the cowshed to make use of the heat from the animals (Anna Lía Rúnarsdóttir 2007; Hjörleifur Stefánsson 2013; Hörður Ágústsson 1987; Bruun 1987: 207-263; and Boucher 1989: 43, 59–60, 119–120, 181). In 1920, when many of the women focused on in this project were establishing their own families, this form of housing had started to decline, only 2% of houses in towns⁷⁸ and 15% in villages taking this form, while 68% of those houses in rural areas remained in this style (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 373). Although many of the women who later went on to live as adults in villages and towns around the Icelandic coastline would settle down as adults in more modern houses built of concrete or wood, the emphasis placed by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson on the storytelling tradition they knew in their childhood (see Chapter 3.2) means that the narrative tradition reflected in the interviews is predominantly that of the turf-farm.

⁷⁸ In 1894, laws were put in place that forbade the building of turf-farms in Reykjavík: see Þórunn Valdimarsdóttir 1986: 3-4.

The turf-farm had several rooms depending on its size and the economic standing of the inhabitants. While the smaller farms had only a kitchen, a pantry, place for storage and a *baðstofa*, larger farms also included a private bedroom for the farmer and his wife at the very back of the *baðstofa*, and sometimes a living room in which guests were received (Hörður Ágústsson 1987; and Hjörleifur Stefánsson 2013). The earlier-noted *baðstofa* was originally a form of sauna (the word *baðstofa* means literally the “bathroom”) but as the climate in Iceland grew colder in the Middle Ages and firewood became increasingly difficult to obtain, the inhabitants of the farms had retreated back into this room for warmth (something helped by the fact that it was so far back in the structure) (Hörður Ágústsson 1987: 330-338). The *baðstofa* had thus become the communal room on the farm, a place in which almost all the inhabitants ate, slept, and worked (especially in the winter). The multi-functional role of the *baðstofa* sometimes caught the attention of foreign travellers such as the Baring-Gould, who notes how the room:

... is lighted by two or more glass panes, three inches square, inserted in the roof and sealed in so as never to be opened for the admission of pure air. The walls are lined with beds and the end is divided off by a wooden mock-partition (never closed by a door) so as to form a compartment: here the father and the mother of the family sleep, together with such visitors as cannot be accommodated in the guest chamber. In the bathstófa sleep all the people connected with the farm, two or even four in bed, with the head of one at the feet of other. The beds are lockers in the wall, lined with wood, and with wooden partitions between them. They are arranged along the room much like the berths in a cabin, or the cubilia in a catacomb. Each is supplied with a mattress, feather bed or quilt, and home-woven counterpane. The Icelanders not only sleep in this room, but eat in it, making sofas of the beds, and tables of their knees. In it is spent the long dark winter, with no fire, and each inmate kept warm by animal heat alone. The stifling foulness of the atmosphere can hardly be conceived, and indeed, it is quite unendurable to English lungs (Baring-Gould 1863: 59-60).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Bearing in mind the time frame of this thesis, it is worth noting that in the early 1900s, the turf-farm was going through an existential crisis rooted in the social changes that were taking place in Iceland as a result of the process of industrialization and urbanization noted above. One of the most problematic features of life on the turf farm in earlier centuries had naturally been the lack of privacy (Guðmundur Hálfðánarson 2008). In the former half of the twentieth century, sources indicate that attempts were being made to create private rooms for farm workers as part of the structure of the house, the agricultural community finding itself competing with the emerging urban community for workers (Anna Lía Rúnarsdóttir 2007: 40-41). During the same period, the inhabitants of the turf-farms were also making attempts to adapt modern techniques for their houses, one of these being the use of electricity, which caused many turf-farms to burn down because of the difficulty of keeping damp away from the electrical cables (Anna Lía Rúnarsdóttir 2007: 10).

The hybrid nature of the gender-mixed, multifunctional *baðstofa* makes this space particularly interesting for further consideration, and not least in terms of its role as a platform for oral storytelling. One of the key features of the turf-farm culture was that of the *kvöldvaka* (see above and Chapter 3.3) which took place during the winter nights on farms in Iceland until the 1920s, and, in some places until 1930s.⁸⁰ In the *kvöldvaka*, which took place in the *baðstofa*, the inhabitants of the farm would gather together and engage in textile work, small repairs and other tasks for the household, simultaneously taking part in various kinds of intellectual activity (see Magnús Gíslason 1977). As noted in the beginning of this subchapter, in 1962, the Icelandic National Museum sent out a questionnaire entitled *Kvöldvakan og hlutdeild heimilisins í íslensku þjóðaruppeldi* (ÞP: Questionnaire 7: On Evening Wakes and the Role of the Homestead in Cultural Upbringing) asking informants, most of whom, like the women in this project, had been born in the late nineteenth century, for their memories of this tradition. A typical account on this can be found in the following description, given by a man born in 1895 in West Iceland:

Kvöldvakan hófst þegar rökkursvefni var lokið, en rökkursvefni þegar var orðið svo dimmt í baðstofunni að konur sáu ekki til að kamba og spinna eða önnur birtuvönd störf. Þá voru karlmenn komnir inn frá fjárgeymslu og öðrum útiverkum og þá tóku þeir þátt í rökkursvefni (rökkurbundi). [...]. Kvöldvökur hófust um veturnatur [...] þegar hauststörfum var lokið að mestu. Kvöldvökum var haldið til þorraloka eða litið lengur, því það var hætt að hafa ljós í bæ þegar þorri var búinn. [...]. Þegar rökkursvefni var lokið var ljós borið í baðstofu, ljósfærið sem var lýsislampi með fifukveik var komið fyrir við eina stoð í baðstofunni sem næst henni miðri þar út frá sat fólkið við vinnu sína. Konur við rokka, ullarkamba, þrjóna, saumaskap skógerð o.fl. Karlar við vefnað, ýmsar smíðar, vinna hrosshár (kamba, spinna, flétta, bregða). Sumir að kamba ull fyrir konur. Tvinnuðu band á hála snældu, börn að vinda af snældu, spóla fyrir vefarann og þess á milli að leika sér að dóti sínu en einn maður tók sér sæti næst ljósinu með bók í hönd og las upphátt fyrir fólkið, eða kvað rímur. Einn maður hafði þann starfa með öðru að passa

⁸⁰ Magnús Gíslason (1977: 139-143 and 153-154) gives several reasons for the demise of the *kvöldvaka* tradition in the 1920s and early 1930s. First of all, increasing urbanization had meant there were no longer enough workers on the farm to form the customary circle of listeners. Secondly, the new modern houses that were being built in the countryside during this period often included separate bedrooms and working rooms undermining the old sense of community that had prevailed on the farmstead. Thirdly, schools and new methods of education were taking over from traditional system of tuition being provided in rural homes, something that can be said to have undermined one of the practical purposes of the *kvöldvaka*. Finally, the arrival of the Icelandic national radio during this same period meant that many of the activities previously performed by the household as part of the *kvöldvaka* were now being replaced by a new radio programme (interestingly called “*kvöldvaka*”) which was broadcast every week during the winter.

ljósið, sjá um að ljósmatur væri nægur og skara fram kveikinn. Var svo vökunni lokið þegar stjörnumerkið var gengið fram hjá tilteknu dagsmarki (svo kallaði fólkíð það) (ÐP: 457/1962-1)

(The *kvöldvaka* began when the *rökkursvefn* (lit. dusk sleep)⁸¹ had finished, the *rökkursvefn* was when it had got so dark in the *baðstofa* that the women could no longer see to comb [wool], spin or do any work that needed light. By then the men had come in from dealing with the sheep and other outdoor work, and then they took part in the *rökkursvefn* (or *rökkurblundur* [lit. dusk nap]). [...]. The *kvöldvökur* [pl.] began at the time of the *veturnætur* [lit. winter nights]⁸² when most of the autumn work had been finished. The *kvöldvökur* were held until the end of the month of Þorri [c. 18-24 February] or a little longer, because people stopped using lights [oil lamps] when Þorri started [c. 9-15 January]. [...]. When the *rökkursvefn* had finished, a light was brought into the *baðstofa*, this was a fish-oil lamp with a dandelion wick and it was placed somewhere near the middle of the *baðstofa* and people sat around this doing their work. The women were spinning, combing wool, knitting, sewing, making shoes and so on. The men were weaving, making implements, working with combing, spinning, twisting horsehair. Some of them combing wool for the women. Twining thread on a spindle, children drawing off the spindle, and bundling wool for the weaver and in between playing with their toys, and one man would take a seat next to the light and read out loud for the people, or perhaps recite a *rímur* verse [see Chapter 3.2 above]. One man had had the job of also watching over the light and making sure there was enough oil and cutting the wick correctly. The *kvöldvaka* would continue until the constellation had passed a particular “*dagsmark*”⁸³, as people called it.)

The informants of the questionnaire were overwhelmingly male, as was common among informants of ethnology in the middle of the twentieth century.⁸⁴ This may be the reason why many of them tend to elaborate more on

⁸¹ The custom was that many workers would have a short sleep when they came in from their work at dusk. This short sleep was termed the *rökkursvefn*.

⁸² The *veturnætur* occurred at the start of the winter half of the year, at around the time of Halloween.

⁸³ The *dagsmark* would have been a particular point in the landscape used as a means of establishing the time (for example, when a constellation passed it, as in this case)

⁸⁴ It is worth bearing in mind that the sources on the *kvöldvaka* in the past, such as Questionnaire 7 and various older questionnaires used by Magnús Gíslason for his reconstruction of the *kvöldvaka* tradition, have a strong male bias. The former source includes 20 answers provided by women and 57 by men, while Magnús Gíslason himself uses over 100 male informants opposed to only 19 women (see Magnús Gíslason 1977: 11-19 and 145-146). This means that the key sources on the *kvöldvaka* tradition tend to describe it from a male perspective, something which may reduce the role of women in the tradition, simply because the men may have paid less attention to what the women were doing and communicating. It is nonetheless interesting how many of those who answered Questionnaire 7 (especially the women) mention the oral storytelling of a number of famous women, and not least that of the *orlofskonur* who

the intellectual activities of men in the *baðstofa* than those of women, as in the account above in which the women's tasks are only briefly noted. The winter storytelling that took place in the *baðstofa* is given special consideration in Article 2 which focuses among other things on the different roles played by men and women in the winter entertainments and education that took place here. This article underlines the degree to which the *baðstofa* was the key storytelling platform of the turf-farm society, and also the place in which women's storytelling dominated during the earlier-noted *rökkri*n (literally twilight) period when most of the adult men in the household were napping in the room.

The social organization of the turf-farm traditionally included several categories of people, all of whom had different social roles. The household sizes, of course, varied in line with the economic status of the farm in the early 1900s, just as it had done in earlier. While the poorest households included only the farmer and his family, those on richer farms often included, along with the farmer and his family, several unrelated farmhands and sometimes a pauper or two. In 1880, around the time when many of the women in the project were being born, the average household in Iceland had 7.4 inhabitants, a number that had fallen to 5.3 inhabitants by 1930 (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1988: 41). As has been noted above (Chapter 4.1), studies show that in the first half of the twentieth century, farmers were becoming increasingly reliant on their own relatives for labour, as non-related workers, and especially men, were now becoming too expensive to hire for a full year because of the competition with the fishing sector: many farmers therefore opted to hire workers only for the hay-making season, workers traditionally called *kaupafólk* (Eng. temporary workers) (Anna Lísía Rúnarsdóttir 2007: 35 and 58; and Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1988: 159-160). Censuses from the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth offer some insight into this development. In 1890, for example, the well-to-do household of Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir (1887-1971) who was living on the farm of Byggðarholt in Eastern Iceland (featured in Article 4) included her grandfather (the farmer in legal terms), his two adult sons and their wives, four children, including Ingibjörg, and six non-related workers: three adult farmhands, one additional *kaupamaður*, a 14-year-old *léttastúlka* (maid) and a twelve-year-old *matvinnung* (who earned only food). By 1920, however, this family were no longer the only people working this

would come to stay for a period of time on the farms (on these women, see Chapter 4.1). See, for example, the account by a woman born in 1899 (ÞÞ: 9986/1962-1) about the storytelling of the home school teacher Viktoria Guðmundsdóttir; that by a woman born in 1911 (ÞÞ: 463/1962-1) describing the storytelling of the *orlofskona* Þórey Guðmundsdóttir; that by a woman born in 1907 (ÞÞ: 453/1962-1) on the storytelling of Elín Sigurðardóttir; and that by a man born in 1884 (ÞÞ: 446/1962-1) on the storytelling of the *orlofskona* Guðrún Halldórsdóttir.

farmland, the estate now appearing to be shared with another unrelated family. At this time, Ingibjörg's part of the estate appears to be run by her two aging uncles, both of whom are legally referred to as "farmers" in the census. The households in this period include five adult female relatives, including Ingibjörg, who has been given the somewhat unclear legal status of *ættingi* (Eng. relative) in the census. The household now includes fewer unrelated individuals: only two farmhands and a pauper (*manntal.is*). As was common in Iceland in this period, the farm work originally done by outsiders now appears to be largely covered by female relatives.

As on most farms in Europe, the work on the turf-farm largely varied by the season. On many of those farms that were close to good fishing grounds, when there was time, the men in the household would engage in fishing in open boats, after which the fish would be dried in the *hjallir* (Eng. sheds for drying fish) that stood close to the turf-farm structure (Bruun 1987: 212). On other farms that were less suited for fishing, the men in the household would often travel across the country to those fishing stations situated in South and West Iceland for the duration of the winter fishing seasons, not returning until in the spring (Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 106–110). On those farms where the men were absent during this period, the women would naturally assume the role of the men in the household, something that meant them taking on outdoor work such as looking after the sheep and spreading manure on the fields in the spring (Jónas Jónasson 1961: 59; and Magnús Gíslason 1977: 47-49 and 148-149). Indeed, it has been suggested that the main privilege allotted to married women when they became housewives in rural Iceland in the nineteenth century was that they no longer had to take on this kind of outdoor work, unlike the maids and other unmarried women on the farm (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011: 20 and 82-83).⁸⁵

If and when the men *were* present on the farm, farm work would traditionally be organized along gender-lines: the men in the household would manage those tasks that took place outside, such as hunting and fishing in the lakes; attending to the sheep in the sheep shed; repairing buildings; spreading manure on the fields in the spring; cutting peat and wood for fuel; cutting the grass in the fields and meadows during the harvesting season; and rounding up the sheep in the highland *afréttir* (see above) in the fall (Anna Lísá Rúnarsdóttir

⁸⁵ This, however, does not mean that the housewife would have had a lesser workload; she would have to manage the farm and the household alone during the times at which husband was away (for example, during the fishing season); to raise (and teach) the children; and to organize the hiring of labour if there were farm workers in the household that could be relied on. In poorer households with few or no farmworkers, she would also have had to be responsible for most of the food and textile production and, despite her privileged position as a housewife, would have undoubtedly had to help out with various outdoor tasks.

2007: 36-39; Guðmundur L. Friðfinnsson 1991: 13-40 and 130-141; Guðmundur Þorsteinsson 1990: 100-160 and 178-182; and Jónas Jónasson 1961: 57-130). Women, on the other hand, were traditionally responsible for all the indoor work on the farm, such as food production and storage; washing, drying, making and repairing clothing, and dealing with other kinds of textile work, and then other kinds of work that could be carried out closer to home, such as washing wool, and milking the cows in the cow shed and the sheep in the *kvíar* (Anna Lísá Rúnarsdóttir 2007: 36-39; Guðmundur L. Friðfinnsson 1991: 109-116; 130-133 and 157-166; Guðmundur Þorsteinsson 1990: 13-41; 64-93 and 164- 177; and Jónas Jónasson 1961: 60-61 and 102-128). During the harvesting season, however, everyone in the household would have worked together in the fields and meadows (Anna Lísá Rúnarsdóttir 2007: 36-39; Guðmundur Þorsteinsson 1990: 42-63; and Guðmundur L. Friðfinnsson 1991: 255-273). It is interesting, that while women may very well have been perceived as being closer to nature, and men being closer to culture (see Ortner 1974), in some aspects of Icelandic culture, it was the men that were predominantly associated with the raw nature of the Icelandic wilderness, and women with the domestic spaces of the farms, which can be regarded as having been the dominant cultural and educational spaces in pre-industrial Icelandic society.⁸⁶

While the division of labour noted above was common on most farms, it should be remembered that this was not always the rule. On many farms, for example, men would also be involved in various aspects of textile production, such as the knitting and weaving that took place in the *baðstofa* during the *kvöldvaka* in the winter nights (Guðmundur Þorsteinsson 1990: 72-79; Jónas Jónasson 1961: 112; and Magnús Gíslason 1977: 77-80 and 150; see also the quote from the 1962 questionnaire given above). There is also a good reason to suspect that some of the men who wrote ethnographic accounts in the past (including those noted above), may well have overlooked, and perhaps reduced the role of women in their writing. Indeed, various studies concerning women's history have indicated that a number of women participated in certain types of work that were previously assumed to have been carried out by men alone, such as fishing in open boats (Oddný Yngvadóttir 1987; Þórunn Magnúsdóttir 1988; and Willson 2016: 23-52), and operating those ferries that ran across rivers on popular routes (Þórunn Magnúsdóttir 1980).⁸⁷ Indeed, Article 4 in this thesis

⁸⁶ A similar pattern can be seen in many other Nordic countries; see, for example, Tarka (1998), and Stark-Arola (1998).

⁸⁷ Þórunn Magnúsdóttir's study deals with ferrywomen in Ölfusá in South Iceland, but it is known that women also operated ferries elsewhere. Another example is Sveinbjörg Sigríður Ásmundsdóttir (1900-1994) who operated a ferry over the river Eldvatn in Vestur-Skaftafellssýsla. Sveinbjörg's strength was legendary and the subject of many narratives (see Þórarinn Helgason 1975).

mentions one such woman, Þuríður Árnadóttir (1888-1982) from Gunnarsstaðir in Þistilfjörður who occasionally operated a ferry over the Hafralón river in Þistilfjörður in the early twentieth century.

For any thesis focusing on legend traditions, one of the most important features to consider regarding the rural society in the past must be that relating to people's mobility and their opportunities for social interaction. At first glance, women would seem to have been at a disadvantage in this aspect: as noted above, men were largely responsible for the external affairs of the farm, which included travels for trade and fishing, while in their everyday lives, women were largely confined to the domestic spaces of their farms (see further Article 2). This isolation of women is noted by Daniel Bruun who discusses the lives of women in Örfasveit in 1902:

Fram undir miðja 19. öld hafði fólk í afskekktustu sveitunum ekki hugmynd um, hvað gerðist í heiminum utan við næsta nágrennið. – Karlmenn kynntust þó stundum á ferðum sínum mönnum, sem sagt gátu þeim tíðindi, en í mörgum sveitum fóru konur aldrei út fyrir sóknina. Þannig var það í Örfum fyrrum, og áttu hinar illfæru jökulár sinn þátt í því. En eftir síðustu aldamót fóru konur endrum og eins að bregða sér í kaupstaðinn til Hornafjarðar, oft þó með margra ára millibili. Og margar gamlar konur þar höfðu aldrei komið austur að Kvískerjum, afskekktasta bænum í sjálfri Örfasveitinni (Bruun 1987: 457).

(In the middle of the nineteenth century, people in isolated areas had little idea of what was going on in the world outside their local community. – On their trips, men would nonetheless sometimes meet other men who could pass on news to them. In many areas, though, women rarely left their parish. That is how it was in Örfi in the past, and something that the glaciers which were so difficult to traverse played a key role in. After the turn of the century, however, women started to occasionally make trips to the markets in Hornafjörður, albeit with several years in between each visit. Many old women in this area had never travelled east of Kvísker, the most isolated farm in the Örfi district.)

All the same, as highlighted by Article 2, the lives of many women may not have been as stationary as many sources suggest. Indeed, in many cases, we encounter women experiencing a different form of geographical mobility than that known by men in their everyday activities. As noted in the article in question and in Chapter 4.1 above, there are several types of movement that can be understood to have been somewhat typical of women in the past. One was that of the earlier noted *orlofskonur* and the female tramps (see Chapter 4.1) who were a regular part of the social landscape of the late nineteenth century and early 1900s and played an important role in the storytelling traditions of the Icelandic rural society of the time. The second type of mobility associated with women was related to some of those women's professions noted in Chapter 4.1, such that of the midwives and children's teachers, who naturally experienced a

similar kind of everyday mobility to that experienced by the men in their communities. The third type of mobility, however, had more to do with the residential changes experienced by women because of marriage and work, something examined in Chapters 3.2 and 4.1. Indeed, as is noted there and in Article 2, almost half of the women featured in this thesis later settled down as adults in regions that were different to those in which they grew up. One can thus say that while they were largely confined to the domestic spaces of their farms in their everyday lives, in this sense, many women can be considered to have been comparatively *víðförar* (Eng. far-travelled).

It should also be born in mind that as was noted in the beginning of this chapter, the pre-industrial rural community of Iceland was somewhat restricted in terms of public arenas and places in which to socialize outside the domestic spaces of the farms. There were no hotels or guest houses to speak of in rural Iceland until relatively late in the twentieth century, something that meant that travellers tended to be somewhat reliant on the hospitality of farmers for accommodation and refreshment when travelling. Certain farms that were close to the popular routes that ran to the various trading posts thus became social hubs in their communities. As highlighted in Article 4, these farms appear to have played a key role in the development of some of the large legend repertoires of those women mentioned in this project. In the rural Iceland of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as in the distant past,⁸⁸ hospitality towards guests was a crucial social rule. Everyone depended on it for their survival when travelling around the hostile landscape of the country in an unpredictable climate. Indeed, for centuries, the Icelandic rural community lived by the unwritten rule of the earlier-noted *gestanætur* (see Chapter 4.1 above). For centuries, guests of this kind would have been the only source of news in rural Iceland (Jónas Jónasson 1961: 226), and, indeed, one finds frequent remarks about storytelling by guests in those interviews taken by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson. These suggest that oral storytelling frequently took place when guests stayed overnight on farms, the narrations in question sometimes even being considered as a form of payment for the hospitality received (see, for example, SÁM 85/232; 88/1640; 88/1670; 89/ 1761; 90/2128; and 93/3624). It is thus possible to say that for many women in rural Iceland, the domestic sphere of the turf-farm was far from being a socially isolated private place in which women would only socialize with their immediate family. In fact, as underlined above, the *baðstofa* of the isolated farmstead was one of the dominant social spaces of the Icelandic rural society in the past, and perhaps its most prominent storytelling platform.

⁸⁸ The emphasis on hospitality can, among other, be seen in the *Gestaþáttur* of the ancient Icelandic poem *Hávamál* (sts 1-79).

5 Methodology

The previous chapters in the introduction of this thesis have examined earlier scholarship dealing with storytellers and folk narratives, the methods and context that lie behind the creation of the Icelandic folk narrative archives, and the historical and social context that surrounded Icelandic women in the twilight of the nineteenth century and the early 1900s. It remains necessary to account for the approaches and methodology that have been used in the thesis as a means of examining the narrative tradition in question. The chosen methodology needed to be able to reflect the main characteristics of the legend traditions in Iceland during the period in question; to provide some insight into how the traditions of women in this period differed from those of men; and to demonstrate the ways in which women's experiences and the social and geographical conditions that surrounded them influenced the nature of their repertoires and their storytelling platforms. The following two subchapters will thus outline the methodology that came to be chosen. In general, the thesis can be said to adopt a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that among other things involves of the coding of material which is essentially qualitative in nature. This is then followed up by quantitative content analysis, examining, among other things, the degree to which various themes and features appear in narratives told by different gender groups and, to a lesser extent, between different social groups of women.

The most essential difference between quantitative and qualitative research in the social sciences is the way in which the former approach involves figures relating to relatively large groups of people, while qualitative research focuses more on understanding social processes in close context by scrutinizing only a small number of cases (Berg 2009: 3-4; and Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009: 5-7). While the distinction between these two methods is relatively clear when viewed as methods for collecting data, the quantitative method producing data in numerical form while the qualitative method produces descriptions and narratives (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009: 5-7), the lines between these research traditions tend to become somewhat less clear when it comes to the analysis of the data. For one thing, both coding and the statistics commonly associated with quantitative research are sometimes also used by scholars working on qualitative research (on this, see, for example, Esterberg 2002: 2-3). All in all, however, the overall approach to social reality can be said to be somewhat different in these two research traditions. Those scholars who use quantitative research generally argue that research in the social sciences should largely follow same rules as those applied to the natural sciences, while scholars of

qualitative research tend to maintain that social research is primarily a matter of interpretation, and should be aimed at investigating and illuminating how humans construct social reality (Esterberg 2002: 1-2; and Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009: 5-7). While some aspects of this current research, predominantly those focused on in Articles 2 and 3, make use of quantitative approaches, involving content analysis⁸⁹ of a large amount of material relating to tradition as practised by large groups of people, making use of statistics and statistical analysis to reveal key cultural differences, the other approaches used in the thesis, and most particularly those concerned with the interpretation of these statistics (see Articles 2 and 4) and the consideration of individual cases (see especially Article 4) and aspects of performative context (see Article 2) are essentially qualitative, focusing on exactly *how* and *why* the various patterns observed may have developed.

In many respects, the current thesis takes the shape of historically-oriented qualitative research aimed at the reconstruction of a past social process: the formation and sharing of legend narratives. Like other retrospective research of past social processes based on archival material, it naturally faces a number of challenges. According to Kristin Esterberg (2002: 131), one of the main challenges that faces scholars carrying out qualitative historical research of social processes relates to the evaluation of primary and secondary sources, and not least figuring out the ways in which biases and predilections may have affected these sources. This is very much in line with the concerns of the feminist and gender-oriented scholars discussed in Chapter 2.4 of this introduction, and their emphasis on standpoint theory (see Haraway 1988; and Harding 1986), maintaining that knowledge stems from social position, and stressing the need for careful consideration of the ways in which women and their experiences may have been marginalized in sources on culture and history in the past. As discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis, the first step in my current research involved the evaluation of the various primary and secondary sources on Icelandic women and their narratives, considering among other things the important question of exactly how well these sources on women's narrative traditions reflect their traditions, given the limited role played by women in earlier scholarship and the collection of folk narratives. This is also the subject of Article 1, the first article written as part of this project.

The most important methodology for this thesis nonetheless comes from the field of folklore, and especially from those folkloric works concerned with

⁸⁹ Content analysis (see, for example, Joffe and Yardley 2004: 56-67) is a partly quantitative method which involves the establishing of categories and then the counting of the number of instances in which they occur in texts.

the reconstruction and interpretation⁹⁰ of the role and meaning of folk narratives for the communities of the past. As has been pointed out in Chapter 2.2, a number of studies have appeared in recent years that are based on archival material and consider narratives essentially from the perspective of narrators, emphasizing how the element of *craftmanship* can be applied to historical material when considering the meaning that older folkloric texts had for their narrators and tradition groups. This perspective on folk narrative research was introduced by Holbek (1987: 39-45), who, in his approach to the contextual interpretation of oral stories in archives essentially maintains that knowledge of the performance aspects of folklore gained from fieldwork-based studies *in situ* can be also used as framework for the analysis of narratives told and collected in the past. In folk narrative research, the craftsmanship viewpoint privileges the narrators in the tradition, emphasizing that oral stories should be interpreted on the basis of knowledge about the context of their informants and the meaning these informants produce for themselves by means of the performance of the expression (Tangherlini, 1994: 34). This viewpoint is thus essentially tied to the quest for meaning in folkloric texts, emphasizing the relationship between individual narrators and the traditions of their wider communities.

The present thesis is built on the premises that the legend repertoires of narrators can be examined on both a collective level (as a means of uncovering traits that might have been meaningful for the tradition group as whole, in this case those Icelandic women born in the late nineteenth century) and on an individual level (as a means of uncovering traits that might have been meaningful for the individual narrators within the wider tradition group). Such considerations call for a closer examination of how the meaning of folkloric

⁹⁰ The concept of interpretation and what it should consist of in folklore was addressed by, among others, Bengt Holbek (1985: 24-25) who takes a very positivistic approach to methodology. He points to several features that any adequate interpretation of fairy tales should consist of: To Holbek's mind, the interpretation should not contradict known facts or be based on assumptions which can be shown to be wrong; it must be consistent in terms of how various details are interpreted and how they are based on a coherent system of concepts; it must follow a procedure which can be explained and justified step by step on the basis of a clearly stated theory relating to the character of the fairy-tale tradition; it must be comprehensive and applicable to several tales belonging to same tradition; and, finally, it must be capable of being tested by other interpreters who are likely to arrive at a reasonably similar result. While some of these aspects may seem somewhat problematic in modern research, including the stress on the importance of using a pre-stated theory about the character of tradition which to some degree contradicts the earlier-mentioned methods used in qualitative research that emphasise the use of theory as part of the research process, Holbek's notion of interpretation provides an excellent model for the successful analysis of folkloric material in modernity and, in some aspects, has been adopted in this current project.

texts has been constructed by folklorists, and of the relationship between the individual and his or her wider tradition group, in other words, careful consideration of the individual and collective levels of meaning.

The concept of meaning was introduced into folklore scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century in the work of scholars such as Alan Dundes (1934-2005; 1966), Lauri Honko (1984), Bengt Holbek (1985 and 1987) and Lutz Röhrich (1984). The interest in meaning and development of the various ways in which one can interpret the meaning of folkloric material began growing at around the same time that folklorists were beginning to turn their attention away from text-based approaches and more towards performance aspects of folklore (see Chapter 2.2 and 2.3). In modern folkloristics, the meaning of folkloric texts has been understood by scholars to be multi-levelled, varying from one context to another, and created both during and after the performance process by both the teller and her/ his listeners (Brown 1984: 91; Holbek 1985; Palmenfelt 1993: 156-166; and Tangherlini 1994: 30). In his historical overview of the quest of meaning in folkloristics, Ülo Valk (2016: 24-25) has noted that some folklorists who had favoured this approach in European folkloristics, such as Lauri Honko (see also Chapter 2.2.) were nonetheless skeptical about retrospective research into meaning based on archival material, given the crucial role that context and performance plays in the formation of meaning, and the fact that older materials allegedly lacked information about this side of things. Nonetheless, as Holbek (1985: 25-26), Valk (2016), Tangherlini (1994 and 2013); Palmenfelt (1993), and others have all suggested in their examinations of belief narratives and other studies of the legend tradition of earlier rural communities, oral narratives commonly have a more fixed layer of meaning that is not bound exclusively to the immediate situational performance context. It should be born in mind, for example, that for a narrative to be told, it first has to be incorporated into a narrator's repertoire, something which will only happen if it is in some way meaningful to the narrator. This means that while the old material in the folk narrative archives may very well be seen as having been "inauthentic" performances conducted solely for the collector of the narrative, unlike those stories told as part of "authentic" storytelling session in the narrator's community, in which the narrator is likely to negotiate and adapt the meaning of the narrative in line with her or his audiences and the storytelling setting, archival narratives still contain numerous other layers of meaning that are worth examining in the context of the extant information available about the narrator and her or his social background, biography, community and environment, and the likely storytelling contexts.

It is this aspect of the meaning for narrators and the formation of their repertoire that makes the interpretation of the oral narratives contained in archives such a particularly interesting subject. Holbek, working on tale

tradition, talks of eight categories of individuals and points of view relating to them by means of which fairy tales can be interpreted: the people who created the first version, or *Urformen*;⁹¹ the people who passed the tales down over the centuries; the storyteller from whom the tales were actually recorded; the traditional audiences for whose benefit the tales were customarily told; the tale collectors; the publisher; the modern reader; and finally the folklorist or interpreter (Holbek 1985: 25-26). Timothy Tangherlini has since divided these categories into three main sets of people for whom meaning is produced and whose points of view we can interpret: the recorded informant, the intended audiences/ collectors, and the folklorists. As Tangherlini points out, the meaning of a narrative can only be studied by means of considerations of the narrator whose story was collected, noting that, when using archival material, the role of the audience and the collector are likely to merge (Tangherlini 1994: 30-31). For retrospective research into the meaning of the oral narratives contained in archives there are therefore two basic points of view or layers of meaning that can be examined, those of the storyteller who is building up a repertoire, and those produced interactively by the storyteller and the folk narrative collector during the storytelling session in which the story was documented.

It was in his consideration of the reconstruction and interpretation of the fairy tale tradition which focused on the standpoint of storytellers, that Bengt Holbek introduced the earlier-noted idea of the *craftmanship viewpoint*. This approach, also adapted by Tangherlini for his consideration of the interpretation of folk legends, emphasizes the dynamic that exists between the storyteller's individual skills and the meaning they create for themselves, and the wider tradition that they form part of (Holbek 1987: 39-45; see also Tangherlini 1994:34-35). Ulf Palménfelt, emphasizing how the meaning of nineteenth century Gotlandic legends can be studied on the basis of their textual, collective, and individual context (see further Chapter 2.3), elaborates still further on the dynamic that exists between the individual and the tradition:

The inherited text (or, to use another word, tradition) is picked out of the collective store by the individual storyteller telling it to an audience, thus charging the text with individual meaning but still within a collective frame. Telling a legend means at one and the same time actualizing an existing story,

⁹¹ In the early 1980s, when Holbek published his suggestions relating to the interpretation of meaning, the notion of the *Urform* of tales, a concept created by the protagonists of the historical-geographical method (see Chapter 2.3) to refer to the alleged mono-original original creation of a tale was still believed to be a valid point of consideration in folkloristics. Such an idea has since been found to be somewhat problematized and is no longer considered to be relevant, as Tangherlini (1994: 30) has noted.

updating its load of meaning, and storing it to collective memory (Palmenfelt 1993: 166).

The current project adopts the idea of craftsmanship as a dominant perspective, approaching the material essentially from the standpoint of the narrators. To this degree, it adopts the approach taken by several other scholars of Nordic folk narratives who have worked with the rural communities of the past, and most particularly Bengt Holbek (1987) and Timothy Tangherlini (1994 and 2013) who examined a broad range of repertoires of the Danish storytellers found in the collections of the nineteenth-century Danish folk narrative collector Evald Tang Kristensen; and that used by Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (2008) in her study of the Icelandic wonder tales (see Chapter 2.2). In their works, these scholars have attempted to reconstruct both the collective context of the traditions they focused on (by analyzing the patterns found in narrative repertoires of a large group of narrators) and the individual context. As in the works of the other scholars noted above, this thesis thus takes both a collective and individual approach to the tradition at hand, examining both those patterns found in the combined corpus of the repertoires and in the work of individual storytellers, their repertoires and storytelling.

Since this work, like that of Tangherlini, focuses on the legend tradition, clear parallels can be seen between both works. An important step in the methodology of this present project was therefore the creation of a simple database of female legend repertoires in which labels were assigned to various aspects of the legends told by the narrators, as will be outlined in following subchapter, something which was done at an early point with the help of Tangherlini himself as a member of my PhD committee. In spite of the similarities to Tangherlini's project, there are nonetheless a number of features in this present work that are significantly different, both in terms of approach and the nature of the sources at hand. Tangherlini's work essentially had the purpose of examining "who tells what to whom in the form of a legend and why" (Tangherlini 1994: 30), aiming at establishing the social background of those narrators who became active tradition participants in the legend tradition; the connection between the various social backgrounds of narrators and the content of their legends; and finally an evaluation of the legends told by individual narrators during the particular performance situation in which the legends in question were told and documented (Tangherlini 1994: 33). Unlike Tangherlini's work, which considered a broad range of narrators which were divided by sex, age and economic class, this current work has aimed to examine the legend tradition of one single social group, in other words Icelandic women born in the late nineteenth century who, because of the nature of the source material (see Chapter 3.2), all happened to be old at the time at which their legends were recorded. This does not mean that no consideration of any kind

was given to the social variables within the data, as a small group of the women's male peers has also been given consideration where relevant in certain parts of the analysis (see Articles 2 and 3) as a means of establishing which elements of the tradition differ across the gender-line. In addition to this, the different social contexts and backgrounds of the women (such as their residential histories, mobility, and occupation) have also been considered in certain parts of the analysis (see especially Articles 3 and 4).

The other significant difference between the current work and that of Tangherlini (apart from the fact that he was dealing with written records while those examined in the present thesis involve sound recordings) is the consideration of the performance situation. While Tangherlini's work focused on the dynamics that existed during the storytelling sessions in which the legends were documented by Kristensen, this current work takes a somewhat broader approach to the examination of the storytelling by the women in question, considering, among other things, the context in which their storytelling is likely to have taken place (see especially Articles 2 and 4). The reason for the slightly different approach is the nature of my sources, which, unlike Tangherlini's, were not recorded during in active phase of the narrators' lives but were rather recorded from old, retired people living in elderly people's homes or in the care of their relatives in personal homes. As shown in Chapter 3.2, my own material makes up for this with its very rich descriptive accounts of the storytelling sessions that took place during the women's life times and other contextual information about the transmission of legends and their adaption into the women's repertoires, providing an excellent opportunity for the examination of features such as where and when the storytelling of women is likely to have taken place, from whom they learned their legends, and other important performance-related features of the tradition.

5.1 The Construction of the Database

As stated above, the project required the creation of a database to gather together information about the various features that characterized the legends contained in the sources, and make it possible to explore these features statistically. For this purpose, a simple Excel database was constructed with the help of Tangherlini (see above), in which the various features of the legends were marked up with the help of relevant labels.⁹² In the end, the database came

⁹² *Markup* language is a simple form of coding involving the creation of a set of rules for coding a document or audio file in a format that is both human and computer readable. Such markups have previously been applied, to some extent, to the legend material contained in both the *Sagnagrunnur* database and the folkloric collection of Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, (now accessible on *Ismus.is*), making it searchable

to include a total of 2,235 legends told by the 200 women featured in this project along with 196 told by the small group of 25 of their male peers that formed a comparative control group for certain aspects of the thesis. One of the biggest challenges early in the project was naturally that of deciding which elements of the legends in the sources should be examined. As noted in Chapter 2.2, few previous works had been written about gender differences within Icelandic legend tradition. This meant that the net that was initially cast needed to be large and extensive, covering a wide range of aspects that might potentially turn out to be important. While only a few of those features that turned out to be most common came to be covered in the articles, the initial number of labels used totaled over 400, which were then divided into eight main categories (see Table 5.1 below), based on different fields of interest. Each legend was thus assigned with multiple labels based not only on content, but also modes of narration, the simplest legends receiving up to ten labels while the most complex legend in the archive received a total of 36. Since (as has been noted in Chapter 3.2) some of the narrators were interviewed several times, often years apart, some of the interviews included retellings of the same narratives, or similar legends to those previously told. Since some of these retellings included several new or different features, such as different characters and other additions to the plot, each was treated as an independent entity in the database, although notes about such retellings were included in the overall summaries made about the work of various narrators, so that this could be allowed for in estimations of overall repertoire sizes.

The first set of labels applied to the legends referred to the general nature of the various narratives in a narrator's repertoires. As has been discussed in Chapter 2.1, this part of the mark-up work was very loosely based on Lauri Honko's diagram of oral narrative genres (Honko 1989: 28), the label "historical legend" being given to those narratives oriented towards secular history, while the label "supernatural legend" was given to those accounts

on the basis of both content and form (on these databases see Gunnell 2010a and 2016; Trausti Dagsson 2014a; 2014b; Trausti Dagsson and Holownia 2020; and Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2013). The markup language used in these databases is nonetheless very basic, with few labels being assigned to each narrative, as more complex sets of markups are not necessarily beneficial when the material is meant to be available to both the general public and scholars of various fields, all of whom who tend to work on very different aspects of the material. In many aspects, as will be discussed further below, the markup labels for this project can nonetheless in many ways be said to be an extended version of the markup lists used in these databases. It should be noted, however, that the analysis and labelling of the source material in this dissertation was independent of all the pre-classification of the material found both in its original form in the folkloric collection of Árni Magnússon Institute and its later re-classification and editing as part of the *Ísmús/Sagnagrunnur* database.

dealing with the supernatural tradition if the legends were told in a detached or impersonal mode of narration.⁹³ The label “memorate” was applied to personal experience narratives about supernatural experiences, while that of “personal experience narrative/ chronicates” was applied to experience-based narratives dealing with secular topics. With such personal experience accounts, another labelled division was introduced to distinguish between those narratives that dealt with the narrator’s own experience (“first-hand” experiences) and those which were “second-hand”. This distinction was particularly important because it had the potential of providing valuable insight into the transmission of legends, accounts often providing valuable information about whom narrators tended to learn legends from, a feature that received special attention in Articles 2 and 3. In addition to these six forms of narrative, the database also made use of three less well-established terms used for legend-based narratives, some of which occasionally overlapped with the terms noted above, as with “migratory legends” (see, for example, Christiansen 1958), a term which could naturally apply to both supernatural legends and memorates. The two other terms applied to less common forms of narratives were “joculate”, which was assigned to narratives that were told as factual but had humorous and unrealistic twists, suggesting that they were unlikely to be based on real occurrences, and then “rumour narratives” which were assigned to narratives about individuals and alleged events which took place within the narrator’s own contemporary community, and did not easily fit into the categories of personal experience narratives, largely due to deliberate attempts being made by narrators to distance themselves from the events the narratives dealt with.

As can be seen in the table below, the category relating to the previous narrators of the legends included in the informants’ repertoires included 13 labels based on the narrator’s social relationship to these individuals as well as their gender. Such labels included “grandmother”, “grandfather”, “mother”, “father”, “male neighbour”, “female neighbour”, “spouse”, “male family member” and so on. The aim of these labels was to provide insight into the nature of the people

⁹³ Such a division between historical/ secular and supernatural is nonetheless naturally very imperfect as it is always somewhat arbitrary and based on a subjective notion of what “supernatural” means. Indeed, some legends are, of course, both supernatural and historical in the sense that they depict the supernatural experiences of “historical” people in earlier times. In such cases, the analysis privileges the supernatural content over the historical, legends of this kind being denoted as belief legends.

Table 5.1. Labels used in the analysis of the legends considered as part of this project.

Types of label/ Aspects of interest	The number of sub-labels
Forms of legend-based narratives	9
Previous narrators and their relationship to the narrator	13
The setting of narratives in relation to the narrator's place of residence	7
Types of space in which the narratives take place	21
The time frame of the narratives	7
Human characters mentioned in the narratives (based on gender, role, occupation etc.)	120
Supernatural characters mentioned in the narratives (based on character type, gender etc.)	18
Themes	226

from whom the women predominantly learned their legends, and whether there were any signs of gender-bias in terms of the legend transmission, and simultaneously whether there were any differences in the formation of repertoires that might be associated with the members of the women's personal households and families, as opposed to members of the wider community at large. As noted above, this aspect of the analysis turned out to be particularly useful for two of the articles, in other words, Article 2, which considered where and from whom women primarily learned their legends, and Article 3 which focused on the themes and characters appearing in legends told to women by other women as opposed to the material that appeared in the database as whole.

The third category of label also related to the world of the narrators, and focused on setting, in other words, where the legends took place in relation to those places that played a key role in the narrator's residential history. These labels were based on the proximity of the legend settings to the narrator's homes, including additional information about whether the legends took place at the childhood or adult homes of the narrators, or outside of the farmsteads themselves but still within their general home regions (adult or childhood), or elsewhere in Iceland.

Closely related was another category of labels relating to the spaces in which the legends occurred, which could vary from indoor and outdoor spaces on farms, to public spaces such as churches and markets, and the wilderness areas, which included not only the highlands but also the sea. Once again, these labels commonly overlapped as many legends naturally involved several

different types of spaces. These spatial aspects of the women's legends would go on to be one of the main features of Article 2 in the thesis.

Yet another small category of labels related to the time frames of the events described in the legends, if these could be established on the basis of the content of the legends themselves or the general context provided by the narrators. These labels involved two main types of time frame, the former relating to whether the legends took place during the narrator's lifetime or before it, while the latter included several subcategories based on different periods in the Icelandic historical past. These time frames only receive a brief mention in Article 3, as part of a discussion concerning different time frames and the kind of memory reflected in those legends told by men and women. As noted there, it was evident that gender did not seem to have any influence on this element of tradition.

For logical reasons, the largest label categories dealt with the content of the legends themselves, their themes and characters. The human character labels were focused on different social roles and other aspects, such as gender, occupation and nationality, and, when appropriate, relationships to the narrators, for example, whether they were mothers, fathers, male and female neighbours, spouses and so on. Of these labels, it soon became clear that gender, in other words whether the narratives included male or female characters, was one of the most important features, and this came to feature in Article 3 of the thesis. Yet another set of labels relating to character dealt with the types of supernatural character that appear in the legends, also noting the gender of these figures which included the hidden people (*huldufólk*), trolls and ghosts.

The most wide-ranging content-oriented labels nonetheless dealt with the themes of the different legends. As there was no way of knowing beforehand which themes would turn out to be most common, this category featured more than 220 labels, which, as has been noted above, were to a large extent based on the lists of key words originally established by those scholars developing the *Sagnagrunnur* database (see Chapter 3.1) and the closely related list that had been established by the sound archives of the Árni Magnússon Institute for the *Ísmus* database (see Chapter 3.2). Several additional theme labels were nonetheless added to this list at the very beginning of the labelling process in order to accommodate more effectively the experiences and roles of people living during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These included the various struggles endured by women and workers during this period which formed the subjects of several narratives and then wars (such as mentions of the First and the Second World Wars). In some cases, additional sub-labels were also created under those labels incorporated from the earlier-mentioned databases, as a means of narrowing down subjects, one good example being

“natural disaster”, incorporated from the *Sagnagrunnur* database, which needed several sub-labels defining the form of natural disasters described in the narratives. This labelling of the themes and characters encountered in the legends naturally offered excellent insights into which themes are most popular in a narrator’s legend repertoire. This subject features in Article 3 which examines the 25 most common themes encountered in the combined repertoires of the women in comparison to those told by their male peers.

As a means of giving further insight into the process of the labelling of the material carried out as part of this project, it might be useful to give one example. The example in question is a narrative told by Þórunn Ingvarsdóttir (see further figure 5.1 in next chapter), a midwife born in the island Grimsey in North Iceland in 1888. This narrative is a part of wider cluster of legends that recount her families’ encounters with the *huldufólk* believed to occupy various rocks in the neighbourhood of her childhood farm in Grímsey and goes like this:

Þegar það hurfu svona hlutir, þá var huldufólkinu kennt um. Og mamma mín, hún átti eina svuntu sem að hún lét á sig þegar hún fór í kirkju. Einu sinni ætlar hún að fara í kirkju en finnur hvergi nokkurstaðar svuntuna. Hún átti að vera í skúffu í kommóðunni, og samanbrotin og fín. Hún verður að hætta við kirkjuferðina bara fyrir þetta. Og næsta sunnudag, þá ætlar hún að fara í kirkju, og þá liggur svuntan samanbrotin í skúffunni. Og þá sagði hún: það hefur enginn gert þetta nema huldukona (SÁM 92/2690).

(When various things disappeared, the *huldufólk* were blamed for this. And my mother, she had one pinafore that she wore when she went to church. Once, she was going to go to church but could not find her pinafore anywhere. It was supposed to be in a drawer in the cupboard, folded up and fine. She had to abandon the church trip all because of this. And the next Sunday, when she was going to go to church, there was the pinafore folder in the drawer. And then she said that no one could have done this apart from a hulda-woman.

In the database, this legend receives a total of 12 labels. One concerns the form of the legend, classifying it as a second-hand memorat, since it is not clear from the narrative or other information given in the interview whether the informant herself was present during the event in question. Another label concerns the transmission of the narrative, labelling the previous narrator of the story as being the informant’s mother. The story also receives three labels concerning its spatial aspects, in other words, the contextual-based labels “narrator’s childhood region” and “the narrator’s childhood home” and finally the label “indoor”, highlighting the type of space emphasised in the legend-narrative itself. It then receives one label referring to the time in which the narrative takes place, here “during the narrator’s lifetime” since it appears to recount an event that took

place either after the narrator was born or at least very shortly before.⁹⁴ The rest of the labels describe the content of the narratives: it receives the markings “females”, “mothers” and “female *huldufólk*” noting the nature of characters involved, and the thematic labels “*huldufólk*,” “disappearing of things” and “clothing/ jewellery.”

It should be noted that the database created for the project included both occasional storytellers telling only one or few narratives, and those storytellers who can be termed exceptional legend tellers with large legend repertoires. If the bar for the category of “exceptional legend tellers” is set at those women who tell 20 legends or more, this particular category of narrators includes 25 women whose repertoires range from between 20 and 69 legends (after adjustments for retellings). While the biographical histories of these women and various aspects of the geographical and social conditions they experienced form an important part of the examinations that lie behind all of the articles, Article 4 is the one that places most emphasis on such contextual features as part of an examination carried out into three exceptional legend-tellers and their repertoires, which focuses directly on the role played by their home environments, experiences, and biographical histories. The aim of this article was to provide insight into the question of how and why certain women should have become active legend narrators in the Icelandic rural communities of the past at a time when women’s social roles were still predominantly structured around the domestic spaces of their homes. This brings us to another key aspect of the methodology employed in this project, in other words, the collection of information relating to the context of the storytelling, in other words, the construction of biographical histories and the choice of which elements were seen as being most important for contextual analyses.

5.2 Contextual Reconstruction

As most readers should be aware, all around the globe, women have tended to be marginal figures in many of the historical and genealogical sources that deal with the lives and conditions of common people in the past. As explored in Article 1 of the thesis, this element of marginalization throws an additional curve ball into the task of reconstructing features of the lives and experiences of women like those featured on in this thesis. As discussed in Article 1 and Chapter 3.3 of this thesis, the digitalization of various key genealogical sources such as censuses (see *Manntal.is*) that has been taking place in Iceland in recent years, as well as the creation of the online genealogical database *Islendingabok*

⁹⁴ The story takes place during the period when her mother, as an adult, has become a housewife in Grenivík in Grímsey, sometime between 1880 and 1890 according to the information found in censuses from these years, contained in the *manntal.is* database.

(based largely on information drawn from both church records and censuses), and the digitalization of Icelandic journals and newspapers in *Timarit.is* (which provides access to the numerous obituaries that have been written over time about common people), have made the task of compiling contextual data about individuals much easier than it would have been in the latter half of the twentieth century (when it would have been necessary to search for this material throughout reams of paper hidden away in the basement of the Icelandic National Archives and numerous other libraries). These sources nonetheless still have their limits, not least when it applies to the construction of women's biographic histories, as they tend to limit themselves to noting where women happened to have been living at random points in their lives, and are commonly mute about other key elements such as family and economic status, occupation and other elements that were so important for understanding women's lives and experiences. The interviews taken by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (see Chapter 3.2) thus found themselves becoming key sources for the reconstruction of many elements that are lacking in written sources. The problem is that the amount of detail provided by these interviews tends to vary greatly.


While gender is the most significant element in the analysis of material for this thesis, the number of female informants focused on and the variables within the group encouraged closer examination of several other elements, and not least the relationship between certain key aspects of the women's tradition and their different backgrounds and experiences. As can be seen from the example given below of the background material collected on one informant (see fig. 5.2 and Article 4 for further examples), particular attention was paid to family status, residential history (something that reveals geographical mobility) and occupation. Originally, economic class was considered as well, but defining this rather unstable and slightly confusing feature turned out to be somewhat problematic: indeed, the economic class of women in the past was largely dependent on that of their parents and husbands, elements which are often very difficult to establish on the basis of the historical sources, and problematised by the fact that if and when women became widows, they were usually expected to give up farming (see Chapter 4.1). These features meant that the economic status of women was comparatively changeable. As a result, the decision was taken to put this feature largely to one side when considering biographical context for the database. It is nonetheless explained and considered to some degree in the analysis of the three individual narrators and their repertoires in Article 4.

Deciding the family status of women was naturally much more straight forward and more easily reconstructed by means of the available sources. It was based on four categories which distinguished between married women, widows, women who were divorced, and single women. The project's focus on women

born and raised during the nineteenth century, and Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's overall emphasis on collecting material from senior citizens⁹⁵ naturally led to a high concentration of widows in the material: of the 200 women focused on in this project, 103 were widows at the time of the interviews, while 52 were married, four divorced and 41 single. The single women were of particular interest, as they lived somewhat different lives to the married women who, upon getting married, assumed the new roles of housewives in their households. As noted in Article 4, single women had a variety of different roles in the households of rural Iceland, which may well have influenced their storytelling. In most cases these women were childless, which may well have meant that their repertoires tended to be more shaped by storytelling for adults rather than for children. While the family status of the various women is touched on here and there in the articles, this is something that deserves more attention in the future.

As noted above, another important classification feature in the construction of the women's biographies was their occupation. As noted in Chapter 4.1, a range of new employment opportunities for women was coming into being in the early 1900s, although most women were expected to give up working when they married, something that meant that most married women in this study have come to be defined as housewives in the records. It is nonetheless evident that a considerable number of women did maintain jobs outside their households for most of their lives, and these occupations are of particular interest when considering why certain women might have come to be active participants in the Icelandic legend-telling tradition of the past. Midwives and schoolteachers were naturally more mobile members of the local communities. The potential influences of occupation and mobility on women's storytelling came to be a key feature in Articles 2 to 4 of the thesis.

⁹⁵ The fact that all of the informants were senior citizens naturally meant that age had to be eliminated as a form of classification.



Þórunn Ingvarsdóttir (1888-1981).

Biographical summary: Farmer's daughter, born and raised in Grenivík in Grímsey (Ey.). Studied needlework in Húsavík (N-Þing.) in 1905; farmhand in Kelduhverfi (N-Þing.) that same year; married housewife on the farm of Nýihóll in Hólsfjöll (N-Þing.) in 1913; husband Gunnar Jónasson (1890-1923) farmer in Nýihóll in Hólsfjöll; one daughter, Valgerður Jakobína born in 1917; student of midwifery in Reykjavík in 1922; widow in Hólsfjöll (N-Þing) in 1923; midwife in Seyðisfjörður (N-Múl.), Djúpivogur (S-Múl.) and Stöðvarfjörður (S-Múl.) in 1924-1936; living in Reykjavík in 1936; midwife in Laugarvatn (Árn.) in the late 1930s or early 1940s; then back in Reykjavík for the rest of her life.

Family status: Married sometime between 1906 and 1913, widow (1923) with one child. Occupation: Midwife. Mobility: 8. Number of Interviews: 12. Sources: SÁM 89/1751-53; 89/1757-58; 89/1779; 89/1930; 89/1960; 89/1983; 90/2132-33; 90/2140; 92/2648; 92/2690; 92/2769 and the databases *Mamntal.is* and of *Islendingabok.is*.

Summary of repertoire: 34 legends (6 retellings).

Types of narratives: Joculates: 2; belief legends: 4; historical legends: 2; memorates: 8; second-hand memorates: 12; secular personal experience narratives: 7; second-hand secular personal experience narratives: 5.

Notes on previous narrators: Mother x 7; father x 7; other female family member x 1; male neighbour x 3; female neighbour x 2.

Narrative settings/ places: Childhood region x 30; childhood household x 14; adult region x 7; adult household x 5; other places unconnected to residency x 4.

Time frames: Occurring in narrator's lifetime x 29; occurring before narrator's lifetime x 8 (nineteenth century x 8); undefinable timeframe x 3.

Types of spaces: Indoor x 22; farm's outdoor spaces x 10; public spaces x 1; wilderness: sea x 11; wilderness: mountain/highland/hills x 7; wilderness: islands x 2; wilderness: shores x 4.

Characters: Informant herself x 11; female characters x 11; male characters x 30; mother x 8; father x 15; grandfather x 2; female family members other than mothers/ grandmothers x 2; male family members other than father/ grandfather x 3; female neighbours x 3; male neighbours x 14; male children x 3; female children x 2.

Characters: Occupation⁹⁶/ nationality: Male farmhands x 1; female farmhands x 1; male fishermen x 5; priests x 3; male politicians x 1; male teachers x 1; male poets x 8; female poets x 1; male foreigners x 3; Englishmen x 1; female *huldufólk* x 4; male *huldufólk* x 4; supernatural animals x 1.

Themes: *Huldufólk* x 8; settlement of *huldufólk* x 5; belief in *huldufólk* x 1; things taken by *huldufólk* x 1; livestock of *huldufólk* x 1; the dead x 1; revenants and visions x 1; enchantments x 1; hidden treasure x 1; omens x 6; *fylgjur* and *hugir* x 1; visions x 1; dreams x 9; dream interpretation x 1; animals as evil spirits x 2; sea monsters x 2; charms x 1; power poets x 1; religion x 2; Christ x 1; Devil x 1; Hell x 1; prophecies x 1; clairvoyance x 2; illnesses x 4; deaths x 2; accidents x 2; medical cures x 1; bones x 2; graves x 1; wars x 2; place names x 1, crimes x 1; weather x 3; wild animals x 1; polar bears x 2; seals x 1; birds x 1; domestic animals x 10; journeys x 11; seafaring/ fishing x 9; commerce x 5; shepherds x 3; round-ups x 4; food and drink x 2; harvesting x 1; clothing/ jewellery x 2; board-games and chess x 3; cliff-hanging x 1; clever answers x 1; nicknames x 1; poetry x 9.

Figure 5.1. An example of an informant's biography and a summary of the features of their repertoire. Photo courtesy of Héraðsskjalasafn Austfirðinga.

One other type of mobility that came to be of particular interest in the reconstruction of the women's biographical histories challenged many of the earlier assumptions of scholars about the degree to which Icelandic women

⁹⁶ This category excludes the occupational roles of the farmer and his family, roles which were default in the Icelandic rural community of the time and therefore usually not noted or specified by the narrators.

were confined to one place for most of their lives. The review of biographical material carried out for this project showed that many women had quite a high degree of geographic mobility, changing their place of residence several times during their lifetimes. As the biographical accounts given on the tapes showed, some women had residential histories that covered almost every part of Iceland. For this reason, the biographical summaries of the women's lives assembled for this project all include the element of "mobility", something rated on a scale that notes how many new areas or regions the women moved to during their lives. This element of mobility is considered in some detail in Article 2 which, among other things, examines the relationship between geographical mobility (residential change) and sizes of repertoires. This particular article includes a comparison of the repertoires of those women who continued living as adults in the same region as that in which they grew up as children with those of women who lived as adults elsewhere. Article 4 than follows up on Article 2 in considering the degree to which the geographical scope of women's narratives reflects their place of residence. As will be further elaborated on in the conclusions of the thesis, the role played by women's special forms of geographical mobility evidently deserves more attention than it has earlier received, not least because it raises a wide range of new questions about the role of women in the migration of legends between different parts of Iceland in the past, and not least their involvement in shaping the legend tradition over the course of the previous centuries.

6 The Articles

We can now proceed to the four articles that make up the heart of this thesis, each of which deals with different aspects of the legend-telling traditions of Icelandic women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Please note that each article retains the house-style required by the journal in which it was published, and has its own separate bibliography (although a complete bibliography for the thesis as a whole is given at the end). Also note that the original Icelandic of quotes given here in translation can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of the thesis.

6.1 Gender, Legend, and the Icelandic Countryside in the Long Nineteenth Century: Re-engaging the Archives as a Means of Giving Voice to the Women of the Past

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Abstract

This article addresses the way in which, in spite of their accepted drawbacks (which often include an over-emphasis on male informants), folklore archives can be used to reconstruct the oral traditions of women from earlier times, especially when used in combination with other archival sources that are increasingly becoming available online. In Iceland, the recorded interviews by the folklore collector Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in the 1960s and the 1970s have proven to be particularly useful source for engaging with the reconstruction of women's narrative tradition in Iceland. These interviews not only provide us with women's narratives told in their own voices, but also yield a wide range of additional information about the context of women's storytelling within the rural society of previous centuries.

Introduction

Since the onset of the New Perspectives (see Parades and Baumann 1972) in folklore in the 1960s, a large number of folklorists have turned away from the folklore archives, assuming them to be of little value for contemporary folkloristics. Following up on the recent pioneering work of Timothy Tangherlini (1994; 2013) and others (see, for example, Gunnell 2016; Tangherlini 2016; and Trausti Dagsson¹ 2014), the present article aims to underline that a serious reassessment needs to be made of this assumption. It weighs up the various strengths and weaknesses of the folk narrative archives, arguing that such archives have been significantly undervalued, not least with regard to the information that they provide about gender-related questions. Focusing on the narrative traditions of women in the rural society of Iceland in the long nineteenth century (late nineteenth century and early 1900s) and the audiotaped folklore material collected by the Icelandic folklorist Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (1933-2005), this article stresses that broad generalizations about the nature of archives are both unhelpful and harmful to the subject. Archives take different forms, have different purposes, and are collected at different times in which different views of the roles of women exist. As this study demonstrates, there is little question that used in association with other sources (now becoming digitally accessible), the sound archives in particular have the potential to provide unique insights into female narrative traditions, shedding

new light on the role that gender can play in the stories that people tell. Indeed, it might be said that they provide a key to reopening the written archives, enabling us to delve even further back in time.

The Prospect of Burning the Icelandic Archives

The New Perspectives had assumed folklore could only be understood in the context of expressive performance (Abrahams 1971, 28; Ben-Amos 1972, 10; Honko 1989, 33) arguing that the old materials of the archives were merely ‘dead artifacts, arbitrarily limited texts, that were generated under rather special, mostly non-authentic circumstances’ (Honko 1989, 33). This performance-oriented approach to folklore has, of course, in many aspects been extremely beneficial to folkloristics over the last five decades and should be applauded for bringing new life into a discipline which, at the time, had become stagnated as a result of the rather repetitive text-oriented approach that had arisen partly as a result of the so-called ‘historical-geographical method’. Nonetheless, it might be said that the emphasis of many of the protagonists of the New Perspectives on redefining folklore as an academic field that *only* concerns itself with expressive aspects of cultural production (rather than suggesting that this is just one of many approaches that can be used in folklore) has given the New Perspectives a rather limiting, almost hegemonic character. It might be argued that they have left the field of folklore much narrower and more monolithic than it deserves to be (Gunnell et al. 2013).

The flat rejection of all archived material (whether it takes the form of written sources or sound recordings) as a valid source of study, and along with it the rejection of members of the pre-industrial ‘rural’ community as legitimate subjects for study,² can be regarded as having been particularly problematic for Icelandic folkloristics, and especially for anyone wishing to deal with oral narrative traditions. In Iceland, academic folkloristics had a particularly late start in the 1970s, following almost 120 years of extensive collection of folk narrative and other folklore (Gunnell 2000).³ This effort of collection had produced more than twenty (mostly multi-volume) collections of folk narratives (Steindór Steindórsson 1964; see also the *Sagnagrunnur* database), and about two thousand hours of recordings, which are preserved in the Sound Archives of The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2013). This is a rather impressive result for a nation which only reached a total population of 100,000 in the 1920s, at a time when the pre-industrial rural community and its culture, which produced the bulk of the written archival material, was coming to an end. Bearing in mind the criticism raised by the New Perspectives, Icelandic scholars were faced with a dilemma: What were Icelandic folklorists and students of folklore supposed to do with all

these narratives? Was it a collection of totally useless dead artefacts with no value whatsoever for modern folkloristics or was it possible that something new could still be learned from it? The answer was that instead of ‘burning the archives’⁴ and abandoning the community that lay behind them (in line with the New Perspectives), Icelandic folklorists in recent years have been engaged in digitizing it, in order to make it more easily accessible. One of the aims is to enable users to draw together different kinds of archival sources, thus allowing them to consider the narratives more effectively in its original sociocultural context (see, for example, Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2001; Gunnell 2016; Trausti Dagsson 2014).⁵

The process of digitizing the Icelandic archives (both the printed collections and the sound material in The Árni Magnússon Institute), in which the material is being reconnected to its original narrators and the geographical surroundings they both inhabited and discussed, has made it clear that far from being useless, these archived sources can still be very relevant. Furthermore, the digitization provides easy access to new aspects of folklore that were often marginalized in earlier scholarly traditions. One of these largely neglected subjects is the narrative tradition of women, and the consideration of the potential differences that might have existed between male and female narrative traditions, as well as other gender-related aspects, including what we might call ‘narrative spaces’ (Gunnell 2006). It is clear that archival material relates not only to the past, but also has a great deal to offer those interested in the present—not least from the viewpoint of its potential to establish which elements of women’s contemporary popular culture can be considered to be truly traditional in the sense of having roots in previous times and being transmitted from one generation to another.⁶

Naturally, this does not mean that the archives are free from issues that need to be addressed and explored before the data can be engaged with. Indeed, when dealing with traditional archival material collected from women, it is immediately evident that one is facing a number of largely unexplored difficulties that are even more relevant, ominous, and ongoing than the apparent lack of performance context.

Conflicting Opinions of the Archives

Of course, contemporary folklorists have some valid reasons to question the folk narratives collected during the long nineteenth century because of their apparent lack of contextual information. As folklorists reassessing this period of collecting in Northern Europe have shown, the focus of this earlier time was different to that of the present. In Iceland, as in Norway, Denmark, Scotland, and Ireland, the earliest collections of traditional narratives were characterized by the political agenda of the romantic nationalists, which stressed national

difference and identity, something closely associated with various struggles for political independence. This agenda showed little respect for regional difference within the emerging nation states or the individual artistic traits of the narrative tradition it was utilizing, presenting the narratives rather as the product of an abstract but homogeneous ‘national spirit’ (see, for example, Gunnell 2010).

The lack of respect for the creative and artistic roles of the individual narrators is seen, *inter alia*, in the ways individual oral narratives are sometimes blended with other oral and even written sources in the earliest printed collections.⁷ Furthermore, these collections commonly lack accompanying information about narrators’ names, locations where the story was collected, or the nature of the performance situation. Accordingly, little attention was paid to gender and gender-related questions.

While these criticisms about the early material in the archives have some validity, others that have been made in recent years are more questionable. This applies in particular to the common complaints that these printed collections and the archives behind them placed too much focus on rural society and too little on the urban, middle-class culture from which the elite collectors came, resulting in a one-sided view of the world (e.g. Abrahams 1993; Dundes 1980, 1-19). In Iceland, as in most of the other Nordic countries in the heyday of folk narrative collecting during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the situation was certainly much more complex than a simple urban/ rural dichotomy might suggest. For a start, it needs to be remembered that in Iceland, the process of industrialization and urbanization which gave birth to the modern middle class and larger urban settlements took place much later than in most other European countries. Even in 1890, only fourteen percent of Icelanders lived in settlements of fifty residents or more. This included the 3,886 people living in the capital, Reykjavík (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997, 86 and 90). Fishing villages only started to form, mostly around former commercial fishing stations, in the late nineteenth century. It was not until the 1894 abolition of the law against *þurrabúð* (residency at the seaside without livestock), which had restricted the number of residents in seaside villages and obliged all landless people to be employed on farms, that the first fishing settlements emerged (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1988, 138-41; Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 231-33). The larger Icelandic community thus remained truly rural until early 1900s. Outside Reykjavík, it lacked a real bourgeois middle class; indeed, even in the growing capital, most of the new elite had come from the countryside. The focus of social organization and social life was most definitely the rural *torfbær* (turf farmhouse), a house built mostly of turf, stones, and wood, with a communal space represented by the *baðstofa* (living room) in which the residents both slept and (in winter) worked (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1988, 138-42; Magnús Gíslason 1977). This belated urbanization

meant that in the case of Iceland at least, criticizing the focus on rural society in the archives is more than a little naïve. Until the 1930s or later, Iceland was at heart very much a rural society.

Another generalization that needs to be questioned is the idea that people living in rural society were illiterate. In Iceland, from an early date, literacy was relatively high among both the rural and the urban populations. Somewhere between ten and thirty percent of women and twenty to fifty percent of men are estimated to have been capable of writing in 1839 (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011, 107; Loftur Guttormsson 2008, 32-34). This means that many of the ‘rural folk’, especially men, were able to write their own narrative records in the early days of Icelandic folk narrative collecting, often including alongside their own, additional narratives known by their family members, as well as unrelated household members and neighbours (Werth 2015, 102-17). In short, it is also wrong to believe that all early records were made by outsiders unfamiliar with the culture and traditions of the subjects.

With regard to the other common accusation that folklore collection at this time was carried out by an outsider belonging to an urban elite, it needs to be remembered that while many of the early collectors of folk narratives in Iceland were certainly educated priests and other officials (Gunnell 2012), most of these people had grown up in the countryside, and many had also had to farm for a living. This meant that they had firm roots in the same rural community as their informants and thus knew their world.

Finally, as noted at the start, it is clear that not all archives can be tarred with the same brush. A case in point is the work of the Icelandic folklore collector Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson. Hallfreður’s comparatively late collection of folk narratives, starting in the 1960s, focused on Icelandic informants born in the nineteenth century who belonged to what can be termed as the last generation of the pre-industrial turf-house community—a world which finally disintegrated along with the social structure it created shortly before the Second World War (Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1971, 16). In addition to being the largest collection of oral narratives told in their own voices by narrators born and raised in the turf-house community, Hallfreður’s collection of audio recordings includes a great deal of invaluable contextual information on the narratives and storytelling in general, its settings, its audiences, and its relationship to working culture and the so-called Icelandic *kvöldvökur* (evening wakes).⁸ These aspects of the tradition appear to have been rarely noticed, recognized, or even deemed important enough to warrant a description by the collectors of oral narratives in the days when the turf-house community was still flourishing, partly because they were an integral part of the everyday rural life that was familiar to everyone. Hallfreður’s deliberate collection of contextual information about the

traditions and life of this vanishing community actually underlines the value of what Icelanders call the ‘the visitor’s eye’ (*gests auga*). Another valuable feature of Hallfreður’s work is that he was much more interested in recording stories told by women than his predecessors, thereby giving a more complete image of the Icelandic narrative tradition of the recent past.

Addressing Gender in the Icelandic Archives

The new understanding of ‘the folk’ suggested by Alan Dundes was designed to liberate folklorists from seeing popular culture as being limited to the products of a monolithic homogeneous group of people living in the rural community, thus opening up the potential for focusing on other groups (Dundes 1980, 1-19). One of the ‘new’ folk groups created by this liberation was women, who became increasingly popular subjects of folklorists in the 1970s and onwards. This popularity appeared not least in works of those folklorists, among them many feminists, who were dealing with expressive performance, cultural production, and the meaning of folklore from the perspective of gender, underlining, among other things, various kinds of gender-related differences.⁹ In line with the New Perspective stress on living folklore, most of these studies have tended to be ‘now’-oriented and fieldwork-based, focusing on women living in contemporary communities rather than in historical communities. These studies have been tremendously important in placing more focus on women’s experiences, their genres and topics of narration, and the variety of women’s expressions of folklore in contemporary communities. They have simultaneously made more apparent the general marginalization of women and of questions of gender in earlier folklore scholarship, and the consequent large gap in our knowledge of the potential roots of modern female traditions—a gap that clearly needs to be filled. Instead of simply consigning the apparently faulty archives to the rubbish dump, however, new gender-based analyses of the folk narrative archives should start by identifying how and where women’s traditions have been affected by the male-dominated process of writing and editing. They can then focus on those cases where women’s traditions and voices are still to be found, helping readers understand how these materials should be read, interpreted, and utilized.

The folk narrative archives are, admittedly, not always easy to work if one wishes to explore women’s traditions because women were commonly marginalized in the very processes of collecting that lay behind the creation of the archive. The new, digital Icelandic folk legend database *Sagnagrunnur* offers a clear illustration of this problem, containing at present over ten thousand legends documented and published by Icelandic collectors of folk narratives between the mid nineteenth century and the mid twentieth. Of the

nineteen collections currently in the database, only one was collected by a woman, the novelist Torfhildur Hólm (1845-1918), and published only in 1962, many years after her death. It is noteworthy that very few female names can be found among the lists of the local people who recorded folk narratives for the other eighteen collections summarized in the database,¹⁰ perhaps highlighting the fact that literacy was much lower among women at this time, but also that there was less interest in their narratives. Indeed, of the roughly 6,300 legends in the database that are attributed to named storytellers, only 1,550 appear to have been told by females. Furthermore, on average, women tended to constitute less than a third of named narrators in most Icelandic collections.¹¹ Interestingly enough, Torfhildur Hólm's collection (1962) is the only one in which named female narrators outnumber the males—a clear demonstration of the influence of gender on the representation of narrative traditions and of the fact that the percentage of recorded female narratives might not reflect the situation in real life.

Another common problem associated with working with these archives relates to the way in which women from this period have tended to be presented in Icelandic historical and autobiographical sources that ought to provide valuable contextual information for female narrative traditions. Until the latter half of the twentieth century, in spite of having attained the vote in 1915 and full rights to education and to hold office in 1911,¹² it is noteworthy how women seem to have lacked accredited agency in most Icelandic biographical and genealogical works, such as *Íslenzkar æviskrár* (Biographies of Icelanders) (Páll Eggert Ólafsson 1948-1976), *Merkir Íslendingar* (Noteworthy Icelanders) (Guðni Jónsson 1962-1967) and *Strandamenn* (The people of the Strandir area) (Jón Guðnason 1955). When women appear at all in such works, it is usually in the role of wives, daughters, and mothers of male subjects. In order to find information about them, the researcher usually has to start by figuring out the names of their husbands or fathers, data which is rarely provided in the original folk narrative records on those occasions when female storytellers are named. When the females are eventually located in these sources, the information about them still tends to be limited and oriented towards their roles as wives, mothers, or daughters rather than as active agents of their own history.

Fortunately, more recent historical sources show more respect for the agency of women in the pre-modern rural society of Iceland, encouraging new attempts to be made at reconstructing the nature of their social context and surroundings. These new sources make such research less problematic than it was during the earlier days of archive-based folk-narrative research. Indeed, scholars are beginning to return to the archives after having abandoned them on the grounds of lack of context in the 1960s and 1970s. The appearance in Iceland in the early 2000s of *Íslendingabok.is* (see *Archival Sources*), an online

database containing genealogical information about the Icelandic population, which reaches as far back as the settlement in the ninth century, has been particularly helpful in this regard. This applies especially in the cases where the information given in the folk narrative records is sufficient to help find the location of female narrators in the database. For folklorists working on female and male storytellers in the older Icelandic archives, the digitization of the census archives (including data from 1703 to 1922), which became searchable online in the early 2000s, has been a godsend, especially when other historical sources fail.¹³ For those working on the reconstruction of the background and social history of Icelandic storytellers in more recent times, obituaries have often turned out to be one of the best sources of information. The practice of writing obituaries in newspapers about common people dates back to the 1950s in Iceland (Annadís Gréta Rúðolsdóttir 1997; Koester 1995) and tends to give both men and women agency, although obituaries about men typically take up more space in the newspapers on average. These obituaries are also at last also freely available online at The National and University Library of Iceland. They provide invaluable information about the life histories of storytellers of the long nineteenth century, often giving more personal accounts of their lives than those found in official sources, including remarks about their skills, including storytelling. Obituaries of this kind are particularly useful with regard to those storytellers born late in the nineteenth century who were recorded for the Sound Archives and who represent what might be termed the last generation of the turf-house community. This data certainly makes compiling contextual material on more recent storytellers easier.

The same applies to the more systematic and professional approach to folk narrative collecting used by collectors in the second half of the twentieth century, which has left Icelandic folklorists with better, wider-ranging sources for using narrator-based approaches to narrative traditions than those that came from the earlier period. This applies, among other things, to the gender deficit in the pool of informants, obvious in the earlier Icelandic folk narrative archives, but much less apparent in the more recent Sound Archives of The Árni Magnússon Institute. Nonetheless, the sound files also bear some marks of having come into existence in the male-dominated scholarly environment that was still evident in the 1960s, when gender had yet to establish itself as an important and independent category of experience and research.

Prior to 1980, apart from Torfhildur Hólm, the musicologist Helga Jóhannsdóttir (1935-2006) was the only female folklore collector in Iceland to collect material systematically among informants born and raised in the turf-house community, mostly focusing on folk music and poetry. As with Torfhildur, Helga appears to have had a greater appreciation of female informants than her male peers; her poll of recorded informants includes males

and females in about equal numbers. In comparison, the most productive male collector for the Sound Archives, the aforementioned Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, appears to have been somewhat gender-biased, males constituting about sixty percent of his informants. Despite this imbalance, Hallfreður's collection of audio-recordings remains the best available source for dealing with historical Icelandic folk narrative traditions, even from the viewpoint of gender focused on here. This is essentially thanks to his habit of recording as much of his informants' repertoires as possible, his professionalism with regard to interview technique, and his enduring curiosity about the culture of the turf-house and narrative traditions of all kinds.

Another problem associated with using archival sources to reconstruct the nature of women's narrative traditions relates to the way male collectors tended to treat female narratives in the process of documentation, leading one to suspect a comparatively high degree of marginalization of narratives and parts of narratives that might reflect the specific experiences, roles and world views of women.¹⁴ Although questions regarding the authenticity of texts are always relevant when working with folk narratives in the archives from a narrator's perspective, the comparative absence of women in the process of documentation in Iceland naturally adds an additional layer to this problem. As noted elsewhere, men and women sometimes have different understandings of which elements of the narratives are important and should be included in their retelling or editing. Women's roles and points of view are sometimes dismissed when the narratives get re-oriented by men (Júlíana Magnúsdóttir 2010, 168-71). As many studies have shown, men also appear to have a tendency to ignore women and women's roles in their narratives (and versions of narratives), while women appear to have greater appreciation of roles of both sexes in their narratives, including male and female characters in equal proportions (with regard to this point, see Holbek 1987, 168; Júlíana Magnúsdóttir 2008, 172-75; Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011, 148-51; and Tangherlini 1994, 147). These problematic characteristics, however, do not mean these texts should be circumvented. Little else is available and it is safe to assume that even though some elements of women's narratives may have been tainted by the male-dominated process of writing and editing, many others have clearly survived. Despite their shortcomings, these admittedly limited sources still have great value as sources, especially as new theories, new methods, new digitized databases, and perhaps more enlightened fieldwork supply us with new questions, new approaches, and new means of understanding.

There is little question that, as noted above, the later sound recordings of the last generation of the Icelandic turf-house community from the 1960s provide a much more complete picture of the narrative tradition of Icelandic women born in the late nineteenth century than the extant printed material and the written

records that lie behind it. More importantly, they contain the first major collection of folk narratives to be told by Icelandic women born and raised in the turf-house community in their own words and voices, less affected by previously male-dominated practices of interpretation and reorientation. The audio-recordings of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson alone include hundreds of hours of folklore data recorded from Icelandic women, including oral narratives told by more than 230 women who were born in this period and come from all of Iceland's twenty-three counties. The subjects of their stories range from secular topics such as childbirth, midwifery, tragic accidents, witty poets, and crimes to supernatural topics such as dreams and omens, encounters with the dead, and interactions with the *huldufólk* (lit. 'hidden people').¹⁵ Although recorded in the twilight between the decline of the pre-modern community of the turf-house and the upsurge of the urbanized modern community, these audiotaped interviews offer a unique insight into broad scope of subjects related to women's traditions in the long nineteenth century. Since they deal with a similar society to that which provided the written sources, it is probable that they can also be used to provide some of the context that is missing in those sources, restoring some of their value as a means of studying women's narrative traditions in the more distant past.

A Case for Reconstruction?

It has been argued above that beneath the apparently male-dominated Icelandic legend tradition of former times it is still possible to unearth and examine various aspects of a particular tradition of legends told by and passed on by Icelandic women in the rural community. If that is the case, there is good reason to attempt the reconstruction of such a tradition from the material that remains and examine it from the perspective of gender. Focusing on the legends of a large group of female informants in the Sound Archives, one can make an effective attempt to rebuild the social context, history, and surroundings of the narratives with the help of the range of historical sources now available in digitized form. This 'thick corpus' can then be considered alongside the particular characteristics that become apparent from examining the nature of the individual repertoires and the narratives contained in them. Further depth is provided by the women's personal descriptions of the context in which these stories were once narrated and details of where the narratives were learned, all of which were also collected by Hallfreður. All of this can be compared to the conclusions of past and present folklore scholarship with regard to female narrative traditions known elsewhere. Gradually we find ourselves uncovering a wide range of new gender-related features relating to the Icelandic legend tradition of the long nineteenth century.

As has already been demonstrated by scholars such as Holbek (1987) and Tangherlini (1994 and 2013) examining the Danish narrative tradition, the data stored in the folklore archives, when used in tandem with other archival materials and records, offers a range of opportunities for approaching oral narrative traditions from a much broader contextual perspective than that which can be attained from individual fieldwork case studies alone (on digital archives, ‘big data’, and the future of folklore, see Tangherlini 2016). Such research into narrative tradition nonetheless naturally depends heavily on the existence of a wide-ranging and coherent archive, offering a broad range of narrators from particular communities and particular periods in time, as well as extensive and holistic documentation of these narrators’ lives and repertoires. One also needs a good amount of context-related information (relating to both the tradition itself and the social circumstances that surrounded it). There is little question that such a holistic archive is available in Iceland in the form of the sound recordings of women’s narratives made by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson.

Among the many contextual features that Hallfreður’s recordings offer is valuable insight relating to the process of legend sharing and narration, its setting in time and space, and the degree to which narratives play off the surroundings and draw on different forms of social interaction. Admittedly, the audio-records in question are not ‘authentic’ oral performances made *in situ* in the rural community of the nineteenth century and early 1900s, something regularly deemed to be the Holy Grail of folklore (see, for instance, Honko 1989, 33).¹⁶ All the same, there is no question that Hallfreður’s recordings portray on another level a ‘real’ narrative performance, in this case one that takes place in the presence of a folklore collector and other audience members in narrators’ homes and various old people’s homes in Iceland during the 1960s and 1970s. The collector’s preoccupation with the culture and traditions of the turf-house community his informants grew up in regularly encourages him to request (and often gain) invaluable information about traditions surrounding the performances of the texts, the ways in which they were received, and the surroundings in which they were told. As has been demonstrated by a number of folklorists (for instance, Herranen 1989; Holbek 1987; Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011; Tangherlini 1994 and 2013), such material added to other historical, cultural, and philological sources, and our experience of contemporary traditions, can help us build up a thick corpus and help us reconstruct an understanding of how the narratives in question might once have functioned in live performance (Gunnell 1995 and 2016; Tangherlini 2003).¹⁷ This approach, which goes some way towards meeting the demands of the New Perspectives for performance analysis, has been termed ‘performance archaeology’ by Terry Gunnell. He argues that such approaches allow earlier records of written texts to also be analysed as living performances in context:

As researchers, we know what the texts would have sounded like, . . . we can find out a great deal about where the written recordings were made, who the storytellers were, who their audiences are likely to have been, and where their performances are likely to have usually taken place in space. We can stand in these settings. We can listen to the acoustics. We can consider the probable lighting, smell and accompanying sounds. And we can apply our own experience and the fieldwork notes of our colleagues to these facts. (Gunnell 2013, 176)

If such a restoration (Schechner 2006, 34-35) can be carried out from the written sources, one can imagine how much more can be done with the records in the Sound Archive.

Among the many things that such analysis of archival materials can help reveal is the striking spatial aspect of women's legend tradition in Iceland. The material sheds interesting light on the apparent geographical limitations of the tradition, and its clear relationship with the limited surroundings that women inhabited in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s. Among other things, the absence of villages in Iceland and the environmental constraints this imposed on communication seems to have had an interesting effect on the legend tradition when viewed from a gender perspective. It seems evident that these conditions confined women, their narrative creativity, and their storytelling tradition to the private sphere of the home and even the farm's living room (*baðstofa*), which was the principal setting for legend sharing in Iceland.¹⁸ The following example taken from the interviews recorded by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson gives some sense of the setting, atmosphere, and nature of the storytelling sessions in which women took leading roles:

The women who were living with us, because there were two families living on the same farmstead, they told us stories. There was one woman in particular who told us stories, always at twilight, in the evening. And all of us children sat around her in the bed, all around her we were, swallowing up all of these stories. And some of them were ghost stories, too, and we didn't dare go off walking around the house, as people put it, because we were afraid of the dark. (SÁM 89/2022)¹⁹

Other accounts highlight some of the social aspects involved in women's legend telling, as well as their setting, as can be seen in this prologue to a legend told about the *huldufólk* by another of the women interviewed by Hallfreður:

She was called Elin Bárðardóttir. . . . She hadn't studied to become a midwife, she was unlearned, but very understanding of both people and animals. She was a really sensible woman, I had a sense that she had some kind of magical knowledge. . . . I don't know if she was clairvoyant, but I think she had a sense of what was going to happen in the future, through her sense for people. It didn't need to be because of clairvoyance. But it was such fun to listen to the old woman telling stories. Everything was so logical in the way she put it.

But I was of course so young, I wasn't much more than five and a half when I remember this event taking place, when she helped my mother give birth, and then I listened to various stories that she told, although I've forgotten them all now for the main part. . . What she told us kids were mainly legends of outlaws, *huldufólk*, and trolls, and wonder tales. And she steadfastly believed that the *álfar* [elves] existed. She told my mother this story when we were listening . . . (SÁM 88/1564)²⁰

The reconstruction and examination of legend traditions and their transmission naturally involves considering a wide range of other context-related factors over and above the obvious considerations of temporal and spatial settings. Even before a narration takes place, an active participant in any oral tradition will have selectively chosen and incorporated stories into his or her repertoire in line with his or her subjective interests, experience, and world view, and the interests of the listeners, practising and developing his or her art by means of telling and retelling the stories in question (Schechner 2006, 225-26.) If successful in this, the person will amass a relatively large repertoire of oral narrative and over time become an active participant in the tradition (see, for instance, Siikala 1990, 14-35). My own recent research into the legend repertoires of the larger group of active female participants in the Icelandic Sound Archive has been similarly revealing. It is evident that the existing archival data allows one to establish those traits of the legend tradition that are fundamentally characteristic of females, as well as interesting variations within the group relating to different social, economic, and geographical surroundings, all of which reveal the different roles that gender played in the creation, function, and transmission of women's legend traditions in the pre-industrial rural community.²¹ It might be said that this wide-ranging archival material has particular uses for those wishing to deal with narrative from a broader perspective. This applies especially in Iceland, where both the material and the names of the informants in the archives are a matter of public record. This feature naturally allows for more extensive analysis than can be carried out with modern fieldwork where researchers are often bound to ensure the anonymity of informants.²²

It should be borne in mind that the legend texts themselves naturally almost always provide some implicit context that can provide a great deal of information about the storyteller, the tradition, and its characteristics. This can be extrapolated in spite of the fact that we have little or no direct knowledge about the immediate performance context. Indeed, it might be said that from a gender perspective, the name and gender of the narrators are often enough, although naturally the more background information that can be gleaned about the narrators, the better. With regard to the legends told by the women of the Icelandic turf-house community, a substantial amount of implicit contextual information can be gathered from consideration of the choices of the themes and

characters they introduce; their choices of genres and subgenres; and the references made to space and time as part of their communicative and cultural memories (to use Jan Assmann's terms) expressed in narrative form (Assmann 2008). With regard to the Icelandic tradition, these textual characteristics are particularly interesting when it comes to the question of the long-term survival of essentially female themes and subgenres within the tradition.

Conclusions

Although there is no question that the nature of archival data can pose problems with regard to recovering and reconstructing women's legend traditions, it is evident that some types of archival material, such as that collected in Iceland by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, can also offer invaluable insights. Careful examination of these records in the light of other contextual data actually provides highly useful information on a wide range of subjects, including various topics relating to women's legend traditions, which this present study has focused on.

The fact that women in general, and the subject of gender itself, did not become a serious object of research until after the folklore archives and the pre-modern rural communities had lost their appeal to folklorists in the 1970s, has resulted in a void in our knowledge of the narrative traditions of women in previous centuries. This void has not only left modern folklorists with a somewhat incomplete model of the earlier traditions of women, but also with problems regarding establishing which elements of women's contemporary narrative traditions can be viewed as 'traditional' in the sense of having passed from one generation to another over time. There is little question that much of the material needed to address the question of these traditions is already available in the archives if we know where and how to look for it. The attempted reconstruction of women's traditions on the basis of archival sources that has been encouraged above has obvious value, not only for historians looking back at women's roles in the pre-modern rural community, but also for modern folklorists dealing with women's contemporary traditions. Indeed, this material supplies a much needed temporal dimension to the types of narratives that are still told today. Reconstructions of this kind have the potential to shed an important new spotlight onto previously marginalized traditions that belonged to no less than half of the community at large. They also provide a key to opening up and understanding other earlier records contained in the written archives.

Notes

¹ This article follows the Icelandic custom of citing Icelandic authors by both first name and last name (patronym) and listing them alphabetically under their first names in the bibliography.

² One common criticism of folklorists about the material in the folk archives was that it had been collected by elite urban collectors obsessed with the traditions of illiterate rural people, who were often viewed as monolithic and homogeneous (see Dundes 1980, 2).

³ Although the teaching of folkloristics did not start until the 1970s, some notable works were written earlier by scholars of other disciplines, such as Jónas Jónasson (1856-1918), *Íslenzkir þjóðhættir* [Icelandic folk life] (1934); and Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1899-1984), *Verzeichnis Isländischer Märchen-Varianten* [List of Icelandic wonder tale variants] (1929) and *The Folk-Stories of Iceland* (2003).

⁴ This suggestion was sarcastically made by Wilgus (1973, 244-45) in his early critique of the New Perspectives.

⁵ Printed folk narrative collections have been digitized in *Sagnagrunnur* and sound material in The Árni Magnússon Institute's Icelandic music collection, *Ísmús*. Other archives relevant to folklore and folk history digitized in recent years include *Sarpur* (Consortium of Icelandic Libraries) which, among other things, includes the answers to various questionnaires about folk life from individuals born in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; *Timarit.is* (The National and University Library of Iceland), which contains digitized Icelandic newspapers and journals from the early 1800s to modern times; and *Manntal* (part of The National Archive of Iceland), an Icelandic census database, including census information from 1703 to 1920.

⁶ With regard to the notion of tradition in folkloristics and the value of the past tradition for contemporary folkloristics see, for example, Oring (2012, 220-39).

⁷ Examples of such mixing of oral narratives by two or more narrators, as well as various written sources, can be found in the collection of Jón Árnason. See, for example, the legend 'Kirkjubæjarklaustur' (1956-1961, vol. 2, 76-78 and 569) and comments on its sources. Another Icelandic collector notorious for this kind of mixing of sources is Sigfús Sigfússon (1855-1935), who, in his introduction, admits that he has learned and retold the stories himself, only giving the story as told by others if he thinks it was presented well enough. He adds that the art of narration has deteriorated in his neighbourhood (Sigfús Sigfússon 1982, xxvii). Naturally, none of this bodes well for the authenticity of his material.

⁸ *Kvöldvökur* (pl.) were traditional evening gatherings, which took place in the communal living space of the *baðstofa* (living room) on farms during winter evenings in the pre-industrial rural community, where people took part in various cultural practices such as storytelling, reading aloud, and reciting poetry (see Magnús Gíslason 1977).

⁹ See, for example, Apo, Nenola, and Stark-Arola (1998); Bennett (1989 and 1999); Dégh (1995, 62-69); Dundes (2002, 76-94); Farrer (1975); Haase (2004); Hollis, Pershing, and Young (1993); Jordan and Kalcik (1985); Locke, Vaughan, and Greenhill (2009); and Simpson (1991).

¹⁰ See, for example, Jón Árnason (1954-1961, 6: 49-50); Ólafur Davíðsson (1935-1939, 1: xvi-xvii); and Þorsteinn M. Jónsson, (1978-1979, 1: xix-xxvii). Only five women can be found in the list of 127 recorders of legends in the collection of Jón Árnason, none among the thirty in the collection of Ólafur Davíðsson and nine of 123 in the collection of Þorsteinn M. Jónsson. This however, does not hold true everywhere in Europe. As David Hopkin has shown in a recent study (Hopkin 2017), certain British women played a prominent role in collecting folklore in the nineteenth century, but there seems little question that these were exceptions.

¹¹ See, for example, Jón Árnason (1954-1961, 6: 45-48); Ólafur Davíðsson (1935-1939, 1: xviii-xix); and Þorsteinn M. Jónsson (1978-1979, 1: xxix-xxxviii). Named female narrators constitute about thirty percent of the narrators in Jón Árnason's collection collected during the latter half of the nineteenth century, eighteen percent in Ólafur Davíðsson's collection from around 1900; and thirty percent in that of Þorsteinn M. Jónsson collected during the first half of the twentieth century.

¹² Women did, however, get limited political rights in 1882 when single women and widows twenty-five and older, who ran their own farms or managed their own finances, gained the right to vote at municipal level. In 1908 married women in Reykjavík and Hafnarfjörður also gained the right to vote at a municipal level. The right of women to vote in parliamentary elections, gained in 1915, was tarnished by the fact that only women forty and older were allowed to vote. Icelandic women did not get full political rights until 1920 when franchise limits on women's voting rights were abolished. On women's liberation in Iceland, see, for example, Auður Styrkársdóttir and Kristín Ástgeirsdóttir (2005); and Gunnar Karlsson (2000, 273-79).

¹³ Icelandic legends tend to be localized around the narrators' homes in terms of their setting (almost always given in Icelandic legends) which makes the census, a database searchable by people's names, addresses, or regions a particularly useful tool. It is also worth noting that this database provides more information about social status and personal life than *Islendingabok.is* since it provides information about place of birth, marital status, position within the household of narrators and also other individuals (children, parents, farmhands, and/or paupers) living on the farm.

¹⁴ This suspected marginalization of material representing women's roles and experiences is often clearly reflected in the notes written by earlier collectors about what kind of material they felt needed to be collected. Even if it was unconscious, it is certainly apparent in Jón Árnason's call for popular antiquities, published in 1859. His bias towards male storytellers and the kind of narratives they told is clear in this call, which directly requests legends of famous *male* heroes (summed up in Gunnell 2010), giving little consideration to

heroic women or their roles. The material published by Jón Árnason, along with his thematic organization, would go on to have considerable influence on later collectors, as was noted by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (1983, 18), raising suspicions that the same inherited male bias might still be found material collected in contemporary times.

¹⁵ The Icelandic *álfar* (literally ‘elves’) or ‘hidden people’ are the local equivalent of the fairies (see Ármann Jakobsson 2015; Gunnell 2007 and 2017).

¹⁶ As noted by Ward (1990, 34-36), documentation of live performance situations is hard to come by in praxis. He points out that the Performance School’s notions of oral performance did not correspond to the reality of folklore, but rather were ‘steeped in a romantic vision of storytellers who were conceived as the bearers of an exclusively oral tradition which they – in delightful storytelling events – passed on to other to keep the tradition alive’ (Ward 1990, 35).

¹⁷ Support for this (and further information) is available in the form of the questionnaires in the National Museum (Þjóðminjasafn) on folkways in the late nineteenth century and former half of the twentieth century, especially *Spurningaskrá 7* (survey no. 7, on the evening wakes), which are now also available online at <http://sarpur.is/>.

¹⁸ As noted above, the living room (*baðstofa*) was a shared communal space in which the residents of the farm slept, and during the winter worked. It was the warmest and most spacious room on the farm, often built on top of the cowshed for warmth in winter. The *baðstofa* was also the setting of the *kvöldvökur* (wakes) during the winter. Before the wakes, at twilight, when the people who had been working outside all day took naps in their beds and before the oil lamps were lit, one corner of the *baðstofa* would be the setting of the low-key oral storytelling session referred to as *rökkrin* (‘the twilights’) in which children, teenagers, and other residents of the farm who did not need to rest were told stories in order to keep them from disturbing those sleeping. This storytelling session was usually carried out by women (the housewife, female farmhands, or paupers) or old people of both sexes. (With regard to the space of the turf-house, its working culture, and occasions of storytelling, see Magnús Gíslason 1977). It is perhaps worth noting that in Iceland this non-gendered setting has early roots, reaching back to the Middle Ages. This was from the start the ‘public sphere’ in which stories were told. There is no evidence of any ‘degeneration’ of the tradition from male to female storytellers, as suggested for some other cultures (see, for example, the model suggested in Holbek 1987, 154-57).

¹⁹ *SÁM* sound file 89/2022 EF: Interview with Kristín Friðriksdóttir by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, 1969. All translations from Icelandic sources in this article are by Terry Gunnell.

²⁰ *SÁM* sound file 88/1564 EF: Interview with Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, 1967.

²¹ Although the women share the characteristics of having been born and raised in the rural community of the turf-house farms, they cannot be treated as a

monolithic group. Their geographical environment, socio-economic status, and occupations (many of the most active narrators being midwives and nurses) are diverse, as I hope to show in future articles.

²² This is certainly the case in Iceland where it is often difficult to ensure the anonymity of narrators if only because of the small size of the population, and not least in the sparsely populated areas outside Reykjavík. Since legends often tend to mention place names and other aspects of the narrators' immediate surroundings, maintaining complete anonymity of the narrators is extremely difficult, if not impossible, not least in studies dealing with legend tellers and their traditions.

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Biographical Note

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6.2 Women of the Twilight: The Narrative Spaces of Women in the Icelandic Rural Community of the Past

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Abstract:

The article deals with some of the spatial features of women's storytelling traditions in rural Iceland in late nineteenth century and early 1900s. The study is based on audiotaped sources collected by folklore collector Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in the 1960s and 1970s from informants born in rural Iceland in the later part of the nineteenth century. The main focus of the article is on 200 women that figure in these sources and their legend repertoires, although a small sample group of 25 men and their repertoires will also be examined to allow comparison. The article discusses what these sources tell us about women's mobility and the social spaces they inhabited in the past. It goes on to consider the performance space of the Icelandic turf farm in which women's storytelling took place from the perspective of gender. After noting how the men and women in the sources incorporated different kinds of spaces into their legends, it takes a closer look at how the spatial components of legends told by the women reflect their living spaces, experiences, and spheres of activity. The article underlines that while women in the Icelandic rural community were largely confined to the domestic space of the farm (something reflected in the legends they told), they were neither socially isolated nor immobile. They also evidently played an important part in oral storytelling in their communities, often acting as the dominant storytellers in the performance space of the old turf farm.

Keywords: legends, narratives, performance, space, storytelling, the rural community of the past, women

In recent years, folklorists interested in folk narratives have started to find their way back to the folk narrative archives relating to the rural past, reviewing them with new approaches and methods in mind (see, e.g., Gunnell 2016, 2018; Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir¹ 2011; Skott 2008; Tangherlini 1994, 2013). These same folk narrative archives were largely abandoned by most folklorists in the latter half of the twentieth century in line with the new approaches in folkloristics which placed more value on the living performance event and fieldwork rather than archived texts, and on urbanised contemporary communities rather than on the rural communities of the past (see Gunnell et al. 2013). The general assumption was that the material contained in the archives represented "dead" text that had

been collected as part of the faulty fieldwork efforts of the past, and that the apparent lack of contextual material made interpretation both questionable and unfeasible (Déggh 2001: 25; Honko 1989: 33). As I have argued elsewhere (Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir 2018), and will demonstrate in the following article, the folk narrative archives in question nonetheless represent vital sources that can still be used for a variety of purposes, and not least as part of the reconstruction of certain aspects of narrative tradition that were given comparatively little consideration in previous scholarship such as questions regarding gender and gender-roles and their influence on the formation and performance of women's narrative repertoires and narrative "spaces" that they reflect.

One aspect of this marginalisation of gender in earlier scholarship is the implicit assumption that rural women in the past were socially isolated, firmly rooted in the private domestic spaces of their homes, which may have led to their being assigned a secondary status in certain oral storytelling traditions. In Iceland at least, the oral archive materials demonstrate that this notion is oversimplified, not least with regard to women's geographical mobility in the past and the domestic space they inhabited on the farm. In Iceland, this domestic space was evidently a place where the private and the public effectively merged. It was also the centre of cultural production.

The key sources of my discussion will be the folk narrative repertoires of 200 Icelandic women born in the last decades of the nineteenth century, who were interviewed and recorded on tape by folklore collector Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (1933–2005) in the 1960s and the 1970s. This material now forms part of the Folklore Audio Collection of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Icelandic Studies.² This source material, which has its roots in the pre-industrial rural community of the Icelandic turf farm, includes not only oral narratives, but also a wide range of information regarding both the wider social context of women's storytelling in the past and the performance context in which their storytelling took place. As the focus of Hallfreður Örn's collecting efforts was predominantly on narrators born during the nineteenth century, his material effectively overlaps in time with that found in the written folk narrative archives (from the mid-nineteenth century onwards). His work thus provides valuable opportunities to fill in some of layers of context that are often missing in the written collections.

In this article I will, among other things, make some comparisons between the roles played by men and women as narrators on the Icelandic farms, as well as demonstrating some of the key differences that existed with regard to the performance contexts surrounding their performances. The article will start by considering the wider geographical space of Iceland and women's mobility

within it, considering the roles of women as storytellers and the formation of their repertoires. The second part of the article will then deal with the actual performance space on the turf farm and differences that existed between men's and women's narrative performances. The last part will consider the narrative spaces reflected in the legends³ told by the women compared with those found in men's narratives, demonstrating how women evidently incorporated their living spaces and experiences into their narratives.

The Wider Geographical Space: Women in Iceland

In Iceland, the pre-industrial rural community was largely characterized by a lack of infrastructure, unpredictable nature, dispersed settlements and an absence of what has become known in modernity as public spaces. Until the early 1900s, the farm was the centre of both social organization and cultural production and to a large extent a self-sufficient economic unit. The farm's social organization was thus not only shaped by socially constructed gender roles and norms, but also by particularly harsh environmental conditions that placed restrictions on social interactions outside the realm of the farm for most of its inhabitants and for women in particular. In this community, men were almost exclusively responsible for managing the external affairs of the farm and undertaking seasonal travels, like those relating to fishing and commerce. The general confinement of women to the domestic space of the farm raises some important questions about their key role in the transmission of oral narratives in Iceland. Did the more limited mobility of women in the past mean that they played a lesser part in the migration of oral stories?

It is important to first address the common assumption that in the past women did not generally travel between communities as much as men in Iceland. This argument needs some refining. Until the early 1900s, so-called *orlofskonur* (holiday women) were common guests on Icelandic farms during the autumn, just before the cold winter set in. These were predominantly older women who had limited household responsibilities or had passed them on to younger women in their households, leaving themselves with spare time to travel and socialize with relatives, friends, neighbours, and their former masters. Many of these women belonged to the lower economic strata and this led to some people viewing their visits as thinly-disguised begging trips, since according to custom, the housewife on the host farm was expected to reward a guest with generous parting gifts (Jónas Jónasson 2010: 249–251). Understandably, as the tradition of *orlofsferðir* (holiday journey) gradually came to an end in the early 1900s, none of Hallfreður Örn's female informants were active participants in this custom. *Orlofskonur* nonetheless evidently played a prominent role in the storytelling tradition if we trust women's

accounts of storytelling in their childhood and their narratives about gifted storytellers and their storytelling sessions, some of which even imply that storytelling was the primary purpose of the women's visits.⁴ A good example of this can be seen in the following account told by Ástríður Thorarensen (1895–1985) about the storytelling of a woman called Guðrún, who visited her childhood home every fall in the early 1900s:

I came to Breiðabólstaðir in 1900. And she came every autumn and told stories. Naturally mainly to the children, but everyone listened, everyone who wanted to hear, because they enjoyed listening to her telling them. And this went on for many years. She died in 1911 and did it right up to that point in time, I think she came last in 1910. She told us the same stories. Naturally we asked for them.

You wanted to hear this one or that one, and there were some stories that were told more often than others ... “Kisa kóngsdóttir” [Kisa, the King's Daughter] and “Þorsteinn glott” [Smirking Þorsteinn] and “Hnoðri” [Wispy], and “Álagaflekkur” [Enchanted-Spotty] and “Rautt hnoð” [Red Ball] ... [On Supernatural legends:] I never heard her tell such stories ... She sat and talked with the householders, and then various things came up, of course, various kinds of information as tends to happen. They talked about people and things, and then of course there would be some verses and this and that, as usual, as part of a conversation.⁵ (SÁM 89/1793).

The prominent appearance of such *orlofskonur* in narratives about storytelling not only underlines that some women did indeed travel in Iceland's rural past, but also the degree to which women played an active role in the distribution of narratives between communities. In a sense, these women can be regarded as having been *professional* storytellers in pre-industrial rural Iceland, since they cultivated their storytelling skills as a means of gaining both economic and social capital.

The second feature worth considering here is the effect of women's permanent migration between communities on the transmission of oral narratives. The cultural influence on the oral tradition of people moving to different parts of Iceland as a result of marriage or work has rarely been addressed by scholars dealing with similarities in narratives within the tradition or the geographical scope of migratory legends in Iceland. Most scholars have tended to explain such similarities with reference to the traditional seasonal work-related travels back and forth across the country by fishermen and other seasonal workers and to the recurrent journeys undertaken by men to trading centres (Almqvist 2008: 314; Gunnell 2002: 205, 2004: 61; Trausti Dagsson 2014: 7–8). Discussions of this kind usually focus on the world of male experience and seasonal male mobility, leaving unanswered questions like those relating to the role of men in the transmission of Icelandic migratory legends dealing with women's experiences, their points of views and their social roles.⁶

It would arguably be more logical for such stories to be attributed to women, and for their movement from one community to another to be the result of women moving between communities for marriage or work. While such a migration of women might have been less regular, it was nonetheless a common feature of the Icelandic rural community, partly because deep-seated patriarchal traditions up into the twentieth century tended to prioritise the male inheritance of farmland, something that led to men rather than women remaining in the communities of their youth after marriage, often taking a spouse from another community (Hjördís Sigursteinsdóttir & Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir 2009: 33–39). In short, while men may have *travelled* on average more than women in their everyday lives, women were arguably more prone to move their long-term residence to new communities, naturally taking their legend repertoires with them.

Table 1. The number of women storytellers classified on the basis of the size of their repertoires and residential history.

Repertoire size (number of legends told)	All women	Women remaining in childhood regions	Women settled in new regions
1–9	128	76	52
10–19	47	23	24
20–29	13	6	7
30+	12	3	9
Total number of women	200	108	92

The biographies of the 200 female legend tellers that lie behind this study provide a valuable insight into the scale of the long-term movement of women in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, as well as the influence that this might have had on women’s legend repertoires. As can be seen above, close to half of these women (92 of 200, see Table 1)⁷ migrated in adulthood away from the region they grew up in, many settling down in their husbands’ childhood communities. Some of these women even undertook frequent movement between communities (see Table 2), in some cases moving long distances, meaning that they experienced ways of life in very different parts of Iceland. The effects of women moving their place of residence on the size of their legend repertoires become particularly evident if we compare the repertoires of the women who moved to different parts with those of the women who lived most of their adult lives within the regions in which they grew up. While the former

group constitutes only 46% of the overall total of 200 women storytellers in the sources, they make up more than half of the number of more active legend tellers who tell 10–19 and 20–29 legends (see Table 1) and 75% of those exceptional legend tellers telling 30 legends or more. This underlines the strong correlation between the geographical residential changes undertaken by women and the size of their repertoires.

Table 2. The number of moves undertaken by the 92 women who settled outside their childhood regions as adults examined in relation to the size of their repertoires.

Number of women	Number of moves between regions	Average number of stories in repertoires
21	1	10.9
28	2	11.1
18	3	12.8
12	4	15.5
9	5	16.9
2	6	9.5
1	7	21.0
1	8	34.0

A good example of an active legend teller who experienced life in many different communities in Iceland is Geirlaug Filippusdóttir (1876–1970), who told a total of 21 legends in her interviews (SÁM 86/826-32; 86/847-48). Geirlaug left her home farm in Fljótshverfi in southeast Iceland at the age of nine to work for two years as a babysitter at her uncle’s farm in Hornafjörður, about 150 kilometres east of her childhood home. At the age of 16, she then left her family in Fljótshverfi again to become a maid at the local sheriff’s household some 30 kilometres away. Four years later, she moved about 200 kilometres east, and became a farmhand on a farm close to Hornafjörður in the east of Iceland where she lived until the year 1900 (the age of 24). By that time, her family had also moved across the country to settle down on a new farm in Borgarfjörður Eystri, more than 400 kilometres east of their old home in Fljótshverfi. After briefly joining her family there in 1900, Geirlaug went on to become a farmhand in the neighbouring fjord, Seyðisfjörður, where she worked as farmhand until 1904. At that point in time, she married a farmer’s son from Breiðdalur in eastern Iceland, this time moving some 100 kilometres back south in order to settle down on her husband’s childhood farm. After becoming a

widow in 1924, at the age of 48, she moved once again, this time travelling about 600 kilometres southwest to the growing capital of Iceland, Reykjavík, where she lived for the rest of her life (Björn Magnússon 1970: 307).

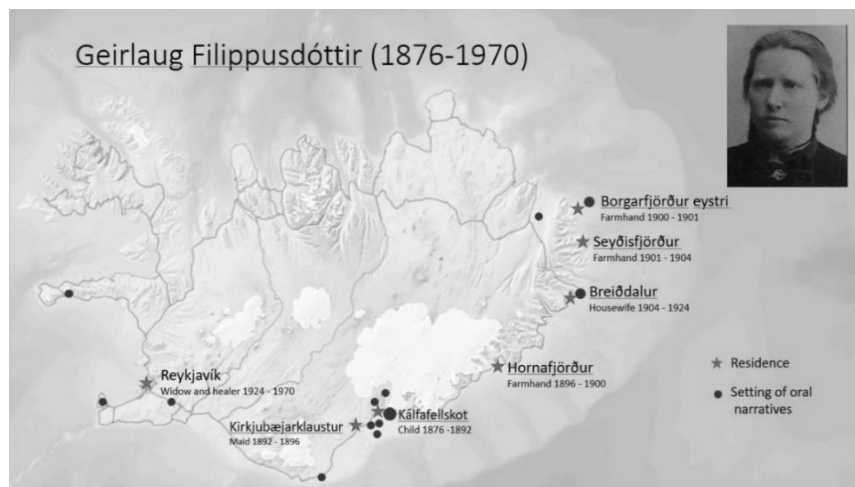


Figure 1. The residence of Geirlaug Filippusdóttir and the setting of her oral narratives.

As can be seen from the above, there is little question about Geirlaug's geographical mobility, even though she would have been largely confined to the domestic space of the farm in each of her successive roles as a female farmhand and later as a housewife. It is also worth bearing in mind that since she lived for relatively long periods of time in each of her new communities, rather than just visiting them briefly as a traveller, she was in a particularly good position to become an active participant in the local legend tradition, constantly gaining new interested audiences for her repertoire and new opportunities for expanding this repertoire as she adopted narratives and traditional ideas from each of her new communities. While Geirlaug predominantly tells first and second-hand memorates about her own experiences and those of her family, drawing on the localized supernatural traditions surrounding the various homes she lived in during her lifetime, she also appears to have incorporated some narratives into her repertoire that originated with non-related people she came across during her frequent movement between communities. These include the story of an elf woman, which she heard from the sheriff she worked for in Kirkjubæjarklaustur; stories of the murderer Axlar-Björn, which she heard from old women in Hornafjörður when she was working as a babysitter there; and a story of the Lagarfljót serpent, which she heard from a woman who stayed at her home in Breiðdalur.

While the women's residential histories are an important key to understanding their role in the storytelling traditions of the past and in the transmission of narratives from one area to another, they do not always say much about exactly *where* these women told their stories or from *whom* they learned their legends. The recordings nonetheless often provide some important clues about such things since Hallfreður Örn frequently asked his informants about the previous narrators of the legends they told him. With regard to the roughly 2200 legends told by his 200 female informants, about 730 are accompanied by important contextual information of this kind. About 65% of the previous narrators are family members, and most often the women's mothers.⁸ Non-related members of the household are then cited as the sources of about 10% of these legends,⁹ underlining the fact that Icelandic rural households in the past were rarely a strictly *private* spaces inhabited by the family alone. All the same, the fact that a total of 75% originated with household members underlines the degree to which Icelandic households were the primary platform for storytelling in the past.

Nonetheless, the fact that the women appear to attribute the other c. 25% of those legends to friends and neighbours from outside the household underlines that despite their general confinement to the domestic space of the farms, these women must have had at least some social networks that extended beyond their households. In this regard it might be born in mind that farms (and especially the living room on the farm) were in most cases the *only* available places for any small or large social gathering to take place (not least storytelling), until special community houses started to appear in rural Iceland in the 1910s–1920s (on Icelandic community houses see Jón M. Ívarsson 2007: 70–73; Loftur Guttormsson 2008: 60–61.) During the winter season, it was the *baðstofa* (living room) that tended to be the scene of traditional cultural work-related events, such as the so-called *kvöldvökur* (lit. evening wakes; sing. *kvöldvaka*) (Magnús Gíslason 1977) which, along with the activities of the so-called *rökkrin* (lit. the twilight gathering, referring to the period in the evening before the *kvöldvökur* took place) was the primary context for both Icelandic oral storytelling and other cultural practices.



Figure 2. An Icelandic turf farm in the early 1900s. Photograph courtesy of the National Museum of Iceland.

Winter-Night Storytelling in the *Baðstofa*

Storytelling traditions in the *baðstofa* were to a large extent shaped by two key factors. The first one was associated with the social organization of the community that had a natural influence on participation in the different cultural practices that took place on the farm. The second factor was related to the nature of the *baðstofa* space itself, which not only determined which forms of cultural entertainment could be performed at any one time but also the ways in which it was received and experienced by the audiences. Together these features provide the performance context of the storytelling, something to which Hallfreður Örn paid particular attention in the material that he collected, which sheds valuable light on the place and role of women in these events. As I will show below, cultural performances in the winter nights in the *baðstofa* had two distinct and different settings that distinguished themselves on the basis of the gender of those involved and the fact that they had quite a different atmosphere.

Icelandic archaeology and ethnography provide an abundance of contextual information not only about what the *baðstofa* would have looked like in the past, but also on its function and on its historical development throughout the centuries. In short, the Icelandic turf farm involved a cluster of interconnected houses built from turf, stones, and wood, which were connected by a long tunnel that started at the front door and usually ended at the heart of the farm,

the so-called *baðstofa*, the communal living room where most residents both worked and slept (Anna Lísá Rúnarsdóttir 2007; Hjörleifur Stefánsson 2013; Guðmundur Ólafsson & Hörður Ágústsson 2004; Boucher 1989: 43, 59–60, 119–120, 181). From the early 1900s and onwards, these turf farms were increasingly replaced by more modern houses built of timber and, later, concrete, first of all in the newly emerging fishing villages but later on also in the rural countryside. In 1910, around 52% of all Icelandic houses were turf houses (around 74% in rural areas), but in 1940, the number of such houses had been reduced to around 11% of all Icelandic houses (23% in rural areas) (Guðmundur Jónsson & Magnús S. Magnússon 1997: 3003–3011). The multi-bedroom houses that replaced the turf farm naturally transformed people’s perception of space, access to privacy, and people’s interaction on a daily basis, making this change in architecture a fundamental factor in the cultural transformation that took place in Iceland in the twentieth century.



Figure 3. Baðstofa at Glaumbær in Skagafjörður. Photograph by Guðni Þórðarson, courtesy of the National Museum of Iceland.

As suggested above, the *baðstofa* was not only a gender-mixed communal space in which families lived in close and intimate contact with non-related workers and guests but also a space in which home life and the workplace merged (especially in the wintertime). The multi-sided nature of this performance space makes it a particularly challenging and interesting place to

explore, not only from the viewpoint of the physical surroundings of oral storytelling but also the gender dynamics involved. The cultural scene and atmosphere of the *baðstofa* would traditionally change depending on the season, the time of the day, and work rhythms of the household members. The winter season in particular had its own rhythm within the *baðstofa*, a tradition that was comparatively fixed and deep-rooted in the rural community of Iceland. Division of labour on many Icelandic farms during the winter was both conventional and seasonal, adult male household members traditionally looking after the sheep during the first part of the winter, and often leaving for the fishing season in January, which meant that on many farms the farm work was then left in the hands of the women until the spring (Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 106–110; Magnús Gíslason 1977: 47). The period from September until the men of the household left for the fishing stations in January was particularly important for cultural activity on the farm, with various forms of oral performances taking place during the *rökkrin* and later the *kvöldvaka*.

Sources suggest the setting that characterized the *rökkrin* offered particularly good opportunities for oral storytelling. The term *rökkur* refers not only to the time setting but also to a particular atmosphere in the *baðstofa* caused by the length of the Icelandic winter twilight and the fact that fuel for the lamp needed to be economized. This is the time of the day when the men came in from outside and when many adults used the opportunity to take a nap referred to as *rökkursvefn* (twilight sleep). During this time, low-key storytelling would often take place in one corner of the *baðstofa* for children, teenagers, and other household members who did not need the sleep (Magnús Gíslason 1977: 70–72, 149–150). This particular period of storytelling had a practical purpose: in bad weather, the children could not be sent outside to play but had to be kept calm and quiet while the adults slept (Magnús Gíslason 1977: 144; SÁM 86/888 (Sigríður Helgadóttir); SÁM 89/1717 (Helga Þorkelsdóttir Smára)). According to many of Hallfreður Örn's informants, this setting was the most common scene of oral storytelling on the turf farm, well over 50 accounts either making this claim or containing descriptions of such storytelling sessions.¹⁰

Over and above its practicality as a means for keeping children under control, another possible reason for why *rökkrin* might have become a preferred platform for oral storytelling is that the semi-darkness (like that in a theatre) provided a good means for the audience to transfer themselves mentally from the immediate living space to that of the narrative. The darkness, the need for quiet and the sound of people sleeping would also have helped create a real or false sense of intimacy, confidentiality and community spirit or *communitas* (Schechner 2006: 70–71) among the storyteller and his or her intended audiences. The darkness naturally also provided storytellers with a degree of

freedom from the visual gaze of audiences, which may have been helpful for modest or less self-confident narrators.¹¹ One account by Ingibörg Tryggvadóttir (1904–1986) (SÁM 88/1546) is particularly interesting in this respect, as it describes how in her youth young people used to take part in meetings organized by the local youth movement in order to practise public speaking. She notes that a common practice during these sessions was for the light to be turned off to help those who felt shy and insecure when speaking.

Sources suggest women rather than men were the dominant storytellers during *rökkrin*. In Hallfreður Örn's sources, women, especially old women, are referred in this context nearly four times as often as men.¹² The logical explanation for this can be found in the traditional division of labour on the turf farm noted earlier, in which men, and in some cases younger women, tended to be responsible for physically challenging tasks and outdoor work and therefore had greater need for sleep at twilight. Further support for the strong role of women in these activities is found in the work of those scholars who have dealt with the Icelandic wonder tale tradition, such as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (2003: 69) and Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (2011: 66; 2015: 70–71), both of whom have shown that women had a much larger role in the preservation of this tradition than men in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s. This may well have been a result of their key role as the predominant entertainers during *rökkrin*.

Another aspect of the *baðstofa* storytelling revealed by Hallfreður's sources relates to exactly *what* was being told and to *whom*. It seems evident that the nature of the audience in the *baðstofa* during *rökkrin* had some influence on the genres chosen, as well as notions of what it was considered appropriate to tell. As noted above, the predominant audiences of *rökkursögur* (e. twilight stories) tended to be children and teenagers. Those informants who describe the *rökkrin* storytelling sessions note that, as might be expected, wonder tales were indeed common. However, they also mention that legends were told as well as retellings of stories in literature or others based on *rímur* poetry (a form of ballad, see Ragnheiður Ólafsdóttir 2008). Genre classification of the material is complicated by the fact that informants rarely use scholarly classifications for oral narratives, such as *ævintýri* (wonder tales) or *sagnir* (legends). Instead, they talk about “stories about kings and queens”, “stories of ghosts and *huldufólk*” (hidden people),¹³ or “stories of events in the past”. If one connects such “ethnic classifications” to our modern scholarly genres, it is apparent that in the accounts about *rökkursögur*, 23 contain clear references to wonder tales, and 30 to legends, while 14 just mention unclassifiable *sögur* (stories). Four mention stories based on books or *rímur* verses. One old woman in the childhood home of Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir (1893–1975) is said to have told folktales and stories “from her own life” and “from Ísafjarðardjúpur where she grew up” (SÁM 89/1812).

Some legend topics seem to have been more controversial than others. The grandmother of Helga Þorkelsdóttir (1884–1974) apparently told both wonder tales and legends of outlaws and *huldufólk* during *rökrin*, but rarely ghost legends, since she did not want the children to become afraid of the dark (SÁM 89/1717). This attitude is reflected by a number of other informants¹⁴ as well as in other sources on storytelling in the *baðstofa* (Magnús Gíslason 1977: 71). In spite of this, legends about ghosts seem to have been one of the most common features of storytelling during *rökrin*, or at least among the most memorable ones. This topic is commonly cited in the accounts about these storytelling sessions, followed closely by legends dealing with the *huldufólk*.¹⁵ Ghost legends evidently had a somewhat ambiguous status in the oral tradition of the turf farm (especially in the *rökrin* sessions), something that is understandable considering the general living space and the atmosphere which would have amplified the emotional effect of ghost stories. As reflected in the following account about storytelling by Júlía Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir (1896–1982) in Hvítanesi in the early 1900s, the *baðstofa* surrounded by a maze of dark narrow corridors could become a fearful place during the twilight:

We became so afraid of the dark that my father and mother didn't want to tell us such stories, because then we didn't dare leave the *baðstofa*. They were telling us these things, and we were sitting in our beds in the *baðstofa* with our feet up on the bed because we thought that this thing might come out from under the bed. It was a pity that grandmother died because she would have told us that sort of thing, sometimes in the *rökrin*. (SÁM 89/2048)

As noted above, it is evident that these storytelling sessions for children and teenagers were not the type of spontaneous and dynamic conversational storytelling event commonly associated with legend sharing but rather organized, conscious, time-bound performances that usually involved only one narrator and a particular designated space in the corner of the *baðstofa*. It is nonetheless also clear that other kinds of less structured storytelling sometimes took place in the *baðstofa* during the *rökrin*, especially in those households where twilight sleeping was not practised. These sessions tended to be less gender-specific in terms of narrators and also more skewed towards legends than wonder tales since the intended audiences involved adults rather than children. An account by Þorsteinn Guðmundsson (1895–1984) tells about such storytelling in a *baðstofa* in south-eastern Iceland in his youth, in which they “would sit there and remember old events and tell stories rather than have a nap” and his parents “asking each other ... about things that happened in their youth” (SÁM 85/228).

The work-related session of *kvöldvaka* that followed on closely from *rökrin*, also had an equally important role to play in the farm's cultural activity. If we compare the performances that took place in *rökrin* with those

that occurred during the *kvöldvaka* later in the evening, it is evident that the latter involved not only a completely different setting but also different genres, a different atmosphere, and a different gender of the performer. As noted by the Icelandic historian Guðmundur Hálfðanarson (2008: 116–117), the lighting of the kerosene lamp at the beginning of the *kvöldvaka* signalled the transformation of the *baðstofa* from a space which was broken up into separate spheres into one that represented an undivided communal space or workplace. Traditionally, one member of the household, situated under the lamp in the centre of the *baðstofa*, would be given the task of reading or performing in some other way during the *kvöldvaka* for the other members of the household who would be working with wool or be engaged in other tasks (Magnús Gíslason 1977: 88–90). Many of Hallfreður Örn's informants who consider the nature of the *kvöldvaka* note that it was more often men than women who now assumed the role of presenters, citing various reasons for this, such as the fact that work-related noise sometimes drowned out women's voices (SÁM 90/2341; 86/834; 89/1967, 90/2287) or that men were simply too tired to take on any further physical work during the *kvöldvaka* (SÁM 86/812).¹⁶

Two other features that distinguished the *kvöldvaka* from *rökkri*n were the actual mode of performance and the nature of the genres performed. While oral storytelling did occasionally take place during the working session, especially when guests were staying overnight, by far the most dominant form of entertainment involved reading books out loud, primarily the Old Icelandic sagas and the newly published Icelandic novels. Also popular in these performances was the chanting of the *rímur* poetry.¹⁷ The atmosphere was also naturally different, shifting from the dark, mystical and supernatural atmosphere of the intimate *rökkri*n to the broader oil lighting and more secular, rational atmosphere of Icelandic literature and the *rímur* tradition.

It is thus evident that the storytelling platform of the *baðstofa* was coloured by both the physical nature of the room and of the gender-roles that existed on the farm. While the social organization of the turf farm appears to have largely favoured women rather than men as oral storytellers, during the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, this role of storytelling seems to have been predominantly assigned to the semi-dark hours of *rökkri*n. Once the lamp was lit, however, it is evident that the *baðstofa* was transformed into a wholly public workplace that was essentially dominated by male performers and more literary traditions that emphasized rationality and enlightenment, in other words, largely profane genres of performance. Even here, within the shared performance space of the *baðstofa*, one thus witnesses the familiar pattern of women being relegated to performing in a more private space.

The Narrative Space

The third type of space worth considering in relation to women's legend-telling is the spaces reflected in the legends they tell. As underlined below, legends are not only told in space but also, to a large extent, incorporate the space(s) that were daily inhabited by their narrators. As has been shown by the British folklorist Terry Gunnell, both wonder tales and legends have the capability to transform space, albeit in a different manner. Legends, of course, tend to be closely bound up with the living spaces inhabited by narrators and their audiences. At the same time, Gunnell argues, they might be said to add new temporal depth, characters, and mystery to these surroundings, simultaneously offering guidelines for listeners on how to deal with these surroundings and the animate and inanimate threats they incorporate (Gunnell 2006: 13–15). Legends that are bound up with space familiar to both narrators and their audiences thus add layers of meaning and values to these spaces. In this sense, legends are an important tool in the making of “places”, effectively transforming unmarked and unbound spaces into meaningful and familiar places (cf. Tuan 1977: 85–100) in the minds of their narrators and listeners. They also underline the fact that while local geography and physical spaces are essentially gender-neutral, people's experiences of them are not. While, as has been shown above, many Icelandic women were certainly mobile (albeit in a way different from men), and while the domestic space of the farm was the dominant place of economic and cultural production for both men and women, the traditional division of labour on gender lines meant that both men and women would naturally have had different experiences of the various social spaces, both on the farm and in its wider surroundings.

One of the biggest weaknesses of folk narratives being published as part of “national” collections, often as a result of the earlier forces of romantic nationalism, is that their original, very real connection with the local surroundings of their narrators often gets lost. The same applies to the implicit connections they often have to the gender of their narrators and their worlds. In reality, comparatively very few Icelandic legends (even those that appeared in the early “national” collections) appear to have been shared nationwide. This becomes particularly evident when one examines the geographical and spatial features of the legend repertoires of the women interviewed by Hallfreður Örn, as well as those found in other narratives told by women (Gunnell 2016: 30–33; Trausti Dagsson 2014; Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir 2008b: 165). As noted above, the 200 women interviewed tell a total of little above 2,200 legends, of which only about 17% have an unspecified setting or a setting that has no apparent connection to the narrator's residential history. Furthermore, it seems evident that the region in which the women grew up regularly plays a particularly large role in these repertoires, 70% of the narratives taking place in the area in which

they lived as children. This underlines the fact that Icelandic legend traditions tend to be highly localized, focusing on places that were familiar to the narrators and their audiences. It also underlines how migratory narratives tend to be adapted to fit local circumstances.

The strains of the gender-restricted roles and environmental conditions that were experienced by Icelandic women in their everyday lives are also reflected by the geographical scope and nature of the legends that they told. As has been shown by studies dealing with the geographical aspects of legend repertoires of male Icelandic narrators in the past, the settings of their legends are commonly associated with the routes that they travelled and the places outside the farms in which they worked, while the legends told by women tend to be associated with the domestic space of the home and its local surroundings (Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir 2008a: 755–757; Trausti Dagsson 2014: 8–9; Gunnell 2016: 30–32). In short, while men and women certainly shared many aspects of the Icelandic legend tradition, and while their legends were shared with audiences of both genders during storytelling sessions such as those in the *baðstofa*, it is evident that the legends told by most women in the past were generally less diverse in terms of setting than those told by men.

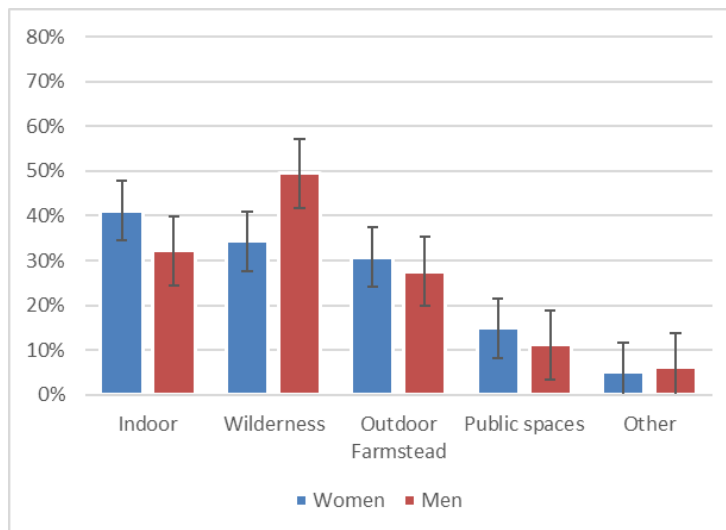


Figure 4. Types of spaces occurring in legends told by women (N=2235) and men (N=196). Error bar shows standard error.

This spatial feature is reflected quite clearly in the legends told by the women interviewed by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson. If one breaks down the general patterns relating to the settings and narrative spaces in the roughly 2,200 legends told by the women and compares them to the patterns reflected in the legends told by a small sample group of men in the same sources (see Fig. 4), it

becomes evident that the emphases are somewhat different as the studies noted above have shown. The women's legends appear to revolve noticeably more around the indoor and outdoor spaces of the farm itself than those told by men. This is, of course, understandable, given the fact that the farm and its indoor spaces were not only the main living space inhabited by women, but also their predominant working space. In short, the legends told by women tend to reflect the lives and concerns of those who tell them.

The most noticeable difference between the men's and women's uses of spaces in their legends is seen in the occurrence of what might be termed "the wilderness", that is, the uncultivated spaces between settlements, such as the highlands and the sea. It is noteworthy that these types of spaces are far more common in legends told by men, underlining the fact that in rural Iceland in the past, the wilderness belonged predominantly to men's sphere of activity and experience. While it does still occur as a setting or part of a setting for about 34% of the legends told by women, there is also a significant difference in *how* men and women *make use of* the wilderness as a setting in their stories. The women's standpoint here is often more complex, often less focused on the event *in situ*. One can take as an example the following two narratives about an accident at sea, the one on the left being told by a man, Jóhannes Magnússon (1877–1970), while the one on the right is told by a woman, Lilja Björnsdóttir (1894–1971).

<p>I knew the foreman of a boat who rowed out from the same place as me, from Guðlaugsá, out there in Ströndin. I was rowing out from there for two fishing seasons. And there was a man there who lived in the western fjords, who was called Guðmundur Benediktsson, and was a great fisherman. He never failed to catch anything, never. Well ... there was this rock on the way out from Eyrar to Núpir, which was covered in water at high tide and visible when it was low. But it was a sure place for fish, in front of the rock. I was fishing out there two seasons and nothing ever happened, I was always careful to keep to deep water. Otherwise you could end up on</p>	<p>The night the lightship <i>Hermóður</i> sunk in bad weather, just out from Reykjanesröst I think it was, it went down on the way from the Westmann Islands to Reykjavík, I remember it well. That same night I dreamt of my husband who had died long before but had been on <i>Hermóður</i> for some time, and he said: "Can you put my clothes together because I'm going on board <i>Hermóður</i>?" He had known about this, he had known that <i>Hermóður</i> was going to sink because he had been on the lightship <i>Hermóður</i> for some time before. (SÁM 89/1913).</p>
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<p>top of the rock, but that never happened. But one time this Guðmundur came along with a large catch of ocean quahaug from Staðareyrar, he was in a group with other men. There were six men in a boat packed with ocean quahaug, and they got stranded on the rock and all of them drowned there. That was a real tragedy. (SÁM 90/2323)</p>	
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Unlike men, who commonly take a secular approach to such accidents and stick to the course of events that take place at sea, women tend to take a different standpoint and often draw on the supernatural tradition in such narratives, and especially dreams that take place at home. Dream narratives, such as the one given above, are by nature multi-spatial and provide women with opportunities to transcend the more limited physical space they inhabit and participate in narrative themes dealing with important events and places to which they otherwise have little physical access. These kinds of dream narratives, which usually take the form of memorates, seem to be particularly common in the repertoires of those women who moved to new communities as adults, sometimes allowing the women narrative access to contemporary people and events that take place in their former childhood communities which are now physically/geographically distant.¹⁸

Another aspect of folk belief that forms a feature of women's narrative traditions and is directly related to their living spaces is reflected in the types of supernatural beings that appear in their stories. As Kristen Hastrup, a Danish anthropologist, has shown in her analysis of perceptions and world views in the Icelandic turf farm community (Hastrup 1990: 255–265), Icelandic folk belief traditions in the past had an essential spatial component, in that different types of supernatural beings were assigned to different kinds of environment.¹⁹ Trolls, outlaws, and sea and lake monsters belonged to the wilderness outside the cultivated surroundings of the farm, while the *huldufólk* were usually situated in close proximity to the farms themselves, in the rocks and hills that formed a border between the wilderness and the cultivated land of the farm. The dead, however, even though they were evidently seen as inhabiting their graves, were perceived as being spatially independent, and capable of moving around at will.

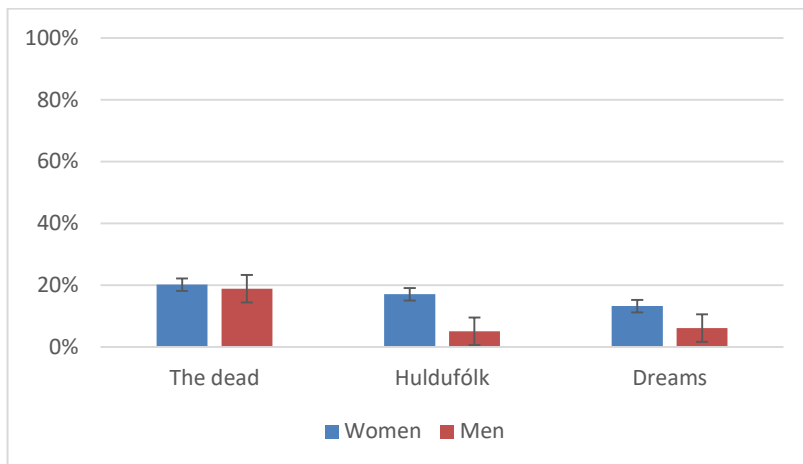


Figure 5. The occurrence of three different supernatural themes in legends told by women (N=2235) and men (N= 196). Error bar shows standard error.

This spatial component is particularly worth bearing in mind when applied to the supernatural themes encountered in legends told by the women and their male counterparts. The largest group of supernatural themes in legends told by both men and women are the dead, which appear at a similar rate in the legends of both sexes. There is, however, a difference in the kinds of ghosts that occur in these legends. On closer examination, about half of these legends told by the women deal with so-called *attardraugar* (family spirits), revenants that haunt families for several generations, typically making themselves evident in the domestic space of farms visited by the unfortunate family members (on *attardraugar* see Gunnell 2012). In short, the *attardraugar* tradition has a particularly strong spatial connection to the space inhabited by women, which may explain why these figures appear so frequently in women's legend repertoires.

The second largest category of supernatural beings to appear in the legends told by women are the earlier noted *huldufólk*, who appear in about 17% of the legends. It is interesting to note that while women appear to tell a similar number of legends about the dead as their male peers, they appear to be far more interested in the *huldufólk* who only account for about 5% of the legends told by men in the same sources. This gender-misbalance (the *huldufólk* appearing more than three times as often in women's tales than in those of men) suggests that to some degree the *huldufólk* were perceived as being more closely associated with women than men (on this, see also Gunnell 2018). As with the *attardraugar*, this might be seen as being quite logical considering the fact that the world of the *huldufólk* was so closely connected to the cultivated life of the farm, the well-being of the farm being closely bound up with the maintenance of good relations with these supernatural beings.

Indeed, there are many signs that the narrative tradition associated with the *huldufólk* was predominantly shaped by women. As has been underlined by several scholars working on this topic in the Icelandic legend tradition (see, e.g., Almqvist 2008: 273–342; Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir 1982: 319–336), legends dealing with the *huldufólk* tend to deal with domestic issues usually associated with women, such as childbearing, farming, the securing of food and other household issues. These legends thus lend a mystical character to the world of women and their surroundings, simultaneously offering them ways of dealing with various problems that they faced in their everyday lives. A good example of such navigation can be found in those legends that deal with the consequences of tampering with land belonging to the *huldufólk*. A number of such legends can be found in the repertoires of the women under discussion here, such as the following account told by Bjarney Guðmundsdóttir (1893–1974):

He was called Hermann and really wanted to extend the house. Then a woman came to her [his wife], she dreamed of her [this woman], and begged her not to let him extend the house. She asked him not to, but he did it all the same, extended the house. And then the winter after, he lost 50 sheep, he lost all these sheep and left next spring. Then he moved out to Bjarnarnes and when he was doing the last trip [on the boat] with his wife and child, a 12- or 13-year-old boy, they got so sick that when they were off Barðsvík, he had to put them on shore. And they landed there. And then he went off, he went out and never came back. He was never seen again. (SÁM 89/2073)

As might be noticed, this legend, like others of a similar kind, has two axes of conflict rather than just one. The first reflects a conflict between the inhabitants of the farm and the supernatural, providing an implicit warning to audiences about the dangers associated with disrespecting such forces. The second conflict is more gendered and has a great deal to do with issues concerning the economic position of women and their overall lack of power with regard to decision-making.²³ While the women were certainly more closely associated with the domestic space of the farm than men, they nonetheless tended to have a subordinate role within the general social organization of the farm. Looking at these legends from this viewpoint, the roles of the supernatural woman and the housewife merge, the human woman becoming in a sense an extension of the former rather than an independent player in the legend, something that ultimately adds to the potential power of the housewife. Arguably, such legends can also be understood as providing a warning to men not to side-line their wife's opinions. For women in rural Iceland in the early 1900s, it might thus be argued that such legends, like the others discussed elsewhere in this chapter, supplied an effective means of giving voice to their hidden concerns about their surroundings.

Conclusion

If we pull together the various spatial aspects involved in Icelandic women's legend-telling noted above, it is immediately evident that folk narrative archives, such as that used in this article, have the potential to provide valuable insights about the contextual surroundings of earlier storytelling, both directly and indirectly. Taking a spatially oriented approach to the narrative traditions of women in the past, like the one used here, is especially valuable considering the strong emphasis that scholars have historically tended to place on the storytelling of men. As this article has noted, while women in Iceland in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s were largely confined to the farm in their everyday lives, they still had valuable social networks that extended beyond the domestic spaces of their homes and, in many cases, also proved to be comparatively mobile, among others as immigrants moving to new communities. In Iceland's rural community of the past, it is also clear that women played an important role within the transmission of oral narratives, as narrators who shared their narratives across different communities and as performers of narratives within the domestic space of the farms.

In short, while the Icelandic farm with its communal *baðstofa* in the late nineteenth century was essentially a central performance space for both men and women, this space was nonetheless evidently still influenced by gender and different gender roles reflected both in terms of who told narratives of different times, and the nature of the narratives told and the spaces they reflected. Evidently, the performance sessions that took place in the dark *rökkrin* period were quite different to those that occurred later in the evening, during the *kvöldvaka*. The *rökkrin* sessions were not only dominated by women's creativity and oral storytelling, but also involved a different, more intimate space in which only some residents of the household (mainly women and children) participated in the storytelling session. Women's storytelling performances thus seem to have taken place in more private settings than those that provided the context for men's performances. This might be said to bring us back to the familiar association between men and the public sphere and women and the private sphere, even though the boundaries in Iceland were clearly somewhat more blurred than those encountered elsewhere.

Finally, as has been shown above, gender-related differences can also be seen in the way Icelandic men and women in the past incorporated the spaces they themselves inhabited into their legend tradition. While the farm might have been the centre of economic and cultural production for both men and women, different gender roles and different spheres of activity meant that women had to some extent different experiences, knowledge, and perceptions of the farm and

its surroundings from those experienced by men. Women's legends are noticeably more centred on the living space of the farm than those told by men. They also make both less and more complicated uses of the wilderness and other distant places in their legends, often combining them in some way with their own living spaces. In a similar way, it is evident that the most common supernatural themes in legends told by women are also those that are most directly connected to the farm in the traditional Icelandic world view. More often than not, these legends deal with problems that women faced in their daily lives within the domestic space at a time when the world order was still somewhat skewed against them. Arguably, these legends often also served to add a mystical layer to their daily living spaces, effectively transforming it to a new, more meaningful place. They were also a valuable means for women to express their feelings about their experiences, their concerns, their dreams, and their discomfort with regard to the subordinate role they experienced within these spaces.

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Notes

¹ This article follows the Icelandic custom of citing Icelandic authors by both first name and last name (patronym) and listing them alphabetically under their first names in the bibliography.

² This material will be referred to under its archive classification SÁM. These audio records (and many others) have been digitalized in recent years and are now available online as part of the *Ísmús* database (© 2017) at <http://www.ismus.is/>.

³ In the article I will use the term “legends” broadly as a concept covering all reality-based narratives, including personal experience narratives, memorates, and jocolates which will all be treated as subcategories of the former.

⁴ See, for example, Ástríður Thorarensen (on Sigríður Jónsdóttir) (SÁM 92/3002); Guðbjörg Bjarman (on Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir) (SÁM 89/1754); Halldóra Sigurðardóttir (on Þuríður Guðmundsdóttir) (SÁM 85/219); Hulda Jónsdóttir (on Sigríður Jónatansdóttir) (SÁM 92/2991); Ingibjörg Finnsdóttir (on Guðrún Hannesdóttir) (SÁM 88/1561); Kristín Jensdóttir (on Guðrún Magnúsdóttir) (SÁM 89/1865); Kristín Jakobína Sigurðardóttir (on Guðrún Jónsdóttir) (SÁM 90/2283); Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir (on Guðríður Jóhannsdóttir) (SÁM 89/1761); Lilja Jóhannsdóttir (on Sigríður from Jörfi) (SÁM 92/2643); Sigurbjörn Snjólfsson (on Steinunn) (SÁM 92/2672); Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson (on Valgerður from Hoffell) (SÁM 85/237); and Þuríður Björnsdóttir (on unnamed “old women“) (SÁM 89/1889). Storytelling by travelling women is also mentioned a few times in the answers to ÞP Questionnaire 7 as well, in answers ÞP 428, ÞP 439, ÞP 454 and ÞP 463.

⁵ Translation of all quotes by Icelandic informants: Terry Gunnell. As underlined in this account, as in many others, *orlofskonur* clearly played a large role in the wonder tale tradition. This, nonetheless, does not mean that they did not tell legends as well, as one can see from Ástríður’s remark about Guðrún’s conversation with the householders. It is, of course, probable that the informants, most of whom were young children during the time when *orlofskonur* were still visiting, would have been more interested in wonder tales than legends.

⁶ On Icelandic migratory legends dealing primarily with female characters and women’s experience, see, for example, Almqvist (2008) and Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir (1982).

⁷ The two groups of women are distinguished entirely on the grounds of whether they settled down as adults in the region in which they grew up or outside these regions. Those women who settled down in their own childhood communities naturally often moved to new areas as well later in their lives, to nearby villages or to the capital of Reykjavík, especially in old age when farms were passed on to children or new owners.

⁸ It is noteworthy that the female informants in the survey appear to have adopted considerably more legends into their own repertoires from female family members than from males. It is nonetheless not clear whether this was because women found legends told by other women more interesting and memorable than those told by men, or they were simply more exposed to legends told by their female family members. 165 of the 730 legends noted above were told by the women’s mothers as opposed to only 112 that were heard from their fathers. 59 legends were learned from grandmothers as opposed to 34 learned from grandfathers, and 49 came from other female family members as opposed to 47 from other male family members (excluding

husbands). Interestingly, the women's husbands are only cited as sources of 15 legends, which is somewhat surprising given the fact that over half of the women were widows at the time of the interviews, meaning that the husbands were no longer around to tell their own stories and maintain informal ownership over them.

⁹ Here the bias towards these non-related household members being women is clear. Non-family female household members are cited as the source of 49 legends as opposed to only 22 which were told by non-family males. This may be a reflection of the changing social reality in rural Iceland in the early 1900s, at a time when the industrialization of the fishing industry was creating new employment opportunities for men, leaving women as the dominant workforce in the agricultural sphere.

¹⁰ Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's sources include at least 57 accounts told by male and female informants, which appear to refer to storytelling taking place in the turf farm during *rökkryn*: SÁM 84/17; 84/22-23; 85/228; 85/247; 85/269; 85/272; 85/279; 85/284; 86/811; 86/820; 86/827; 86/845; 86/858; 86/875; 86/888; 88/1505; 88/1529; 88/1559; 88/1561; 88/1571; 88/1575; 88/1631; 89/1717; 89/1719; 89/1770; 89/1784; 89/1793-94; 89/1812; 89/1847; 89/1865; 89/1879; 89/1972; 89/2022; 89/2048; 90/2100; 90/2107; 90/2111; 90/2211; 90/2246; 90/2283; 90/2306; 90/2329; 90/2349; 91/2370; 91/2426; 92/2639; 92/2675; 92/2736; 92/3002-03; 93/3380; 93/3510; 93/3534; and 93/3621. Not all of these accounts specify that the *baðstofa* was the storytelling space during *rökkryn* – all have thus been included here by default (unless any other place is specified).

¹¹ Of the 57 accounts on *rökkryn* storytelling, 37 refer to female narrators or female groups of narrators, some mentioned by name and others by gender-specific terms such as mothers, grandmothers, maids or *orlofskonur*, as opposed to only 10 accounts which include references to male narrators or a group of male narrators. 18 accounts include general references to narrators that are non-gender specific, making use of terms such as *fólk* (people) or *gestir* (guests).

¹² The *huldufólk* (lit. hidden people), sometimes referred to as *álfar* in Iceland, are the Icelandic equivalent of the Norwegian *huldre* or *underjordiske* (lit. underground people), the Irish and Scottish fairies and the Shetlandic *trows*. Similar in appearance and size to human beings, they are believed to live in rocks close the settlement areas. See further Gunnell 2007.

¹³ See, for example, Einar Sigurfinnsson (SÁM 93/3621); Hulda Jónsdóttir (92/2991); Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir (SÁM 88/1571); Jóhanna Elín Ólafsdóttir (SÁM 89/1879); Sigríður Benediktsdóttir (SÁM 89/1720); Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir (SÁM 89/2048); Sigurjón Jónsson (SÁM 84/23); Steinn Ásmundsson (SÁM 85/269).

¹⁴ In the accounts, legends about ghosts are noted as being frequently told 24 times and legends about *huldufólk* 18 times.

¹⁵ While these sources as well as the answers concerning the *kvöldvaka* in Questionnaire 7 appear to largely underline the role of men as the main performers during the *kvöldvaka*, it is nonetheless clear that some women certainly did assume this role, not least during the period from January to spring, when, as noted above, many men were away during the fishing season. One informant of Hallfreður Örn's, Kristín Jakobína Sigurðardóttir (SÁM 90/2287), notes, for example, that while women generally rarely read out loud during the *kvöldvaka* because of the background noise, her sister, who was considered an exceptionally good reader, did sometimes take on this role. It is also clear that on some farms, children would read during the *kvöldvaka* in order to practise their reading skills (Magnús Gíslason 1977: 95).

¹⁶ In his analysis of the Icelandic *kvöldvaka* (based on the earlier-noted questionnaire), Magnús Gíslason (1977: 144) suggests that the telling of oral narratives, including both wonder tales and legends, was a common activity at this time. Hallfreður Örn's sources, however, do not support this claim. As suggested above, most informants appear to assign this kind of oral storytelling to *rökkri*n rather than to the *kvöldvaka* itself. Oral storytelling during the *kvöldvaka* is only mentioned in about 15 of Hallfreður Örn's accounts. 250 accounts mention the reading of stories aloud during the *kvöldvaka*.

¹⁷ It is noteworthy that the narrator Guðrún Jóhannsdóttir (1897–1987), for example, tells seven such multi-spatial narratives connecting her adult home in Skarðströnd in western Iceland with her childhood home in Grindavík on the Reykjanes Peninsula more than 200 kilometres away (SÁM 88/1902; 88/1706; 89/2010; 92/2580-81). As underlined by Heijnen's study on Icelandic dream narratives (see Heijnen 2013), Icelanders tend to see dreams as a form of reality and means of receiving communications from the dead and other supernatural beings or of gaining knowledge about future events. According to a recent survey on Icelandic belief (2006/2007), 36% of men and 41% of women claimed they had gained knowledge about future events from their dreams; about 90% (86% of men and 94% of women) believed such prophetic dreams were possible (see Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds & Ragna Benedikta Garðarsdóttir & Unnur Diljá Teitsdóttir 2008: 16, 79).

¹⁸ For a slightly different approach to the relationship between space, storytellers, and the supernatural in legends, see Broadwell and Tangherlini's "Ghostscape" (2017).

¹⁹ Until 1923, husbands had autonomy over Icelandic farms, even when the farm had belonged to their wives before marriage. Women nonetheless gained a limited degree of autonomy over the farms in 1900 when new laws stated that

while the husband would have the autonomy over the farm, he could not sell it or mortgage it without his wife's consent (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir & Guðrún Dís Jónatansdóttir 1998: 147, 150).

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6.3 Gender and Legend in Rural Iceland in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

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JÚLÍANA Þ. MAGNÚSDÓTTIR

Abstract: The folk narrative archives, with their large amounts of source material, can provide valuable new insights into the narrative traditions of the past. This also applies to the legend traditions of women in former times and their relationship with women's experiences and social reality. This article examines common features found in the legend repertoires of 200 Icelandic women born in the late nineteenth century which are kept in the Icelandic sound archives. These features are compared to those observed in the repertoires of a small sample of men found in the same archives; the aim is to establish whether and how the legends told by men and women differ. The key findings are that certain elements clearly differ significantly across gender lines, including preferences for different types of narratives, subjects, and choice of characters, highlighting the very different social realities of men and women in the past.

Keywords (from the AFS Ethnographic Thesaurus): Women, gender, storytellers, legends, narratives, storytelling

The folk narrative archives of the Nordic rural communities of the past show themselves to be a rich source of studies in modern folkloristics. As scholars from this region have shown with their reconstruction of various contextual aspects (see, for example, Almqvist 2008; Gunnell 2005, 2012; Harvilhti 2018; Skott 2008; Stark-Arola 1998, 2006; Tangherlini 1994, 2013), this old material is far from being a one-dimensional source on storytelling and can, with some help from methods and knowledge developed by contemporary folkloristics, provide valuable insight into a wide range of topics regarding oral storytelling in the past.¹ As I noted elsewhere (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2018), one of the key advantages of the archives is that they offer a much larger range of source material than that which can be obtained from an individual piece of fieldwork with a limited number of informants. Archives therefore have a key role in the reconstruction of the wider context of traditions practiced across larger geographical areas or amongst people belonging to different social backgrounds or gender groups. Archives have not only synchronic historical value in terms of the spotlight they can shine onto wider developments that took place within

folklore of the past but also diachronic value in the sense that they provide valuable insights into regional and social variation and differences that are difficult to study by other means.

One of the most interesting opportunities offered by the folk narrative archives is their value for reconstructing traditions belonging and relating to groups that were largely marginalized or nearly invisible in official terms during the times at which the material was collected. These groups nonetheless, as various studies have shown (Dagrún Jónsdóttir 2020; Schmiesing 2014, 2017; Stark-Arola 1998), often had a strong presence in the archival material both as subjects and informants if we take the time to look for them. In this article, I focus on one of these folk groups of the past and its narratives: Icelandic women born in the late nineteenth century in what can be termed pre-industrial rural communities of the Icelandic turf-farm.² The sources for this study are audio-recorded interviews made by the Icelandic folklore collector Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (1934-2005) during his travels around Iceland from the late 1950s until the 1980s.³ Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson was one of the first professional fieldworkers in Iceland. He studied folklore in Prague and Dublin in the 1950s and 1960s, where he became interested in the storytelling traditions that became his main focus of interest when collecting folklore material, first for the Icelandic National Radio (RÚV) and later for the Árni Magnússon Institute in Icelandic Studies, where he worked as a folklorist during the latter half of the twentieth century (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2006). In the late 1950s, when Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson was starting his fieldwork, it became clear to him that Icelandic culture had undergone a radical transformation during the previous decades. He therefore focused his work on safeguarding disappearing oral traditions that had lived in and reflected the world views of pre-industrial Icelandic rural communities (Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1983:16).



Figure 1. Icelandic turf-farm in the early 1900s. Photograph from the National Museum of Iceland.

As in the previous articles I have written on this subject (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2018, 2021a, 2021b), this examination focuses on the legend repertoires of 200 of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's female informants born during the late nineteenth century (which make up approximately 2300 narratives in total), along with those of a small group of their male peers (using material from the same source). My aim is to establish which features of the women's legend repertoires appear to be gender-related, reflecting women's social reality in the past. Among the features are questions relating to genre or forms of narratives (for example whether they deal more with the profane or the sacred, the degree to which they are personal or impersonal, or humorous in nature or serious⁴), notions of time, questions of transmission (from whom women learned their narratives), and the different types of characters and themes. I also consider the potential differences between those stories told by different social groups of women. I then compare women's narratives with narratives told by small group of men randomly chosen from the same sources. I rely, to some extent, on a simple descriptive statistic; the main aim is to establish which elements tend to dominate in the Icelandic women's legend-telling in comparison to those of men. Where relevant, I offer examples of women's narratives to provide further insight into the issues at hand. I also give attention to how the Icelandic materials compare to patterns known from earlier studies of women's narratives elsewhere in Northern Europe. My objective is to establish which elements of the tradition reflect general patterns with roots in the shared experience of women in the past, and which are more culturally bound, relating to the specific Icelandic context.

Gender and storytelling

The notion of gender-differences in oral storytelling has been a recurring topic in folkloristics. Indeed, many early images of ideal storytellers depict women telling household tales to children while attending to their domestic work (Dégh 1995:63-4; Kiliánová 1999:99-100; Gunnell 2017b). Such idealized images suggest that storytelling is the natural domain of women; however, they did not always lead to a high representation of female storytellers in the folk narrative collections of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as several works on the storytellers of the past in Iceland, Ostholstein, and Denmark have shown (Júlíana Th. Magnúsdóttir 2018; Köhler-Zülch 1991:101; Tangherlini 1994:67-9). Some scholars suggest that this lower number of female-told narratives could be because the oral narrative repertoires of women were on average smaller than men's (Dégh [1969] 1989:91-3; see also Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008:156). Others question this argument (e.g., Tangherlini 1994:67-8). As I have noted elsewhere on the Icelandic storytelling of the early 1900s (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2021b), in Iceland, women tended to dominate the oral storytelling sessions in the *baðstofur* (communal living spaces; sing.: *baðstofa*) of the Icelandic turf-farms, where most oral storytelling took place at the time (Magnús Gíslason 1977:88-122; Hermann Pálsson 1962). It is therefore likely, as some have suggested (e.g., Tangherlini 1994:67-8), that the lower proportion of female storytellers and stories in many earlier sources may have had more to do with the male collectors' comparative lack of access to women⁵ and their stories rather than women having less interest in or ability to tell stories. Furthermore, as a result, many male collectors may have failed to acknowledge certain types of oral narrative that were told predominantly by women. Indeed, the possibility also exists that these male collectors simply lacked interest in those narratives dealing predominately with women's experiences and their points of view.

Over the last few decades, the nature of women's storytelling repertoires and the differences between the oral repertoires of men and women have nonetheless started receiving increased attention in folkloristics. Some studies have focused on the question of genre or forms of narrative, while others have concerned themselves more with content. In the case of genre, scholars have suggested that women tended to be more prominent tellers of wonder tales, at least during the latter half of the nineteenth century and early half of the twentieth (Dégh 1995:66; Holbek 1987:154-7; Kiliánová 1999:104). Research also suggests that women seem to be more prominent tellers of supernatural legends, particularly ghost stories, while men tend to focus more on humorous stories, anecdotes, and personal experience narratives (Dégh 1976; 1995:66-8; Kiliánová 1999:103-4). Timothy R. Tangherlini's research into the repertoires

of rural nineteenth-century Danish storytellers, meanwhile, indicates that men tended to have a more detached narrative style than women, telling considerably more narratives about unknown third parties, while the women told more first-person narratives and more narratives attributed to close friends or relatives (Tangherlini 1994:146). Tangherlini also observes that while Danish women made use of male human actors in their legends with the same frequency as men, they also tended to include more female actors in their legends than the men did, underlining an apparent male tendency to devalue the role of women in the legends they told (Tangherlini 1994:147).

This tendency of men to tell mostly stories about male characters and of women to tell stories with mixed gender characters has been in part traced back to the contexts in which stories were told and the different audiences involved. Scholars have suggested that men in rural communities in the past predominantly told stories about male characters because they mostly learned stories from other males outside the domain of their homes. They also told them mostly to male audiences in the public sphere. By contrast, women learned their stories at home from both men and women and told them to audiences of both genders (see Apo 1995:145; Holbek 1987:405-6; Swahn 1955:437-8; Tangherlini 1994:147).

There are, however, reasons to question whether this matter should be looked at from another angle. It has been suggested, for example, that the definition of a “woman’s tale” does not necessarily rest on the preference for a female heroine rather than a male one, or a preference for certain kinds of stories but rather the point of view in the story, with “women’s stories” predominantly being those that reflect a woman’s point of view and a focus on the daily lives and experiences of women (Asadowski 1926:61; Dégh [1969] 1989:208-11; 1995:69).

As I have noted elsewhere, the features of women’s storytelling for female audiences in the rural communities of the past are particularly difficult to reconstruct using the folklore archives alone (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2018:133-8), as very little material in the archives was collected by female collectors who were interested in the female sphere of storytelling. Some fieldwork-based studies from the twentieth century nonetheless paid attention to this topic and reached the interesting conclusion that the type of story told depended very much on the audience. The stories told by women to other women tended to be more humorous than they were in gender-mixed spaces (Green 1977; Kiliánová 1999:102-4). Another conclusion was that women were also more likely to share personal experience stories with each other than they did in mixed company (Dégh 1995:66-8).

Few Icelandic studies on narrative traditions have dealt with the topic of gender and gender differences exclusively. The topic has nonetheless been touched on in some studies dealing with narrative traditions from a broader perspective. In her research into the Icelandic wonder-tale tradition, Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (2011:65-6), for example, observed that women born during the late nineteenth century and early 1900s in Iceland tended to be much more prominent tellers of wonder tales than were men, and that there was a strong tendency among narrators to tell stories in which the main character was of their own gender (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011:148-51). In her study into the narrative traditions that lie behind the medieval Icelandic sagas, Helga Kress, meanwhile, observes that, stylistically, women's narratives tended to be more grotesque than those of men (Kress 2006:549). Little work of this kind has been done with regard to Icelandic legend traditions. A notable exception is Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir's articles on Icelandic legends dealing with the so-called *huldufólk* (hidden people) and the way in which these stories highlight women's experiences and roles (Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir 1982, 1990).⁶

Gender was also one of several factors dealt with in my own research (2008) into storytellers from a local community in South-East Iceland based on written accounts from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, found on audiotaped material from the latter half of the twentieth century, and more recent fieldwork in 2006. This research led me to the conclusion that women were evidently more oriented toward telling first- and secondhand memorates (supernatural experience narratives) than were men; that they told more stories about the *huldufólk* and *attardraugar* (family ghosts); and (as Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir has noted) that they were much more likely to include female characters and roles in their stories (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008:156-63, 171-8, 247-8, 310).

Gender and Legend-Telling in Iceland

The sources for my current project are the legend repertoires of 200 women born in late nineteenth-century Iceland. The resulting corpus contains a total of a little over 2,300 legends told by women, collected as part of fieldwork interviews. In order to be able to establish a general idea of whether any forms and themes tend to be found predominantly in the legend repertoires of women rather than those of men, 25 men were randomly selected from the same source material, and their material classified based on the same criteria. This random selection, a total of 196 legends told by men, ought to provide some insight into which features of the legend tradition differ in accordance with the gender of the narrators and which do not.

In the classification of material, I assigned labels to different forms of narratives, distinguishing supernatural or profane legends told in detached or impersonal modes of narration from similar types of legends told in the form of a memorate or personal experience narrative. I also examined the time frame reflected in the stories, that is, whether the narratives are “contemporary” in the sense of being about recent events taking place during the lifetime of the narrators, or “historical” in the sense of being about events and people from previous centuries. With regard to content, I assigned the narratives multiple labels relating to gender and the types of characters that appear in them, and the themes that are touched upon. This resulted in approximately 350 content-based labels that were, to some extent, based on the list of keywords introduced by the designers of the Sagnagrunnur (*sagnagrunnur.com*) database of Icelandic legends in printed collections (see Gunnell 2010, 2015).

Another feature of the repertoires included in the analysis was the “type” of legend told: historical legends (profane), belief legends (supernatural), jocolates,⁷ memorates, and personal experience narratives (profane experience narratives).⁸ These labels help to establish where a particular narrative should be placed on the basis of three different axes, based on Lauri Honko’s model for oral narratives (Honko 1989:28): profane/sacred, personal/impersonal, and humorous/serious.

An analysis of the legend subgenres found in the women’s repertoires demonstrates that the women’s narrative tradition appears to be quite heavily skewed toward the supernatural and the more personal mode of narration, with the supernatural memorate appearing in more than one-third of the narratives told by women. The second largest group of legends told by women are belief legends (telling of other people’s supernatural experiences), which make up about 27 percent of the total. About two-thirds of the women’s legendary corpus deal with the supernatural in some way, with a little under 30 percent dealing with more profane topics (historical legends and personal experience narratives accounting for 12 percent and 17 percent of the narratives respectively), while 8 percent are legend-based jocolates.

Bearing in mind the possible influence of background, I also examined the repertoires in relationship to different “types” of women (see fig. 2): active participants in the legend tradition, women who stayed on the farms where they grew up (“ancestral farms”), and two groups of educated women (midwives and teachers). Interestingly, the overall pattern noted above was remarkably consistent across these groups of women. A statistical hypothesis testing, the calculation of p-value, was used in order to establish whether or not differences are significant (ideally, it should be lower than 0.05 [$p < 0.05$] to be considered significant). Although the midwives, at first sight, seem to have told

proportionally more supernatural memorates than the women as a whole, when it comes down to it, the difference is not significant ($p=0.07$). They did, however, tell significantly fewer jocolates than the average woman ($p=0.01$), although one also has to remember how few such narratives are in the repertoires of the women in general.

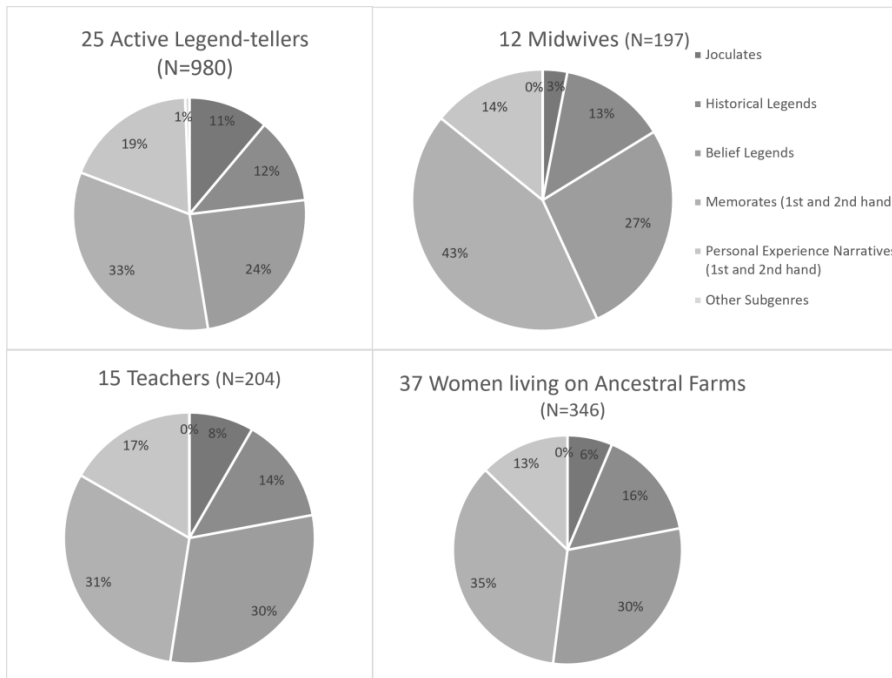


Figure 2. Four Groups of Women and Proportions of Legend-Based Genres in Repertoires. N shows the number of legends told by each group of women.

A more striking difference can be seen in the various types of subgenres found in the legend corpora of the women as compared to those found in the repertoires of their randomly selected males contained in the same sources (fig. 3).⁹ Although both genders tell a similar number of belief legends ($p=0.2$), it is evident that women tell significantly more supernatural memorates ($p<0.001$), while the men tell significantly more historical legends ($p<0.001$) and secular personal experience narratives (also classed as legends in this article) ($p=0.001$). This means that the men appear to take a more profane approach to the legend tradition, with historical legends (profane), jocolates, and secular personal experience narratives (profane) making up about 60 percent of their total legend corpora.

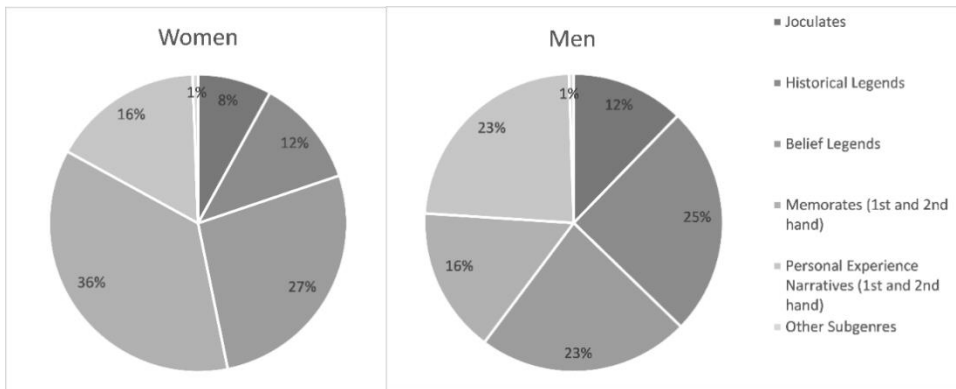


Figure 3. Legend-Based Genres Found in the Combined Repertoires of the 200 Women (N= 2235) and 25 Men (N= 196).

All in all, the Icelandic data appears to support the previously-noted pattern found in the narrative traditions of other European communities in which women appear to concentrate more on the supernatural than men do, while men focus more on profane legends and personal experience narratives.¹⁰ Linda Dégh (1995:66, 68) notes, in her examination of women’s storytelling, that adventurous occupational and personal experience narratives tended to be found more commonly in the repertoires of men in traditional societies, and such narratives apparently only started to form an important part of women’s storytelling in modern urban societies.

Regarding personal narratives, many aspects of women’s shared experiences were still considered to be taboo or a “private matter” in much of the Western world until quite recently, including matters relating to sexual and domestic violence, marital problems, and various female bodily functions, such as births and the onset of menstruation (see, for example, Callister 2004; Lawless 2000; Page 2002). Even though such narratives are rare in the Icelandic archives, it is questionable whether they are a recent innovation. The likelihood is that such stories were mostly shared among women and family members. The fact that one rarely finds these kinds of narratives in the material recorded by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in Iceland in the 1960s and 1970s is thus perhaps understandable given his status as a male outsider and the social atmosphere at the time. Occasionally, though, such “inappropriate” narratives did manage to slip through. One such narrative was told by Guðrún Filippusdóttir (1885-1976), a housewife and a widow who lived in various places in South-East and East Iceland before settling down in Reykjavík where she told 28 legends to Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in the early 1970s. The narrative in question deals with her mother’s experiences as a midwife in rural Iceland in the late nineteenth century:

There was once this woman that she was called out to see, and things were going really badly. So the doctor was also called in. And he says: “OK, I can’t do any more, Þórunn, but if you can do something, well, you just do what you can do.” And then she says she put a silk handkerchief on her hand, and she goes inside the woman, and gets the handkerchief around the head of the baby and manages to turn it like that. The baby was all upside down in the womb....And she did a lot of things like that which the doctor would rather not be associated with (SÁM 90/2325)¹¹

Það var einu sinni kona sem hún var sótt til, og henni gekk svo voðalega illa. Og svo var lækurinn sóttur líka. Svo segir hann: „Ja, nú get ég ekki meira, Þórunn mín, en ef þú getur eitthvað, þá skalt þú gera það sem þú getur.“ Þá segist hún láta silklút á hendina á sér og fer inn með konunni og kemur klútinum á höfðið á barninu og getur snúið því svoleiðis. Barnið lá nefnilega svo öfugt í móðurkviði....Og svona gerði hún mörg verk sem lækurinn vildi helst vera laus við (SÁM 90/2325)

This narrative was told as a part of series of legends about the narrator’s mother’s close relationship with the huldufólk and her career as a midwife that followed her childhood experience of assisting the huldufólk with childbirth. It is perhaps worth mentioning in this context that while stories about midwifery are common in the Icelandic tradition, often taking the form of the earlier-noted migratory legend ML 5070 (Almqvist 2008), they tend to be extremely vague about the details of the birth itself, usually merely stating that the baby was born spontaneously the moment the human woman placed her hand on the woman who was trying to give birth. As Bo Almqvist’s examples show, the same seems to have applied in Ireland, Scotland, and the other Nordic countries.

That the men appear to have a more profane approach to their legend traditions and tell more historical legends raises further questions with regard to potential gender differences relating to an interest in history and the ancient past. In Iceland, as in many other communities, the archivists Susan Tucker and Svanhildur Bogadóttir (2008) observe that men are behind the main written accounts of public national history, while women have tended to be more prominent keepers of family records. This observation suggests that the content of the legend corpus of those men chosen for this survey would contain a higher number of narratives about events that took place in the more distant past than those told by women. In actual fact, if one considers the time frames given in or implied by the legends told by men and women (fig. 4), there seems to be little difference. In both cases, the storytellers seem to deal with the more recent past (in the nineteenth century) rather than the distant past. More than one-half of the narratives told by both genders take place during the narrators’ lifetimes, and a quarter take place just a little earlier. The earlier ones are legends dealing with

people and events from just one to two generations back (reaching into the lives of grandparents). While the men certainly told more historical legends than women proportionally, neither gender in the archives seems to have had much interest in talking about the ancient past. The repertoire of both appears to be based more on communicative memory, which lasts around three generations, rather than general cultural memory, which commonly extends much further back and usually needs support from written sources if it is to survive in oral tradition (see Assmann 2008:109-18).

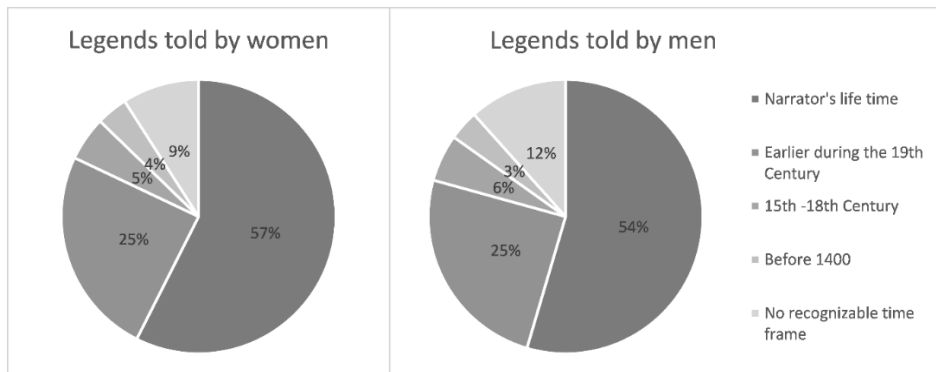


Figure 4. The Timeframes of Narratives Told by Those Women and Men in the Survey.

In spite of this general lack of difference in the time frames of the legends told by the sample of Icelandic men and women, the themes and characters of the narratives told by the different genders tell quite a different story. As shown in figure 5, which considers 25 features that appear in narratives told by women versus men, it is apparent that many such features appear in almost even proportion in women's and men's repertoires. This similarity could be because both genders shared, for the most part, a similar everyday reality and environment living together on turf-farms and amongst the same community, a setting that is heavily reflected in the narratives of both genders. There are, however, key differences regarding certain topics suggesting that certain themes seem to have had a greater appeal for one gender or the other, probably because they were associated with those aspects of the narrators' lives and reality that *were* divided along gender lines. These differences are naturally worth particular attention.

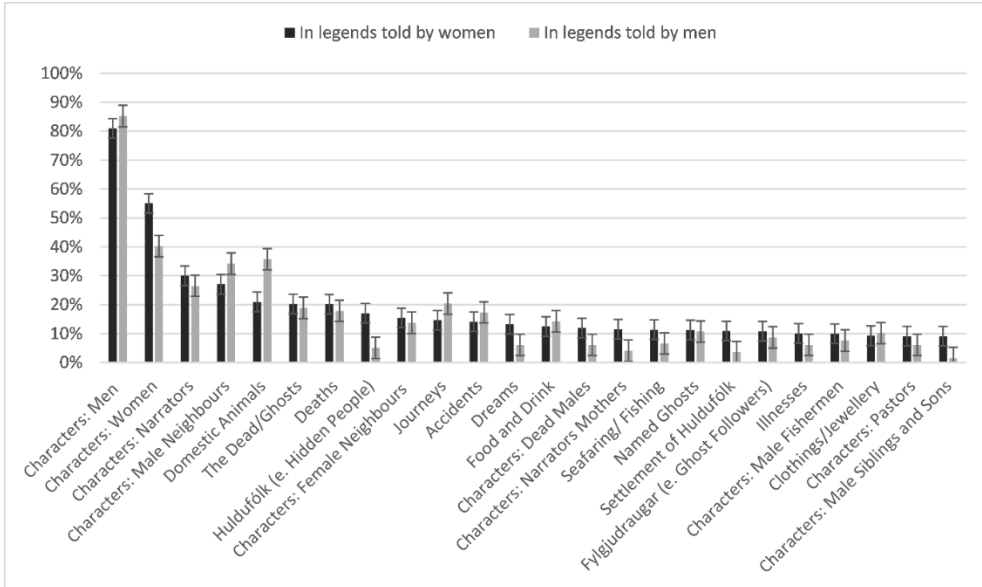


Figure 5. The 25 Most Common Features Relating to Content Occurring in Legends Told by Women Shown in Comparison to Occurrences of Same Features in Legends Told by Men.

The characters' gender in the legends told by the Icelandic narrators in the sound archives appears to follow a pattern that is familiar from other studies. Both men and women told more legends involving male characters than female, and the difference in the number of male characters included in legends appears to be insignificant across gender groups ($p=0.1$). Female characters, on the other hand, are found in significantly more legends told by women than in those by men ($p<0.001$), 55 percent of the legends told by women included female characters as compared to only approximately 40 percent of the legends told by the men. Several factors may explain this unequal use of female characters. First, as noted earlier, it is possible that the women narrators had a greater appreciation of women and their roles, and were thus more likely to include them in the legends they told. As Tangherlini and Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir have suggested, this may also have something to do with how narrators tend to relate personally to the main characters in the legends that they tell. They suggest that women may derive meaning from the legends in which women appear and vice versa, noting that some storytellers even change the gender of characters to match their own when incorporating narratives into their repertoires (Tangherlini 1994:147; Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011:150-1). There is, however, one additional feature that can at least partly explain this uneven occurrence of gender roles in the Icelandic material given the relatively high proportion of secondhand memorates found in women's repertoires. These stories, as will be

shown later, tend to have been predominantly told to women storytellers by other women.

In the Icelandic material, women and men tended to tell narratives about their own lives in similar proportions (fig. 5). This is an aspect in which the Icelandic material seems to differ from that studied by Tangherlini in Denmark, where, as noted above, women tended to tell legends about themselves to a greater extent than the men. In his study, Tangherlini suggests that this may have been caused by societal pressure against talking about oneself in rural nineteenth-century Denmark, something that apparently affected women to a lesser extent than men (Tangherlini 1994:146-7). While it is entirely possible that the Icelandic rural society did not hold such taboos about talking about oneself, the difference might also have arisen from different emphases involved in the collection of material. As noted above, men and women in Iceland appear to have told a similar ratio of first- and secondhand personal experience narratives, the difference here being that the women storytellers in the sound archives made much more use of the supernatural in their narratives than men, who tended to tell more profane personal experience stories. As these narratives were not considered to come under the heading of folklore until the second half of the twentieth century (Dobly-Stahl 1977), it is likely that the folk narrative collectors of the nineteenth century, such as Denmark's Evald Tang Kristensen (1843-1929), were less interested in collecting such stories, placing more emphasis on the supernatural legends told by their informants. The question remains, however, why the Icelandic men of the past were more reluctant to tell narratives about personal supernatural experiences than women were. The most likely explanation is that once again, we are encountering a form of a societal pressure and gender-related ideas about rationality being a predominantly male characteristic.¹²

Regarding the supernatural, Icelandic tradition includes several categories of supernatural beings in human or semi-human form whose gender is identifiable, such as ghosts, *huldufólk*, and trolls. Of these, dead males appear to be the most popular figure among the narratives told by women; such figures appear twice as often in the legends told by women ($p=0.01$). This finding is particularly interesting because while men and women appear to have told the same ratio of ghost stories ($p=0.7$), men seemed to have told slightly more stories involving dead females than dead males. Icelandic traditions involving the dead closely resembles those traditions found in other Northern European countries in terms of a focus on violent and unnatural deaths, with the lack of proper burial being a common premise for a restless afterlife (Pentikäinen 1969; Gunnell 2005). One would thus expect dead males to dominate in those legends told by both men and women in Iceland. Indeed, as elsewhere, because they were more responsible for outdoor work, men were far more likely to meet

accidental deaths in Icelandic rural communities than were women, both at sea and on land.¹³ The different ratios of dead males to females in the legends told by men and women could, however, be explained by the different forms that supernatural narratives tend to take in male and female repertoires. The dead who appear in the supernatural narratives told by men tend to be “well-known ghosts” with a long history in the oral tradition (figures who could be of both genders). Those who appear in the women’s narratives tend to be figures previously known by the women in their lives, such as family members, friends, and neighbors—in other words, people whom women had regularly encountered within their household spaces. In short, the higher proportion of dead males in the women’s supernatural personal experience narratives may simply reflect the sad fact that most of those people known by women who met untimely deaths in Iceland during the late 1800s and early 1900s tended to be men.

Several other features appear in noticeably different proportions. These differences once again underline the fact that while men and women shared a living space on a farm, they had different roles and thus to some extent different experiences and a different kind of social reality. Men told significantly more narratives about domestic animals ($p<0.001$) and “journeys” ($p<0.03$). In Iceland, it was (and still is) a custom for sheep and horses to be kept on highland pastures (*afréttir*) from the late spring until the fall, at which time men rounded them up in the communal act of *göngur and réttir*.¹⁴ The more common appearance of domestic animals in the narratives told by men is thus understandable, given that men had the responsibility for most of the external affairs of the farm, such as trade, the work on distant fishing stations, sheep round-ups in the mountains, and the care of those domestic animals that spent much of the year some distance away from the farms, such as horses and sheep.

Women, however, appear to have told significantly more legends about seafaring and fishing than men have told ($p<0.04$). This might seem a little puzzling, given that women usually had little experience with this line of work. A closer look at the seafaring legends told by the women nonetheless reveals that such narratives often include three other features commonly found in women’s repertoires, namely, accidents, dreams, and omens. As noted earlier, the women in the archives told many personal experience narratives of a supernatural nature (memorates). Closer examination reveals that many of these are stories dealing with the experience of loss, when male relatives and friends got lost in accidents at sea, along with the dreams and omens associated with such occurrences.

Also interesting is the way in which some of the features associated with supernatural traditions occur in different proportions in the repertoires of men and women. As previously mentioned, ghost stories certainly appear to be told

in similar proportions by both genders. Women, however, seemed to have told significantly more stories about the earlier mentioned *huldufólk* ($p < 0.001$) who, in Icelandic tradition, occupy the rocks and hills on the outer borders of farms. As has been underlined by several earlier studies dealing with narrative traditions concerning the *huldufólk* in Iceland (Almqvist 2008; Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir 1982, 1990; Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2021b:115-7), such stories tend to be commonly seen as “women’s stories,” dealing essentially with problems that need to be solved within the household space. Such female-oriented stories about encounters with the *huldufólk* make up the largest bulk of migratory legends found in Iceland,¹⁵ suggesting that women may have had larger roles in transmission of these stories around Iceland than was previously thought (see Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2021b:100-1). It would be interesting to see whether similar patterns exist in the legends told by women of the fairies in Ireland and Scotland told by women and in those dealing with the comparable *huldre* (hidden)/*underjordiske* (underground people) in Norway.¹⁶

As revealed by the list of features outlined in figure 5, dreams appear to be another narrative theme that occurs significantly more in legends told by women ($p < 0.004$). This difference is reflected even today in the earlier-mentioned survey into Icelandic folk beliefs in contemporary Icelandic society, which has shown that women seem to be more likely to admit to having a belief in the prophetic nature of dreams and to experiencing dream omens (Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds, Ragna Benedikta Garðarsdóttir, and Unnur Diljá Teitsdóttir 2008:16, 79). As a theme, dreams seem to have only recently gained interest among folklorists and are today considered to form an important feature within personal experience narrative traditions. As Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj (1993:219) notes, such narratives tend to be short-lived in the oral tradition, although examples can be found of dreams surviving several generations. Indeed, dream accounts of this kind regularly appear in the old Icelandic literature, the earliest dating back to the twelfth century (Kress 2011; Kelchner 1935; Turville-Petre 1972:30-51), which demonstrates that this motif is one of the oldest in the Icelandic narrative tradition. As underscored by Heijnen’s contemporary anthropological study on dreams and dream sharing, the modern Icelandic tradition of dreams and dream narration not only includes apparent omens and their interpretation but also accounts of encounters with supernatural beings such as the dead and *huldufólk* who provide information and advice about the future since dreams are often viewed as a gateway to the supernatural world (Heijnen 2013; see also Almqvist 2008:298-301). In these aspects, the Icelandic tradition resembles to some extent that known in Karelia (Järvinen 1998; Stark et al. 1996:260-2) and other parts of Northern Europe, such as England and Scotland (Wimberly 1927:59-82). The overlap between the dream narrative tradition and that relating to the supernatural world in Iceland may

help explain why this theme appears to be more common in the repertoires of the women. Furthermore, dream narratives in the more recent Icelandic material (such as that under investigation here, and that investigated by Heijnen) tend to almost exclusively to take the form of first- and secondhand personal experience stories, as they do in other cultures. Few such accounts tend to go much further back in time.

Another reason for the popularity of dream narratives among Icelandic women in the past may well have something to do with the way in which they offered women mental involvement in places that they were not able to visit and events in which they are not able to take part physically. In rural Iceland of the late 1800s and early 1900s, the comparative isolation of many farms, the difficult climate, lack of roads, and the division of labor made women particularly homebound in their daily lives (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2018). All the same, marriage and migration between work-places meant that more than 45 percent of the women in the sources under investigation were born and raised in regions other than those they lived in as adults, underlining a gender-system in which men tended to settle down on family-owned farms after finding wives elsewhere, often in the vicinity of fishing stations and other places in which they had worked temporarily as young men (see Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2021b:101). It is interesting how many of the earlier-noted omen dream narratives told by women concern events taking place in distant spaces, such as their former home regions or those where their husbands had gone fishing. Arguably, by experiencing, narrating, and interpreting the dreams, sometimes at a later point (for example, after an accident took place), the women had a way to connect themselves to events that occurred elsewhere. An example is the following narrative told by a woman living in Western Iceland about a shipwreck that took place in her former home region of Grindavík, which was about 124 miles (200 kilometers) away. It is one of the many narratives concerning accidents at sea told by female storytellers in the Icelandic sources:

There is one dream I had some years ago which was a little strange. I dreamt that I was down south in Garðhús [near Grindavík] and I go out around the old farm and onto the steps. And then I see this really big pile of earth, and I hear someone singing [the hymn] [sálminn] “Vertu hjá mér er halla tekur degi” (“Be With Me at the End of the Day”). I tell Pétur [her husband] the dream when I wake up and say immediately that it is probable that the old couple [at Garðhús] are going to die, that is what I thought was most likely. A little later, a boat went down in Grindavík. On the boat was a young lad who was engaged to the granddaughter of the folks at Garðhús, and Petrunella’s son....Some time later when I go down south, this comes up in a conversation I was having with Petrunella and her daughter is in there. And then I tell her the dream. And then the girl says: “That hymn was sung at the funeral.” They

found all the bodies, and all four were buried in the same grave. And that hymn was sung at the funeral (SÁM 89/2010)

Það er nú einn draumur, það eru nú nokkur ár síðan, hann var nú dálítið einkennilegur. Mig dreymir það að ég er suður í Garðhúsum og ég fer út um gamla bæinn og út á tröppur. Og þá sé ég voðalega stóran moldarhaug og ég heyri sungið [sálminn] „Vertu hjá mér er halla tekur degi.“ Ég segi Pétri [eiginmanni] drauminn þegar ég vakna og segi um leið að þau fari líklega að deyja gömlu hjónin [í Garðhúsum], mér datt það helst í hug. Þó nokkru seinna, þá ferst bátur í Grindavík. Á bátinum var piltur sem var trúlofaður sonardóttur þeirra í Garðhúsum, og sonur hennar Petrunellu....Svo kem ég suður nokkru seinna og þá berst þetta í tal hjá okkur Petrunellu og dóttir hennar er inni. Og þá segi ég henni drauminn. Þá segir stúlkan: „Þessi sálmur var sunginn við jarðaförina.“ Þeir fundust sko allir, og voru jarðaðir fjórir í sömu gröf. Og þessi sálmur var sunginn við jarðaförinn. (SÁM 89/2010)

As has been suggested by other scholars, dreams are commonly the subject of collective interpretation, meaning that discussing them can be viewed as a social-cultural phenomenon. In short, they go beyond being merely personal experience (Heijnen 2013; Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1993:214; Stark et al. 1996:256). The omen dream narratives in the Icelandic material highlight this fact. Many accounts, such as this one, have a recurring structure that includes clauses underlining how the dream is told to others (especially other women). They frequently highlight that women’s casual storytelling (especially about dreams) often occurred during conversations with other women.

This brings us back to the information given by the narrators about where they previously heard their stories. Around one-third of the stories told by women to Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson include information about whom the women learned their narratives from as compared to about one-fifth of the stories told by the 25 men in the sample group. From this material, about 60 percent of the narratives told by women were originally learned from other women, mothers being most cited. In contrast, in the men’s sample, over two-thirds of the stories said to be heard from others were told by men—male neighbors and friends being the most common source. The implication is that women in Icelandic rural communities mostly adopted narratives into their repertoires that came from other women they encountered within their household spaces, while men were more likely to adopt narratives picked up from male friends and neighbors living outside their own households. What remains unclear is whether the narrators predominantly adopted narratives from individuals belonging to their own gender because they were more exposed to such narratives in their everyday social interactions or because of greater interest in those narrative themes rooted in gender, or some mixture of both.

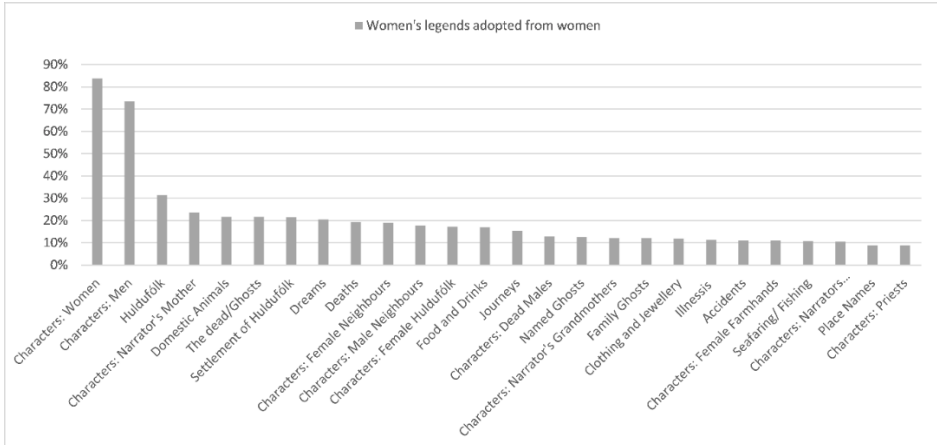


Figure 6. The 25 Most Common Features Found in 407 Legends Women Adopted from Other Women

The 400 legends that the women in the Icelandic sources adopted into their repertoires from other women (see fig. 6)¹⁷ paint a slightly different picture with regard to certain aspects of women's narrative traditions while reinforcing others already mentioned above. As can be seen here, themes relating to the huldufólk and dreams are even more prominent in the material passed on from women to women than in women's repertoires in general, underlining still further the degree to which these themes belong predominantly to women's narrative tradition. The list of key figures and themes occurring in this material similarly underlines the degree to which different categories of female characters tend to dominate, as might be expected given the large number of secondhand supernatural memorates found in the women's repertoires. Female characters known by the women, such as narrators' mothers, grandmothers, neighboring women, and female farmhands, tend to dominate as leading figures in this material learned from other women to a greater extent than they do in the women's narratives in total, and certainly to a far greater extent than they do in the narratives told by men. What is new in terms of the characters found in this list is the high occurrence of female huldufólk who do not make it into the upper echelons of the earlier list of occurrences in the legends told overall by women and never appear in the legends told by the men in the sample group. Also worth noting is the way in which male huldufólk do not reach the upper echelons of the list of legends told by women to women, occurring in less than 8 percent of these legends and less than 4 percent of the women's material in total. This lends support to the idea that the narrative tradition concerning the huldufólk is female-dominated not only in terms of being favored by women storytellers and largely ignored by men, but also in terms of content, once again focusing predominantly on social interaction between women.

Conclusions

The turf-farm and its environment made up the center of experience and social organization for both men and women in Iceland during the late 1800s and early 1900s. While both genders shared a similar everyday reality on farms, from which they drew heavily for the legends that they told in the shared cultural space of the *baðstofa*, it is clear that the material passed on as part of the legend-tradition from this time underlines the degree to which this social reality was heavily gender divided. Legends told by women appear more female-oriented than those told by men, which are particularly male-oriented in terms of their form, content, and means of transmission. In Iceland, male and female storytellers predominantly adopted legends into their repertoires from individuals of their own gender—the women learning stories from other women they shared a household with, while men commonly learned stories from male friends and neighbors, which underlines the fact that other storytelling spaces existed outside the shared space of the *baðstofa*. Also evident is that women tended to draw more from the supernatural tradition than did men, as well as particular themes relating to the supernatural. Women’s evident interest in *huldúfólk* and dream narratives represents the greatest difference, which indicates a greater interest in contacts with the “other world.”

Also clear is the way in which several features in the Icelandic sources lend support to arguments made previously by other scholars about gender-related aspects of the Nordic rural narrative traditions of the past. These include the aforementioned preference of women for supernatural narratives, and especially those told in the form of memorates; the male tendency to avoid female characters and their roles in narratives; and that women include characters of both genders more evenly. These similarities (also relating to the female interest in dream narratives) suggest that while women’s conditions and experiences in the rural communities of the past may well have been different across Northern Europe—with many elements of narrative traditions clearly being culture-bound—a number of features of women’s narratives seem to be cross-cultural, suggesting that many aspects of women’s experiences in this period seem to have been shared. There is good reason for both these shared features and the effects of cultural differences to be examined more closely in the future as the process of digitization of the folk narrative archives of many Northern European countries continues to offer ever more new means of getting easy access to the valuable remnants of women’s oral traditions and the storytelling of the past.

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Notes

¹ Many of these works have built on the various Northern European legend type indices such as those contained in Reidar Th. Christiansen's *Migratory Legends* (1958), Marjatta Jauhiainen's *Type and Motif Index of Finnish Belief Legends and Memorates* (1998; based on the earlier index created by Lauri Simonsuuri in 1961), and Bengt af Klintberg's more recent *Types of the Swedish Folk Legend* (2010).

² On the Icelandic turf-farm community see, for example, Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir (2018, 2021a and 2021b). As noted by Kirsten Hastrup (1998:26) in her excellent analysis of Icelandic notions of history, Icelanders tend to distinguish between three main periods in their past: the *landnámsöld* (the Age of Settlements) covering the settlement of Iceland and the “saga-period” that followed it; “the old days,” which cover the long period between the *landnámsöld* and the Second World War, a period that was characterized by poverty, limited technology, and exploitation by Danish merchants; and finally the *mótorbátaöldin* (the age of motorboats), which was represented by modernity, progress, technological sophistication, and wealth. The turf-farm community is seen as belonging to “the old days” and was perhaps one of its key features; its gradual decline in the first half of the twentieth century went hand in hand with the arrival of the new “age of motorboats.” An Icelandic turf-farm (which most people lived on at the time) involved a cluster of houses or rooms built from turf, stones, and wood, which were interconnected by a long tunnel that started at the front door and usually ended at the heart of the farm, the so-called *baðstofa*, the communal living room, where most residents both worked and slept (Anna Lía Rúnarsdóttir 2007; Hjörleifur Stefánsson 2013; Guðmundur Ólafsson and Hörður Ágústsson 2003; Boucher 1989:43, 59-60, 119-20, 181). In 1910, around 52 percent of all Icelandic houses were still turf-houses (around 74 percent in rural areas), but by 1940, the number of such houses was reduced to around 11 percent (23 percent in rural areas) (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997:303-11).

³ This material has wide-ranging geographical scope and covers every part of Iceland.

⁴ These features are taken from Lauri Honko's famous categorization of legend types: see Honko (1989:27-9).

⁵ Male collectors were more likely to socialize with other men in the public arena in their travel and everyday lives and therefore encountered more active male storytellers than women. In order to meet active female storytellers, in many cases, they would have to be invited into people's homes or to have heard about the women elsewhere.

⁶ Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir (1939-1988) was the first Icelandic folklorist to introduce a gender approach to Icelandic folk narrative research. Unfortunately, she passed away in 1988 before she was able to publish much based on this approach. The *huldufólk* she was dealing with are supernatural beings in human form, originally a kind of nature spirit who are usually thought to occupy hills and rocks in close proximity to farms (on these beings, see Gunnell 2007, 2014, 2017a; Hastrup 1990:261-5).

⁷ The "joculate" is a subgenre of oral narrative that has not been clearly defined and is rarely referred to. Honko (1989:28) places it between the *chronicate* and the *memorate* on the factual side of his diagram of genre, bordering with the legend, and referring to such narratives as being both historical and humorous. Here, *joculates* include narratives that are told as factual and that often deal with the storyteller's own alleged experiences or those of others, but have humorous and unrealistic twists, suggesting that they are unlikely to be based on real occurrences (at least in this form).

⁸ As noted by several scholars dealing with the genres and subgenres, this kind of genre distinction can be somewhat problematic: modes of narration, themes, and the perceived age of events involved call for setting borderlines that can sometimes be obscure (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974; Dégh 2001:55-97; Tangherlini 1994:11-22). In spite of this, the use of labels for oral narratives can still be a helpful tool when trying to establish, for example, whether narrators prefer to tell humorous or serious stories; whether they make frequent use of supernatural tradition or not; whether they are more concerned with profane history; and whether they prefer to tell stories in a detached narrative style or a more personal mode of narration. In this article, I have chosen to use the term "legend" for all reality-based narratives that appear in the narrators' repertoires, and I use other labels, such as "historical legends," "belief legends," "joculates," "memorates," and "personal experience narratives" as a means of establishing differences in orientation within the legend tradition under discussion. It might be noted that Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (2011) has undertaken a similar investigation into gender aspects of the wonder-tale tradition in Iceland.

⁹ The male sample group consists of 25 men who were randomly chosen from the list of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's male informants born during the nineteenth century who told one or more legends in the interviews. The number of male informants in this sample group is only about 13 percent of the group of

female informants, and their total repertoire is around 196 legends (as compared to the total repertoire of 2,235 legends told by the female informants). Conclusions based on this must therefore be somewhat tentative. The analysis based on this comparison considers various aspects of the sampled repertoires seen in terms of proportions of the total number of legends told by various groups. A two proportional z test was used to establish whether or not this difference was significant across groups, and the bars in figures 4 and 5 show standard error.

¹⁰. This greater interest in the supernatural among women is reflected in a comparatively recent survey of Icelandic beliefs from 2006-2007 that showed that women were more likely to have experienced supernatural experiences and more likely to admit belief in the supernatural than men (see Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds Ragna Benedikta Garðarsdóttir, and Unnur Diljá Teitsdóttir 2008:16-39).

¹¹. SÁM: Segulbandasafn Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar í Íslenskum fræðum [The Audio Archives of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík], <http://www.ismus.is>. Translation of all quotes by Icelandic informants is by Terry Gunnell.

¹². Both Jón Árnason (1819-1888) and Konrad Maurer (1823-1902) observed, based on their own experiences of collecting Icelandic legends in the nineteenth century (and that of others) that men were often reluctant to tell collectors stories about recent supernatural experiences. They were afraid that if such stories appeared in print, it might affect the way they were seen by others (see Jón Árnason 1954:XIX-XX and Maurer 2015:15).

¹³. In their descriptions of Iceland in the mid-nineteenth century, Frederik A. Bergsöe and Sveinn Skúlasón (1853:25-8) talk about a strong imbalance in the ratio between men and women in Iceland, especially in those over the age of 20. The main reason was the high proportion of men drowning at sea. In this period, 35 out of every 10,000 men aged 15-60 drowned in Iceland annually, compared with six of every 10,000 in Denmark. Drowning continued to be one of the main causes of accidental death for Icelandic males well into the twentieth century, with about 70 men drowning each year (Guðmundur Jónsson and Magnús S. Magnússon 1997:195). It is a high death toll given the small size of the Icelandic population, which did not reach 100,000 until the 1920s. As for deaths on land, as noted above, men were more often responsible for outdoor work on the farm, although women certainly had to take on male roles at certain times, as when the men were absent during the fishing season. Men were also largely responsible for travel (as when trading) and would commonly have to traverse rivers without bridges on their routes, where they risked drowning. They were also at greater risk of dying of exposure, not only during their travels

but also when attending to the sheep in the sheep sheds, which were usually some distance from the farm, and when gathering the sheep in the fall in the *afréttir*, the communal pasturelands in the Icelandic highlands in which sheep roamed freely during the summer. On the division of labor on the Icelandic turf-farm and in the *afréttir*, see Jónas Jónasson (1961:56-130); and Magnús Gíslason (1977:21-67, 147-54).

¹⁴. See note 13.

¹⁵. Along with short accounts dealing with the experiences of people witnessing or hearing them, the legends told about *huldufólk* in the Icelandic sound archives include several international migratory legends (see Christiansen 1958, on the ML numbers given here) about midwives to the fairies (ML 5070) (see Almqvist 2008), and Christmas visits made to farms by such supernatural figures (ML 6015 and 6015A) (see Gunnell 2004). Alongside these are numerous local migratory legends about love affairs between women and male *huldufólk* (and vice versa); about female *huldukonur* asking for assistance in the form of milk or other food; and about the revenge taken by the *huldufólk* when children or other humans (usually male) threw stones at them or ruined the *huldufólk* household with new constructions on the same site. In the first Icelandic legend collection published in the mid-nineteenth century, Jón Árnason's *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* (1954-1961), there are stories about people, usually men, doing business with *huldufólk* merchants and international migratory legends about changelings (ML 5058), as well as legends about *huldufólk* kidnapping human children. Such stories are rarely found in the more recent collections.

¹⁶. A number of the Northern European legends about the fairies or hidden people certainly place a strong emphasis on women's experiences and roles. See, for example, Conrad (2021) and Mac Cárthaigh (1991).

¹⁷. The 407 legends cited in figure 4 include only material for which women are the only source. There are, however, many more legends for which women are named as a source along with male storytellers. These have been excluded from the analysis for the sake of clarity.

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Note that in accordance with Icelandic practice, all Icelandic authors are listed by their Christian/first names unless they use a family name. They are placed alphabetically in bibliography according to their Christian/first names.]

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6.4 Three Women of Iceland and The Stories They Told

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Abstract:

This article focuses on the repertoires of three female storytellers contained in the audio archives of the folkloric collection of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland. The women in question were all born late in the nineteenth century and had unusually large repertoires. The article draws together information on their lives and surroundings to consider the context of their storytelling, also paying attention to who they learned their stories from and to whom they are predominantly likely to have told them. Among other things, it considers the close relationship between the women's experiences, and surroundings and their stories, underlining the degree to which such contextual features influence the content of the stories. The article shows that although these women also lived comparatively different lives, they all seem to have had an unusually large circle of contacts for women living in the Icelandic rural community of the past, underlining the importance of this feature for building up the repertoire of an active storyteller. While some elements of these women's repertoires can be considered to be particularly female traits (on the basis of previous research), others are evidently more in line with those witnessed in the repertoires of men in the past, something which, to some extent, can be explained by these women's experiences, which to some degree seem to reflect those of men in their communities.

Key words: Iceland, Women, Storytellers, Legends, Narratives, Storytelling, Performance, the Icelandic Rural Community of the Past

Iceland is particularly rich in terms of sources on oral storytelling in the pre-industrial rural community of earlier times. These sources come in the form of two particularly large types of folk narrative archives. One is the folk narrative collections published by various collectors in the nineteenth and twentieth century, which in recent years have been digitalized and mapped in the Sagnagrunnur database in which special effort has been put into reconnecting the material with its original narrators and its geographical surroundings (see Trausti Dagsson 2014; and Gunnell 2015). This large archive of c. 10,000 printed legends originating mainly in the earlier rural community has in recent years been the source of several new studies dealing with the sociocultural context of folk narrative traditions of the past (see, for example, Eva Þórdís Ebenezersdóttir 2010, and Gunnell 2005 and 2012), among others dealing with gender and the image of women in Icelandic legends (see, for example, Dagrún

Jónsdóttir 2020). These studies have shown that it is possible to reconstruct many performative features of the legend tradition of the past, among other things by making use of various kinds of archives.

The second Icelandic archive of folk narratives with roots in the earlier Icelandic rural community is the sound archive of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland. This collection has also recently gone through the process of digitalization and is now easily available on the electronic database *Ísmús* (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2013). This collection includes over 2000 hours of audiotaped folkloric material recorded by several collectors in the latter half of the twentieth century, using informants who in many cases were born on the latter half of the nineteenth century. This generation of Icelanders have been referred to as the last generation of the Icelandic pre-industrial rural community, which came to an end unusually late by European standards, around the time of the Second World War (Hastrup 1998: 26; Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1983; Magnús Gíslason 1977: 5-8). This collection, due to its audio nature and its rich contextual information about narrators and storytelling traditions, is particularly well suited for considerations of narrators and performance and has already been effectively used by Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir in her studies of the Icelandic narrators of wonder tales and their repertoires, a work which underlined the degree to which the mindset and environment of the narrators left its mark on the stories they told (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011: 154-165). My own studies, which have been aimed at reconstructing various features of women's legend traditions in earlier times, using these audiotaped sources, have been limited to the interviews taken by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (1934-2005) (see Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2018 and forthcoming a and b). In these previous articles, I have concentrated on the role played by women in storytelling activities on the Icelandic turf-farm, and various spatial features reflected in their storytelling; and the general characteristics of women's repertoires, underlining features which can potentially be regarded as female traits.

This present article will focus on three women interviewed by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson who had unusually large repertoires. These women were chosen more and less randomly from the group of women in my sources who were shown to have had unusually large repertoires and belonged to three different social groups of women, one being a married farm housewife, one being a single, childless woman and one a woman who had employment outside the realm of her home. The purpose of this survey is to examine the degree to which these women's experiences and surroundings shaped their repertoires and influenced their storytelling. Here, I follow the lead of several other folklorists who have focused on the work of individual storytellers by the means of archived material (see, for example, Gísli Sigurðsson 1998; Herranen 1989 and 1993; Holbek 1987; Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011; and Tangherlini 1994 and

2013), reconstructing both their biographical profiles and the context of their storytelling. The three women featured in this article, Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir, Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir and Þuríður Stefanía Árnadóttir, who were all born late in the nineteenth century, came of age in the early 1900s, when the rural community of the turf-farm was still in bloom. However, as I will hope to show in the article, these women evidently lived quite different lives which shaped their repertoire in different ways. Among other things, this underlines the degree to which the women of the past in Iceland were far from being a monolithic group, suggesting that the general ideas about Icelandic rural women in the past being homebound and socially restricted may have been somewhat too simple. It also adds further support to earlier research underlining how legend repertoires seem to have developed in close relationship with narrators' surroundings and life experience.

Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir (1892-1982)

In the Icelandic rural community, midwives lived lives that were considerably different from those of most other women at the time. In the late eighteenth century, midwifery had become the first profession for women that demanded a formal education, the first official training having been established in 1761 (Helga Þórarinsdóttir 1984: 19) and was for many years the only public office allotted to women. Being a midwife in rural Iceland was a difficult job in the past, perhaps more difficult than in most other countries because of the absence of roads and bridges, the long distances between farms and the unpredictable weather. The midwives were some of the few very women (outside tramps) who regularly experienced rough winter travelling around their wider communities, having been appointed by the state to cover districts that were often comparatively large in geographical terms and sparsely populated. As in other countries, they are common figures in Icelandic legend tradition, many of them being themselves noted storytellers (Almqvist 2008: 312- 316; Elsa Ósk Alfreðsdóttir 2013: 79-84). This implies that there may have been something about the profession of midwifery in rural Iceland that made midwives particularly suitable as active participants in passing on the legend tradition. Indeed, among the informants interviewed by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson one finds several midwives with unusually large legend repertoires, the largest with a total of 69 legends belonging to Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir (1892-1982) from Skógarnes on Snæfellsnes peninsula, who became the midwife for the Ólafsvík and Fróðár municipality.

The source material on the life of Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir is comparatively rich compared with that on most other women of her time. Indeed, she was one of few Icelandic women of her period to have their

memoirs published (in 1973, when she was still alive: see Halldór Pjetursson 1973).⁹⁷ This book alongside an obituary written about her in 1982 (Helgi Kristjánsson 1982) make an excellent addition to the information she gives herself about her life in the nine interviews with her recorded by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in Reykjavík over the years 1967-1978. This material provides a valuable context to her extant oral repertoire recorded in Hallfreður Örn's interviews.

As many midwives in the past, Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir belonged to the lower economic stratum throughout her life. She grew up in a poor rural household in Straumfjarðartunga in the municipality of Miklaholt in Snæfellsnes after having been born in 1892, the second oldest of seven siblings. The municipality was a small community on the south of the Snæfellsnes peninsula, containing about 20 farms at the time Þorbjörg was growing up (Halldór Pjetursson, 1973: 16-31). The farm at Straumfjarðartunga was small and could barely sustain the family. Her father, Guðmundur Jóhannesson (1859-1930), therefore had to do small jobs for other wealthier farmers in the neighbourhood to provide for the household, and during the spring, annually left the farm to work as a fisherman on an open boat in a neighbouring region which was better located for fishing (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 9-11; SÁM 88/1514 and 89/1986). He was considered very able travelling under difficult conditions and was often asked to help travellers over the river his farm, Straumfjarðartunga, drew its name from, or to escort doctors and midwives on their journeys (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 32-35 and 43-44; SÁM 88/1552). While Þorbjörg does not tell any accounts of her father's travelling in the interviews taken by Hallfreður Örn, she does this in her autobiography, where, among other reminiscences, she gives an account of how her father escorted a midwife over the ice-covered river when it flooded during the winter of 1906. While the narrative is told as a means of highlighting her father's role as an escort under difficult conditions, it simultaneously provides an excellent insight into the conditions faced by midwives like Þorbjörg in rural Iceland at the time:

Kristjana [the midwife] was a wise woman with "fortunate hands." My father passed on his message and said how long it had been since the woman had been taken ill, giving all relevant information about the situation. She thought for a moment and then said: "It would be criminal to refuse now; we will

⁹⁷ The account was recorded and edited by Halldór Pjetursson who is seen as being the author of the book instead of Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir herself, as was common practice at the time. While it was common for men who grew up in the Icelandic rural community of the past to publish their autobiographies and memoirs in the latter half of the twentieth century, few such accounts written by women exist (see further Ragnhildur Richter 1997). Þorbjörg's memoir is thus a valuable and somewhat rare source on the life of women in Iceland.

attempt this in the name of God, Guðmundur; no one should have to live without mercy.” [...] They set off and did not waste any time on the way. But when they got to the river, things looked even worse. Cracks had started appearing in the ice, and the river was roaring by like mad. Gestur [who had been called out on the other side of the river] called over to them, saying: “It’s hopeless! The ice has burst up there and reached the Gissursvallafljót river [...], and even more has broken off the ice bridge [that had been crossed earlier] since this morning.” My father looked at Kristjana and said: “What now?” She answered immediately: “Onwards, for the sake of God.” My father swung her up onto his shoulder and set off. When they approached the other side, the water was up to his hips. My father then swung Kristjana and threw her up onto the Ice edge, calling to Gestur: “Make sure you deliver her in no worse a condition than I am delivering her to you! It’s a matter of life and death!” He then turned back, but just as he was approaching the other side, then the avalanche reached them, the river cutting its way between the banks. He later said that he was really lucky that he made it, because the avalanche went over both banks. And the midwife made it just in time. The mother had been fighting like a hero for 38 hours before help arrived. Kristjana was a brave woman, she trusted in more than her own abilities, she believed in God. There was no doctor there to assist her, but she managed to save mother and child. (Halldór Pétursson 1973: 63-64).⁹⁸

(Kristjana [ljósmóðirin] var vitur kona og með lánshendur. Faðir minn ber nú upp erindið, segir hvað langur tími var síðan konan veiktist og allar aðstæður þar að lútandi. Hún hugsar sig um andartak og segir síðan: „Það kemur nú úr hörðustu átt að neita núna, og við skulum reyna í Drottins nafni Guðmundur minn, enginn má líknarlaus lífa.” [...] Þau leggja nú af stað og spöruðu ekki sporin. En er að ánni kemur, er útlitið enn ljótara. Þar eru komnar sprungur í ísinn og áin beljar fram í grimdarham. Kallar þá Gestur [sendimaður handan árinna] til þeirra og segir: „Þetta er vonlaust, jakahlaupið er komið ofan að Gissursvallafljóti [...] og mikið meira brotið úr skaflinum [sem fært var yfir um morguninn] en í morgunn.” Pabbi segir þá og lítur á Kristjönu: „Hvað nú?” Hún svarar á augabragði: „Áfram fyrir Guðs skuld.” Pabbi sveiflar henni þá á öxl sér og leggur út í. Þegar að hinum bakkanum kemur, tekur vatnið honum í mjöðm. Tekur þá pabbi sveiflu og kastar Kristjönu upp á skörina, og kallar til Gestu svo segjandi: „Skilaðu henni ekki verr í áfangastað en ég til þín, því líf liggur við.” Snýr hann svo til baka, en um leið og hann kemur að bakkanum hinum megin, þá kemur skriðan og áin ruddi sig landanna á milli. Sagði hann frá því síðar, að þá hefði hann átt fótum sínum fjör að launa, því skriðan gekk yfir alla bakka. Og seinna mátti ekki vera með ljósmóðurina. Móðirin var búin að heyja hetjulega baráttu í 38 klukkustundir, þegar hjálpin kom. Kristjana var hugprúð kona, hún trúði á meria en mátt sinn og megin, hún trúði á guð. Þarna var enginn læknir til aðstoðar, en henni tókst að bjarga bæði móðirinni og barninu.)

⁹⁸ All stories in this article are all translated by Terry Gunnell.

Þorbjörg herself became a midwife in 1914 and would later experience similar conditions in the rural parts of the municipality she later worked in on Fróðár on the northern side of the Snæfellsnes peninsula. Before leaving for Reykjavík in 1914 to study to become a midwife, she had had a child out of wedlock, a “lovechild” as she herself referred to such children (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 76-72 and 81-87; Helgi Kristjánsson 1982: 38). In 1912, she had become a farmhand on a farm in Staðarsveit on the south of the peninsula, where she had fallen in love with the son of her employee, who became the father of the child.



Figure 1. Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir. Photo: From Halldór Pjetursson 1973.

Unfortunately, his mother had higher expectations for son, wanting him to marry a woman with a higher economic background, and she succeeded in splitting the couple before the child was born in 1913. Now a single mother, Þorbjörg was forced to figure out a way to provide for herself and the child. She opted to leave her son with her parents and to study to become a midwife. By the time Þorbjörg entered the newly established School of Midwifery (*Ljósmeðraskólinn*) in Reykjavík in 1914, the training of midwives had been extended from three months to six. Still very poor, she had managed to make a deal with the local municipality of Fróðár before leaving, a small grant being awarded to her for the promise to serve the municipality for one year after her graduation (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 81-87).

Þorbjörg moved to the Fróðár district in 1915, living there on the farm Hrísar for the next four years (Halldór Pjetursson 1973, 88; SÁM 88/1514 and 92/2965). At the time, midwifery was not considered to be a full-time job, the assumption being that, unlike nurses who were supposed to remain single, midwives would be married women who were provided for by their husbands (Margrét Guðmundsdóttir 2010: 129- 132 and 155). This meant Þorbjörg had to take on a part time job as a farmhand on the farm alongside her work as midwife. After the first winter, she had to give up having her son with her and sent him back to live with her parents (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 88; SÁM 88/1514 and 92/2965). In 1918, however, she married a local fisherman named Steindór Bjarnason. Since there was no farm available for them in Fróðár municipality, they opted to move further west to Ólafsvík, a small fishing village on its borders (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 105-112).

Ólafsvík is one of the oldest villages in Iceland, having been certified as a trading place by the Danish authorities in 1687. In the 1920s, the village had a population of little under 450 (Hagstofa Íslands: sögulegar hagtölur), most of whom survived on a mixture of fishing and small-scale farming on the very limited farmland allotted to them by the village municipality (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1987: 206-208; Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 111; and Halldór Laxness 1963/1991: 230-231). Despite being a central trading place with several merchants, Ólafsvík did not get a proper harbour until 1920, meaning that fishing was restricted to small boats (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1987: 133). At around the time that Þorbjörg settled down in Ólafsvík with her husband, the village had become known as one of Iceland's most poverty-stricken villages (Halldór Laxness 1963/ 1991: 93). Þorbjörg now took on the role of a midwife in Ólafsvík, while simultaneously maintaining her duties in her former district of Fróðár. Her husband became a good father to her son, and over the next years they had six more children, including one that they lost in childhood. Þorbjörg spent a great deal of time alone, as her husband often worked a fisherman on larger trawlers based both in Reykjavík and in other distant places. In between these jobs, he would work on smaller fishing boats in their home village (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 105-112). This work along with Þorbjörg's modest salary as a midwife meant they were probably a little better off financially than many other inhabitants in the village at the time.

After the Second World War, Iceland's capital of Reykjavík experienced a strong wave of immigration of people from other parts of Iceland who were seeking new economic opportunities in the city. In line with this, Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir moved to Reykjavík with her husband in 1949, living in the city with their youngest son and his family. Unfortunately, disaster struck the family soon after their arrival when Þorbjörg's husband became disabled following a work accident (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 174-176). Only a few

years later, one of her sons suffered the same fate in Ólafsvík (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 177-180). As noted in her obituary, these accidents, and the other hardships Þorbjörg suffered over the course of her life may have caused her to become somewhat judgemental and even ruthless regarding some other people in her autobiography (Helgi Kristjánsson 1982: 39). She and her husband lived in Reykjavík for the rest of their lives on the second floor of a house built by her youngest son (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 175-176; and Helgi Kristjánsson 1982: 39). It is here that Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson met her for the first time in February 1967, when she had recently become a widow. Hallfreður Örn visited Þorbjörg nine times during two distinct periods 10 years apart, the former lasting from February 1967 to October 1968 at which time he recorded six interviews (SÁM 88/1514-1515; 88/1552-1553; 88/1564-1565; 89/1761-1762; 89/1752-1753; and 89/1986), while the latter visits occurred over the space of several days in April 1978, during which time he recorded three more interviews (SÁM 92/2963-2967). The interviews in question provide little information about the wider context of Þorbjörg's storytelling occasions in her former home on the Snæfellsnes peninsula, including when and to whom she told her stories. Other sources, however, such as the obituary written by Helgi Kristjánsson in 1982 (p.39), imply she was well-known and respected for her storytelling skills. Helgi also notes her intelligence and her large repertoire of "amusing and serious materials". In his introduction to her memoirs, Halldór Pjetursson gives a short account about how he came to cooperate with Þorbjörg during their mutual stay at a sanatorium in Hveragerði in 1968. Halldór's wife had come across Þorbjörg outside and told her husband, an author of several books on the Icelandic oral tradition, that this woman was likely to have something interesting to talk about. Upon meeting her himself, he says he too became aware of her intelligence and storytelling skills as well as her frankness, which he makes special mention of in the introduction (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 7-8). An anonymous review of Þorbjörg's memoirs ("Lífsreynslusaga ljósmóður" 1973: 12), also notes her frankness, saying she is sometimes even somewhat merciless in her narratives about people, meaning that the book is likely to be found controversial by some. The implication here is that Þorbjörg did not tend to hold much back in her narrating, feeling no need to remain polite towards people in her narratives.

As noted above, midwifery in rural Iceland appears to have provided women with a good platform for sharing and learning oral stories. Þorbjörg's midwifery meant she was unusually mobile within her own community, meeting far more people than most other women of the period, something which is likely to have contributed to her ability to adapt new narratives into her repertoire and share her own with new audiences. This feature of midwifery in rural Iceland is highlighted in the following introduction Þorbjörg give to one of

her narratives, a story about livestock of the *huldufólk*⁹⁹ adopted into her repertoire from a senior midwife who stayed for several days at on Þorbjörg's childhood home when her brother was born:

It was so much fun hearing the old woman telling stories, everything was so logical for her. But I was so young, no more than five and half when I remember this event occurring, she helped my mother give birth. I listened to various stories that she told although I've forgotten them all now for the main part. [...] What she told us kids were mainly outlaw stories, *huldufólk* stories, ghost stories and wonder tales. And she believed steadfastly that *álfar*¹⁰⁰ existed. And then she told our mother this one [a story about the livestock of the *huldufólk*] while we were listening. (SÁM 88/1564).

(Það var ákaflega gaman að heyra gömlu konuna segja frá, það var allt svo rökfast hjá henni. En ég var nú svo ung, ég var ekki nema fimm og hálfárs þegar ég man eftir þessu atviki, að hún tók á móti barni hjá móður minni. Þá hlustaði ég ýmsar sögur sem hún var að segja þó ég sé búin að gleyma því núna í aðaldráttum. [...] Það sem hún sagði okkur krökkunum, það voru aðallega útilegumannasögur, huldufólkssögur, draugasögur og ævintýri. Og hún trúði því stöðugt að álfar væru til. Og þá sagði hún móðir okkar þetta [sögu um búfénað huldufólks] að okkur áheyrandi.)

As Þorbjörg notes herself (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 47-48; SÁM 89/1761), echoing many of Hallfreður Örn's other informants (see, for example, SÁM 85/232; 88/1640; 88/1670; 90/2128; 93/3624), guests were an important source of news and new narratives in the rural community of the past, and especially those who visited came from other regions. This means that Þorbjörg, who was not a native of the district in which she served, is more likely to have been asked to share her stories and give information about ways of life in her childhood region than people who were native to the district. Furthermore, because of her work, she was naturally unusually mobile compared to most women of the period, as earlier noted, something that would give her, like most other midwives, strong social capital, making her a more active participant in the legend tradition than most other women.

Information provided by Þorbjörg in the recordings suggests that she adapted narratives into her repertoire from both men and women living both at her home and in the wider community. Indeed, she notes previous narrators of 16 of the narratives she tells in the recordings, nine women and seven men, suggesting women might have been a slightly more common source for her than

⁹⁹ The *huldufólk* (lit. hidden people), sometimes referred to as *álfar* in Iceland, are the Icelandic equivalent of the Norwegian *huldre* or *underjordiske* (lit. underground people), the Irish and Scottish fairies and the Shetlandic *trows*. Similar in appearance and size to human beings, they are believed to live in rocks close the settlement areas. See further Gunnell 2007, 2014 and 2017.

¹⁰⁰ See previous note.

men. (Of course, most of her interactions would have been with women.) This gender-division is nonetheless somewhat different from the overall pattern witnessed in the repertoires of Hallfreður Örn's other female informants, in which women, and predominantly mothers, tend to dominate as source of the women's narratives, suggesting which suggests that legend tradition of the Icelandic rural community in the past was to some extent transmitted along gender-lines (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir, forthcoming b). In the case of Þorbjörg her most common source was not her mother, but rather female neighbours (who are the sources of five of her narratives; seven if we consider her full repertoire, including the nine retellings). While her mother is the source of three legends, her father and male neighbours are noted as being the source of two narratives.¹⁰¹ The high number of neighbours mentioned here as sources would seem to underline the different social reality that Þorbjörg inhabited and the fact that she had a better platform for learning new stories outside the realm of her home than most other women would have had at the time.

Regarding the subject matter of her stories, while Þorbjörg tells several secular narratives dealing with historical people and events such as a local mass murderer, the secular origins of place names, and accidents on mountain routes, especially in the long interview from April 1967 (SÁM 88/1564-1966), her tradition orientation¹⁰² represented by her complete recorded repertoire appears to focus on supernatural tradition. In short, about two thirds of her narratives make use of supernatural tradition in some form.¹⁰³ She also appears to prefer a personal mode of narration to a more detached narrative style. In short, around half of her narratives are first and second-hand personal experience stories, predominantly memorates dealing with supernatural experiences. This line of tradition orientation is very much in line with that of other female storytellers in the recordings of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir, forthcoming b).

While almost all the categories of supernatural tradition known to Icelandic culture in the past (see Jón Árnason 1862-1864) make an appearance in Hallfreður Örn's recordings of Þorbjörg's storytelling, she has several

¹⁰¹ Other sources of single narratives include her husband, her grandfather, her father-in-law and a housewife on a farm where Þorbjörg worked as a farmhand.

¹⁰² Tradition orientation refers to the type of narrative tradition that narrators tend to specialize in (see Siikala 1990: 146-169).

¹⁰³ This excludes the nine retellings, all of which are rooted in the supernatural tradition (three belief legends, five memorates and one second-hand memorates). These retellings naturally also tell us something about tradition orientation, since it suggests that they were a fixed part of her repertoire, that is, the narratives which she was herself most interested in telling, in this case, narratives of supernatural nature.

conflicting views about their background in reality. For example, while she certainly tells first and second-hand experience narratives about lake- and sea monsters and the *huldufólk* (SÁM 88/1564-1565; and 89/1760-1761) she also makes several remarks mocking other people's beliefs in these beings, including her husbands' belief in *huldufólk* (SÁM 88/1564) and her father-in-law's apparent experience of sea monsters (SÁM 92/2966). Her doubts about existence of *huldufólk* are particularly interesting given her profession: as Bo Almqvist has shown in his detailed study of the Icelandic version of Midwife to the Fairies migratory legend (ML 5070), well-known local midwives tended to be central figures in these narratives in the late nineteenth century and the early 1900s (Almqvist 2008: 307-314). Furthermore, as Almqvist underlines, midwives appear to have commonly told these stories about themselves as an explanation of their calling to midwifery and their general good fortune in this profession, the latter being result of a reward from the *huldufólk* that originally called on them. Þorbjörg, however, makes no attempt to associate her career with the world of the *huldufólk* or claim any supernatural help. She does, however, (on the same occasion) state a firm belief in the spirits of the dead,¹⁰⁴ following this statement up with a long personal experience story about two dead fishermen from her community who guided her when visiting a woman in labour on a bad weather day in Ólafsvík (SÁM 88/1564). Like many other midwives in rural Iceland, she thus still expresses the idea of receiving supernatural help, seemingly exchanging assistance from the *huldufólk* with that of the dead, something that can be said to illustrate how narrators adapt traditional ideas to new challenges and their own personal belief systems.

The content of Þorbjörg's supernatural legends suggest she predominantly draws on three categories of supernatural tradition: the dead, which appear in 13 narratives; the *huldufólk*, appearing in seven; and omens (and especially dream omens), which form the topics of eight,¹⁰⁵ Despite Þorbjörg's earlier-noted doubts

¹⁰⁴ In another interview (SÁM 89/1761), however, Þorbjörg also suggests that she does not believe in "*draugar*", implying that she saw a distinction between types of dead spirits. In Icelandic tradition, *draugar* (pl.) are usually maleficent dead people, often strangers, who appear repeatedly, while the *svipir* that Þorbjörg refers to here are usually the spirits of familiar people who appear once or twice to solve some unfinished business. (On this, see, for example, Simpson 2004: 17-18 and Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 183-188).

¹⁰⁵ While only eight dream narratives are found Þorbjörg's recorded repertoire, her 1973 memoirs suggest that dreams may have been a favourite subject of hers, especially in her senior years, a large number of dream narratives appearing in the narratives she shares with Hallfreður Örn (and especially the later interviews where she tells the most of her narratives about dream omens, which follow a request from Hallfreður Örn, who was probably made aware of her interest in this subject from her memoirs).

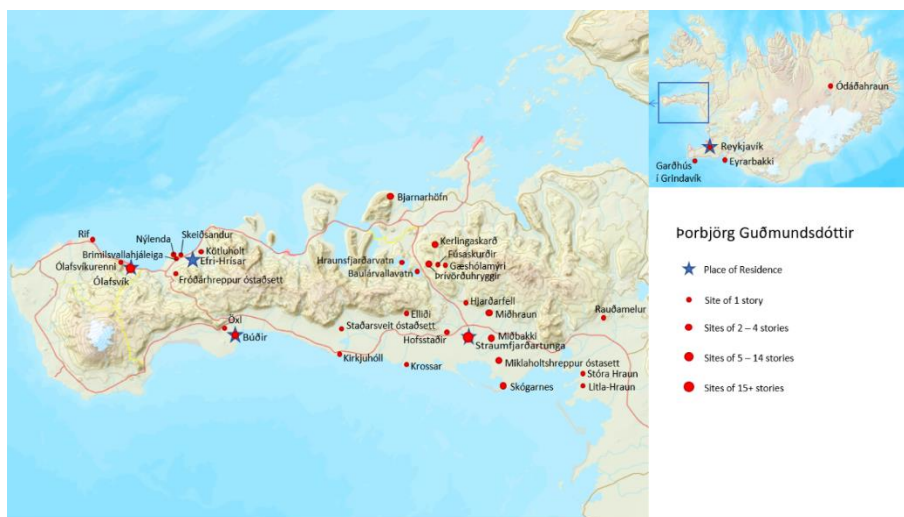


Figure 2: Þorbjörg’s residential history and the settings of her stories.¹⁰⁶

about the existence of *huldufólk*, she tells four memorates and three second-hand memorates about these beings in the recordings, most of which deal with experiences of alleged enchanted spots associated with the sites where the *huldufólk* lived (see Gunnell, 2018) or witnesses of their livestock. It is noteworthy that all these narratives take place in her childhood or before she was born, suggesting that while she may not have been a strong believer herself, she was aware of other people’s beliefs and interests and that she had grown up in an environment where this tradition had still been strong. The narratives of the dead and the omens, on the other hand, take the form of both memorates recounting her adult experiences and legends recounting the contemporary experiences of her neighbours in Ólafsvík and Fróðár municipality where she worked. These are evidently the dominant supernatural traditions that she draws on as adult, perhaps reflecting wider trends in Icelandic traditional folk belief at the time in which experiences of the dead were gradually replacing those of the *huldufólk* as the dominant tradition (on this, see, for example, Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2008: 297).

Regarding gender emphases, men appear in close to 90% of Þorbjörg’s narratives and women appear in little over half. This ratio is very similar to that found in the repertoires of Hallfreður Örn’s other female informants of (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir, forthcoming b). It may simply reflect the fact that men were more involved in the “noteworthy” activities that took place in the rural

¹⁰⁶ The maps in this article all come from the *Kortasjá database* produced by *Landmælingar Íslands*, retrieved May 24th from <https://kortasja.lmi.is/mapview/application=kortasja>. The markings on the maps have been drawn by Ólöf Birna Magnúsdóttir.

community of the past, meaning that their experiences tended to form the norm. What is perhaps particularly significant here, is that while half of Þorbjörg's narratives include female roles (other than herself), women seldom take leading positions in her stories. This might perhaps be explained by the fact that her profession meant that she had experiences (including travel, for example) which were more characteristic of men's lives than those of most women. This might also have led to her having more interest in stories that reflected such experiences, which would typically have involved men rather than women.

If one considers mood and style, Þorbjörg is a pessimistic narrator in the sense that her narratives tend to have tragic outcome, resulting in somebody's death, often by accident. Fishermen drowned at sea are common feature of her storytelling, among other places appearing in narratives about haunted routes and other experiences of the dead that occur while travelling on foot (SÁM 88/1565; 92/2963; and 92/2966); in narratives about omens observed before accidents take place on the sea (SÁM 89/1952; and 92/2965); and of hearing "náhljóð" (lit. the sound of a corpse) on land at a time when fishermen are drowning at sea far away (SÁM 89/1952). The strong role played by fishermen and accidents at sea in Þorbjörg's narratives is understandable given the fact that Þorbjörg was the daughter of one fisherman and later a wife of another and lived most of her adult years in a fishing village. This emphasizes the degree to which legend repertoires in the rural community of the past were, as they are today, predominantly shaped by the narrator's environment and experience, expressing concerns and fears which take different forms in different communities.

Þorbjörg's experience as a regularly travelling rural midwife may also be responsible for strong emphasis on journeys in her storytelling, and especially those telling of trips often across mountain routes which would have been a common feature of her work in Snæfellsnes. Indeed, more than half of her narratives take place partly or fully in non-domestic spaces (such as on travel routes, mountains, sea, beaches and so on: see *Figure 2*). In this respect, as in several others, her repertoire resembles those of men in the Icelandic rural community of the past more than women's. Indeed, studies dealing with the occurrence of place names in the Icelandic legend tradition have shown how legends told by men tend to reflect the routes they travelled as part of their work while women's narratives tend to be limited to the domestic space of their farms (Trausti Dagsson 2014: 8-9; Gunnell 2015: 31-33). Þorbjörg's midwifery naturally meant she shared the experience of travel on foot with the men in her community, giving her plenty of opportunities to experience memorable and tellable incidents that occurred during her own travels. Several narratives she tells deal with adventures that occurred during her work-related journeys, during which she experienced both difficult environments and the contact with

the supernatural (SÁM 88/1564-1567; 92/2966; see also the example quoted above). The same spaces are reflected in many of the other historical legends and belief legends she tells in which travellers encounter lake monsters, hauntings, and sometimes tragic deaths because of the elements (SÁM 88/1564-1566; and 92/2965).

One narrative in Þorbjörg's repertory offers a good example of how a narrator's personal experiences are reflected not only in the own memorates but also (less directly) by the narratives they choose to tell of other people's experiences (Holbek 1987; Palmenfelt 1993; Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011). This can be clearly seen in one narrative Þorbjörg tells in a recording from December 1967 as part of a conversation about folk poetry:

This was a story that I heard when I was a farmhand at Búðir in Snæfellsnes, working for the late Finnbogi Lárusson and his people. Finnbogi's mother-in-law was called Guðbjörg and she was born and brought up in Garðhús in í Reykjavík. And there used to be a lot of people and lively activity in her house because her father ran a fishing business. And there were a lot of people staying at the fishing station, and among them a man called Jónatan, a young man. He loved singing and had a good voice, and often chanted *rímur* ballads for the lady of the house, Þuríður Eyjólfsdóttir, an old lady. And once it happened that he was unusually down at heart. So Þuríður said to him: "What's the matter, Jónatan? You're not usually so bad-tempered." And then he said: "A chilly, gripping gust of wind / is causing me anxiety ;/ I have lost a maid who was dear to me / so terribly." Then Þuríður said, "Things have evidently come to pass that you will never enjoy Ólöf." He was engaged at the time to Ólöf, who was the daughter of a rich man and never got to marry Jónatan. She was made to marry another man. [...] Ólöf married this man and then Jónatan [married someone else] but he had only been married for half a month when her husband died, and then it was too late. Jónatan missed her all his life and had a child named after her. (SÁM 89/1762).

(Þessa sögn heyrði ég nú þegar ég var vinnukona á Búðum á Snæfellsnesi, hjá Finnboga heitnum Lárussyn og því fólki. Tengdamóðir Finnboga hét Guðbjörg og hún var fædd og uppalinn í Garðhúsum í Reykjavík. Og á hennar heimili var oft mjög mannmargt og glaðværðin mikil því að hann var útvegsmaður faðir hennar. Og þar voru margir menn í veri, þar á meðal var maður sem hét Jónatan, ungur maður. Hann var mjög söngelskur, og raddmaður góður, og kvað oft rímur fyrir húsfreyjuna, Þuríði Eyjólfsdóttur, gömlu konuna. Eitt sinn ber svo við að hann er venju fremur daufur í dálkinn. Þá hafi Þuríður sagt við hann: „hvað amar að þér Jónatan? Þú ert ekki vanur að vera svona fúll.“ Og þá segir hann: Kuldanapur, nauður blær/nú mér skapar trega/mér hefur tapast mærin kær/ mikið hraparlega.“ Þá segir Þuríður, „nú er það nú komið svo, færð þú nú ekki að njóta hennar Ólafar.“ Þá var hann heitbundinn, og þau sín á milli, Ólöf og hann, en hún var ríks manns dóttir og fékk ekki að eiga hann Jónatan. En var látinn eiga annan mann. [...] Ólöf giftist þessum manni og síðan Jónatan en hann er bara búinn að vera hálfan mánuð í hjónabandi þegar maður hennar dó- en þá var það of seint, en Jónatan tregaði hana alla ævi og lét heita eftir henni.)

As noted by Þorbjörg at the start of the narrative, she had heard this story being told when she was a young farmhand in Búðir, where she lived in 1910-1911 and where she met the father of her first child (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 67-72). While the timing suggests that she heard this story before she experienced her own adversity,¹⁰⁷ the narrative closely mirrors her own experience shortly afterwards, when her boy-friend's mother succeeding in breaking the couple apart after finding that Þorbjörg came from a low economic background. One can understand why this story should have been meaningful for Þorbjörg, who, just like the poet in the story, also composed poetry about her lost love (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 70 and 80). As Palmenfelt (1993) notes, narratives of other people's similar experiences can offer a useful buffer for narrators to refer to their own painful or shameful experiences while simultaneously offering an outlet for the narrator's feelings and the audiences' evaluation of the experiences. While Þorbjörg's frankness about the betrayal of her boyfriend, the rejection by his family and the child she had out of wedlock are all in her memoirs, one can understand that she may have found her own personal experiences difficult to narrate during her audiotaped sessions with Hallfreður Örn, in which she would have had less control of the narrative and its interpretation. The narrative quoted above was thus a useful substitute for her own experience, and its importance in Þorbjörg's repertoire is underlined by the fact that this is one of the very few narratives she tells that does not take place in a familiar environment in which she has resided (see *Figure 2*) but rather in a community she is unfamiliar with (Grindavík in South-East Iceland).

To summarize, Þorbjörg appears to be a storyteller who took a rather personal approach to the legend and folk belief tradition, specializing predominantly in memorates of a supernatural nature. While she appears to have been familiar with the broad range of Icelandic folk belief traditions, her own personal beliefs, expressed through her personal memorates and comments on her own experiences of the supernatural (and those of other people), suggest that she was a strong believer in dreams, omens and the spirits of the dead, but had reservations about other categories of the supernatural, such as sea- and lake monsters and the *huldufólk*, the latter predominantly appearing in stories learned in her childhood rather than in adulthood. While her repertoire includes certain characteristics commonly dominant in the repertoires of other women in the same sources (see Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir, forthcoming b), such as a

¹⁰⁷ The housewife at Búðir was the aunt of Þorbjörg's boy-friend, and in the following winter of 1912-1913, she became a farmhand on his parents' farm in the same region. His parents were unaware of their affair until the summer of 1913, when Þorbjörg could no longer hide her pregnancy and had to move back to her parents because of his mother's hostility (Halldór Pjetursson 1973: 67-69).

general orientation towards memorates and supernatural traditions, and the inclusion of more female characters in her stories, other characteristics of her repertoire are more in line with those stories more commonly told by men, with an emphasis on leading male characters, and journeys across the wilderness and along highland routes. This emphasis, as well as the close proximity of places mentioned in her stories to her places of residence, and the inclusion of narratives that directly or indirectly reflect her own personal experience, both as a midwife travelling around rural Iceland and as a woman suffering heartbreak, clearly underlines the degree to which legend repertoires are essentially formed around the surroundings and personal experiences of their narrators.

Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir frá Byggðarholti (1887-1971)

Single unmarried women are one of the most difficult social groups to work with when reconstructing the context of oral storytelling in the Icelandic rural community of the past. These women often have thin presence in biographical sources which, until recently, have tended to treat women primarily in connection with their husbands or male relatives rather than as autonomous individuals entitled to their own coverage (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir 2018: 134). The lack of descendants of most single women in the past does not help, as this means they tend to have a shorter afterlife in oral history and cultural memory than other women who have children and grandchildren to pass on information about them. Historically however, single women made up a large social group in the Icelandic rural community of the past, about a third of those women 25 years old and older in 1910 (Hagstofa Íslands: sögulegar hagtölur), and presumably an even higher proportion of women in earlier times when restrictions were still in place on the marriages of poor people (Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson 1988: 108-111). Despite being a difficult social group to approach and reconstruct, these women are one of the most interesting groups to explore regarding the question of how the experiences and daily environments of women influenced their repertoires of legends. These women often lived lives and experienced a social reality that was considerably different from that of married women, having to either provide for themselves with employment, or live within the shelter of their family into adulthood (if their families could provide such shelter). The following discussion deals with the legends of one such woman, Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir (1887-1971), a former housekeeper from Byggðarholt in the Lón valley in South-East Iceland, who was interviewed seven times by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in the years 1966-1968 when she was a resident in the elderly people's home of Hrafnista in Reykjavík, each one being around 15-25 minutes in length (SÁM 85/259-260; 86/807-808; 86/843;

86/857-858; 88/1573-1574; 89/1782-1783; and 89/1807).¹⁰⁸ Here Ingibjörg tells 29 narratives, several riddles, a number of *þulur* (a form of oral poetry reminiscent in some way of nursery rhymes, see Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir 2020), some descriptions of folklife, and a short, rather holistic autobiographical account.



Figure 3: Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir frá Byggðarholti. Photo: Nicoline Waywadt 1848-1921, courtesy of the National Museum of Iceland.

As with most other single women in the past, written records provide little information about Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir's life. Hallferður Örn's interviews nonetheless provide some context to her life and storytelling. Ingibjörg was born on the farm Svínhólar in Lón valley in 1887, to Guðrún Vigfúsdóttir (1863-1940) and Sigurður Jónsson (1864-1938) (Austur-Skaftfellingar, 603). Her paternal grandfather was Jón Jónsson (1824-1907), living at Byggðarholt in

¹⁰⁸ Ingibjörg was also interviewed by Helga Jóhannsdóttir (1935-2006) in August 1963, when she was in the Ás nursing home in Hveragerði in Southern Iceland. Helga was an ethnomusicologist, and this interview was somewhat different to those taken by Hallferður Örn, being almost exclusively centred around musical genres and descriptions of performances.

the same valley who was also the local sheriff, and when her parents moved to Winnipeg in Canada in 1892¹⁰⁹ along with her siblings, Ingibjörg was left behind in his care (at the age of five). Ingibjörg would live here for most of her life. She began living as a foster child with her grandfather, but her upbringing was completed by her paternal uncles, Benedikt Jónsson (1854-1918) and Guðmundur Jónsson (1860-1944) and the latter's wife Guðrún Antoníusdóttir (1855-1926), who she fondly refers to as her mother in the recordings (SÁM 85/259 and 86/843). The reason why she was the only one of the family left behind is unclear. No explanation is given in the recordings. She nonetheless notes that she went to Canada twice to visit her family, first for a one-year-stay when she was a young woman and then once again for another year, 25 years later, after her parents had passed away (SÁM 85/259). On this same occasion, she notes that she did not like Canada very much at this point, feeling somewhat alienated from her siblings who had scattered across a large area. She therefore opted to move back to Iceland for her senior years.

The Lón valley where Ingibjörg grew up lies on the eastern border of the county of Austur-Skaftafellssýsla in South-East Iceland. The valley is somewhat isolated, surrounded by the highlands east of Iceland's largest glacier Vatnajökull, two large scree mountains, Eystrahorn and Vestrahorn reaching down to the sea and marking its borders to the east and west. 153 metres in height, the passage of Almannaskarð over the latter of the two mountains, was one of the steepest mountain routes in Iceland. The open sea which marks the south-eastern border of the Lón valley has two large lagoons (*lón* in Icelandic), from which the valley draws its name. The southern lagoon, Papafjörður, was serving as a small trading post between the mid-nineteenth century and 1897 (Stefán Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason 1971: 15-19). Until the mid-twentieth century, these lagoons were a main source of economic prosperity for the farmers in the valley who hunted seals here for their skins which were sold in markets. The farmers in the valley also had unusually large sheep herds because of how large their common grazing land (*afréttur* in Icelandic) in the highlands was, and because of the good environmental conditions, the region having

¹⁰⁹ Ingibjörg was the second oldest of ten siblings, four of whom were born in Iceland and six in Manitoba in Canada (Austur-Skaftfellingar, 1178). The Icelandic emigration to Canada between the early 1870s and the First World War is well-documented. It is estimated that during the period between 1870 to 1914 15.000 to 20.000 Icelanders, about a quarter of the population at the time, moved to Canada, settling down predominantly in Manitoba, where they established the Icelandic colony of Gimli. Many emigrants came from the east fjords of Iceland which had suffered the effects of a catastrophic volcanic eruption in 1875, which had a devastating effect on agriculture in this part of Iceland (see further Guðjón Arngrímsson 1997: 9-13 and 34-43 and Jonas Thor 2002: 3-23).

unusually little snow for Iceland (Jón Bragason, personal communication April 28, 2021). It is therefore safe to say that the Lón valley was a fairly rich region in the past, at least by Icelandic standards. In 1880 (shortly before Ingibjörg was born), it had a population of 278, and 17 main farmlands, many of which provided for more than one farmstead (Stefán Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason 1971: 19).

The farm of Byggðarholt, on which Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir lived most of her life, is situated in the middle of the valley, on the eastern riverbanks of the Jökulsá glacial river which divides the valley in two. The main route across the valley passed right by the farm in the past, meaning that the inhabitants frequently had to offer accommodation and escort for travellers seeking to cross the river. Indeed, the farm was a designated resting place for travellers on their way to the fishing village and trading post of Djúpivogur, east of Lón valley. Here people could rest and graze their horses (Stefán Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason 1971: 67-68). This meant that the inhabitants of Byggðarholt probably had frequent social interaction with travellers from other regions, especially those living to the south of the Lón valley, who travelled seasonally to Djúpivogur for fishing seasons or trading.¹¹⁰

In the late nineteenth century and the early 1900s, Ingibjörg's foster parents ran the farm at Byggðarholt in partnership with her grandfather and her unmarried uncle Benedikt Jónsson, who passed away in 1918 (Stefán Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason 1971: 70). Their estate had been the largest on this farmland since around 1800 according to Stefán Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason (1971: 69). According to censuses in 1901, 1910 and 1920 (*Manntöl*, digitalized versions available on <http://manntal.is/>), Byggðarholt supported a large household, including, in addition to the owners and their families, several farmhands and other non-related individuals.

The recordings with Ingibjörg provide a little more insight into her role on the farm. In the first recording, from October 1966, she tells Hallfreður Örn that it became her job to take care of the farm for her uncle after both of his sons had died from tuberculosis and he himself had lost his vision 30 years prior to his death (SÁM 85/259).¹¹¹ This timeframe points to this having taken place in the period between 1910 and 1920, her choice of words implying that her role on the farm involved supervision of the external affairs of the farm and other work

¹¹¹ It seems that Rögnvaldur, who died in 1917, was the only son to be raised on Byggðarholt, while according to the 1901 census, his brother Guðjón (1884-1905) appears to have been living with maternal relatives on the farm of Starmýri in the next valley to the east of Lón, where he is labelled foster son of the masters (*Manntal* 1901; *Íslendingabók*; and *Austur-Skaftfellingar*: 339).

that was traditionally done by men, rather than just housekeeping. From the recordings, it also becomes apparent that Ingibjörg received a good education by the standards of the time. She even went on to attend the secondary school for women in Akureyri (in the north of Iceland) for one winter, having to sail around Iceland for almost two weeks to get there (SÁM 85/260). In another recording, she casually admits that her household in Byggðarholt was unusually wealthy (SÁM 86/808), something which is further underlined by her two trips to Canada at times at a time when few people, let alone women, could afford such luxuries.

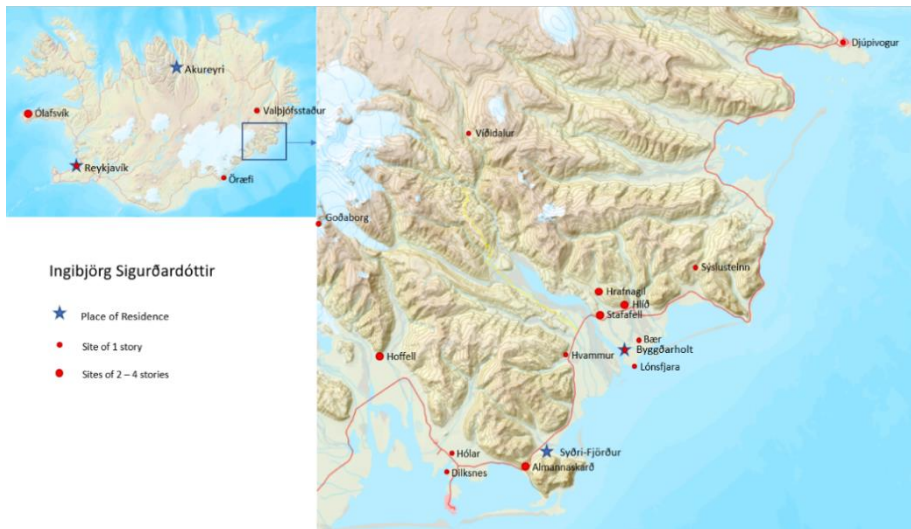


Figure 4: Ingibjörg’s residential history and the settings of her stories.

The latter part of Ingibjörg’s life is somewhat less clear although some limited information can be assumed by comparing the information given by herself in the recordings to other sources. Her foster mother died in Byggðarholt in 1926, and in 1934 her foster father moved to another farm in the valley, called Fjörður, where he died in 1944 (Stefán Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason 1971: 70). By this time, farming in Byggðarholt had become very difficult owing to repeated flooding of the river (Stefán Jónsson and Bjarni Bjarnason 1971: 68). The new farm had more land and better access to seals in the lagoon. Its main weakness was that it was located at the foot of the earlier-noted mountain, Vestrahorn, meaning that it was known as one of the farmsteads in Iceland that had the least sunlight, the sun not being visible for four months during the winter (Jón Bragason, personal communication April 28, 2021). As Ingibjörg is listed as living on this farm in the genealogical database *Íslendingabók* it can be assumed that she must have moved there in 1934 along with her foster father, and that she took care of him for the remainder of his life.

It is likely that Ingibjörg's second trip to Canada took place after the death of her foster father in 1944 which must have resulted in an existential crisis for Ingibjörg who suddenly found herself living alone and without immediate family in Iceland. Exactly where she settled after returning from her second trip to Canada is uncertain, but it is likely that it was in Reykjavík, contextual information in one of her stories suggesting that at

Ingibjörg recounts 24 legends and personal experience narratives for Hallfreður Örn during the years 1966-1968, 29 if we include five retellings of narratives. One noteworthy feature of her repertoire is that, like Þorbjörg's repertoire noted above, it reflects several traits that are more commonly associated with men's storytelling than women's. One logical reason for this might be the overly male environments in which she lived, both in her personal household, which was ruled by her grandfather and two uncles, and in her interactions with other individuals, who are likely to have been predominantly male neighbours living to the south of Byggðarholt and Lón valley, people who stopped by the farm on their seasonal journeys to Djúpvogur.¹¹² In this respect, the previous narrators of the stories told by Ingibjörg, who are sometimes noted by her, are particularly interesting: She cites her grandfather as the source of two narratives; her foster mother as the source of one; male and female farmhands living in the household as a mutual source of one; and then various non-domestic friends or neighbours as the sources of seven, five of them being men and only two women. This ratio is somewhat unusual among Hallfreður Örn's other female informants, since, as has been previously noted (see Þorbjörg above), women in Iceland seem to have predominantly adopted narratives from other women, mothers being the most common source. One possible explanation for Ingibjörg's repertoire might be her greater exposure to men's narratives rather than those of women. Another might be her experience as single woman, which could potentially have resulted in her having less interest in legends dealing with household matters than women who were housewives and mothers. One thus wonders whether there was possibly a difference between the repertoires of single women and those of women who were married or actively running a household. This seems likely but needs further research to establish whether this is actually the case and if so, how such repertoires would differ.

¹¹² In the early 1900s and up until 1920, Djúpvogur was arguably the main trading post and fishing station in the southeast Iceland. While there was a small trading post in Höfn, south of Lón valley during this period, many farmers, and especially those living in the Lón valley, were unhappy with it, preferring the trading post in Djúpvogur: see further Arnþór Gunnarsson 1997: 145-152.

One of the features that characterises Ingibjörg's repertoire as being more in the line with men's storytelling than that of women is her tradition orientation, that is, the types of narratives she prefers to tell. The most common type of narrative in her repertoire is the historical legend (accounts of historical events) which accounts for eight of her narratives,¹¹³ a field that men are said to be more prone to specialise in (Dégh 1995:66-68; Kiliánová 1999: 103-104), something that has received support from by my own analysis of the repertoires of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's informants (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir, forthcoming b). While Ingibjörg does indeed tell several belief legends and even two memorates about her own supernatural experiences (a field that tends to be more popular amongst women both in Iceland and elsewhere), one notes that she tends to express reservations about the truth of the alleged experience and, in some cases, carefully avoids interpreting and labelling the experiences to make them fit pre-existing traditional categories of belief. A good example of this is a long memorate she tells about certain strange visions she had when she was a housekeeper in Reykjavík, in which the house next door, as seen through a window, seemed to transform from being a small shoemaker's work shop into a large office populated by people in strange clothing one summer's evening (SÁM 86/807). She makes no attempt to classify the people she saw as being either *huldufólk* or ghosts, the two most common forms of supernatural beings in human form in Icelandic tradition.¹¹⁴ Further, at the end of her story, she notes that she has never told anyone this story before, since she did not want to be known for telling tales of wonder ("undrasögur"). In another interview, Ingibjörg notes that people in her region did not talk much about the *huldufólk*, and that those who did were considered stupid (SÁM 857260). This suggests that Ingibjörg had experienced at least some form social pressure about the need

¹¹³ These narratives include three of her five retold narratives, suggesting that stories of secular history were among the most stable part of her Ingibjörg's repertoire.

¹¹⁴ Interestingly In the Ísmús database, this narrative has been labelled as being a story about ghosts and haunting, presumably either by Hallfreður Örn himself or by later archivists classifying the material for the database. It is far from clear whether Ingibjörg herself viewed her experience to be associated with the dead, or *huldufólk*, even though this account follows another about a neighbour's experience of seeing something that might have been related to the *huldufólk*. Indeed, *huldufólk* stories rarely take place in urban settings. Another example of a supernatural experience that Ingibjörg left uninterpreted is a second-hand memorate about her foster mother's experience of seeing strange men in unusual clothing riding out of an uninhabited valley and passing them by (SÁM 86/843). This narrative is more logically labelled in the Ísmús database as being a narrative about *huldufólk* or outlaws, underlining the difficulties encountered by an archivist trying to classify narratives that are not interpreted by the narrators themselves and for which we lack knowledge of any original storytelling context. In this case, the narrative follows a story about ghosts, and could thus easily have also been interpreted as a ghost story.

to remain rational in her former storytelling environment of the Lón valley, either because of her upbringing or because of her most common audiences, who are likely to have been predominantly men given the composition of her household in Byggðarholt and its strategic location on the main route.¹¹⁵

The form of supernatural experience that Ingibjörg appears to have been most willing to narrate is essentially related to interactions with the dead, that is, ghost stories. Her repertoire includes five narratives about this subject.¹¹⁶ As I have noted elsewhere (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir, forthcoming b), it is apparent that men and women in the Icelandic rural community appear to have focused (at least to some extent) on different categories of the dead in the narratives that they passed on, women tending to tell more stories about the harmless appearance of *svipir* (ghosts that appear only once or twice) of often newly dead individuals in their family and the wider community, whereas men tended to tell stories of “older” and more malicious ghosts, often with deep roots in tradition. Another example of this female approach to the tradition of the dead can be seen in Þorbjörg’s repertoire noted above, another woman who predominantly tells stories about the spirits of newly dead individuals from her community. As can perhaps be expected, given the other male traits of Ingibjörg’s repertoire, the dead in her stories appear to be predominantly of the latter type. Her narratives contain two stories about Halla, a vengeful female murder victim from previous centuries back, and a well-known revenant in the Lón valley (SÁM 86/807), and then stories about unnamed ghosts who haunted buildings in Ólafsvík and Djúpivogur (SÁM 85/260). One particularly interesting narrative in her repertoire, once again left uninterpreted by Ingibjörg, deals with the problem of corpses of foreign seamen which have been washed ashore, a common theme in the Icelandic tradition (Gunnell 2005). The story in question, which appears to have played an important part in Ingibjörg’s repertoire, given the fact that she tells it at two different occasions in her sessions with Hallfreður Örn (SÁM 86/843 and 89/1807), follows in both cases another narrative relating to the drowning of 42 French fishermen whose bodies were washed up on the shores of the Lón valley in 1873, something that was considered to have initiated a series of events that later came to take place in the cemetery of Staðarfell. It recounts the experience of Þorsteinn, a farmhand at the church of Stafafell in the Lón valley who found himself wrestling with an unknown

¹¹⁵ As I have noted elsewhere (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir forthcoming b), social pressure to keep to the rational (and the beliefs accepted by the church) may have affected the genders disproportionately in the Icelandic rural community of the past, making men more reluctant to tell stories about supernatural experiences than women.

¹¹⁶ As noted above, Ingibjörg also tells several narratives in which she avoids interpreting or labelling the experience involved, some of which could arguably best be interpreted as also being ghost stories.

supernatural being in human form one evening shortly before the shipwreck. While Ingibjörg does not try to classify the nature of the supernatural being, the narrative itself follows closely an ancient Icelandic motif about people wrestling with ghosts which is also found in Old Icelandic saga literature (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1987). This narrative, like the others she tells about revenants and ghosts, suggests that while Ingibjörg certainly enjoyed telling ghost stories, she chose to use a degree of personal distancing in her narrations of this kind, telling only stories about well-known traditionally rooted “old ghosts” rather than more personal narratives dealing with recently dead people from her own local community.

Another feature that gives Ingibjörg’s repertoire a rather masculine flavour relates to the persons involved and the points of view expressed in her narratives. In short, male characters appear to dominate in her narratives,¹¹⁷ many of them being male neighbours from the Lón valley or men from regions south of Lón valley who traditionally would be travelling to the trading post in Papós or to Djúpivogur. The emphasis on neighbours from the south rather than from north-east may potentially underline the degree to which legends are connected to geography, among other things underlining routes of communication and connections between people and places (on this, see Gunnell 2009). This can also be seen on the map of the sites of Ingibjörg’s narratives in *Figure 4*, which underlines how her stories take place almost exclusively either in the Lón Valley and the regions south of it, none occurring in the bordering region of Álftafjörður to the north-east, reflecting the fact that people from this region and further to the north of Lón valley seem to have had no good reason to travel south, thus share their narratives and socialize with those living in Byggðarholt.¹¹⁸ As for the characters in her stories, they tend to be men from her contemporary community highlighting them as being champions or showing them in a humorous light (see especially SÁM 86/858). Of particular interest is a narrative about an unusual childbirth which took place in the neighbouring region of Nesjar, south of the Lón valley, in which the hero

¹¹⁷ Women appear in about 44% of Ingibjörg’s legends, men appearing in around 90%. This means that, compared to the average repertoires of Hallfreður Örn’s female informants in which female characters appear in well over half of the stories told by the women (see above), Ingibjörg, for some reason, appears to tell unusually few stories involving female characters.

¹¹⁸ Ingibjörg tells one story that takes place in a store in Djúpivogur, which she had learned few years earlier when she was travelling there. Otherwise, other places situated to the east of the Lón valley (and those living in these places) do not appear in her narratives. She does, however, tell several narratives about people living in Ólafsvík, on the opposite side of Iceland, narratives which she learned when the ship she was travelling on to school in Akureyri made a brief stop there.

of the story is neither the woman giving birth or the midwife, but rather a local blacksmith who puts together forceps with which the baby is successfully saved (SÁM 86/858). One of Ingibjörg's more humorous legends involving men from her local community deals with an accident that took place in Almannaskarð, the mountain pass marking the southern border of Lón valley, in the late nineteenth century, at the time in which Papós in the Lón valley was still the central trading post for the Skaftafell:

They were in the store in Papós, three men from the Mýrar district who were shopping, and had been drinking. And they went along the Klöpp ridge and one of them came off the ridge and went down, horse and all. But there was so much snow as he went down that he wasn't injured, they just slid down the snow, he and his horse. But the others thought that he was dead; of course, they went down to check on him and assumed that he was dead. And so they piled a lot of stones on top of him, stones they had picked up from the Mýrar landscape. And then they went to Þingnes and got some accommodation there and didn't say anything about what had happened. And in the morning when they meant to set off, they went over and told Jón, the farmer at Þinganes about this thing. And it's said that Jón reacted pretty quickly and set off and found the guy. He was just sitting up, rocking back and forth, singing, totally unhurt. And so he took him home with him. And it's said that one of the man said when Jón leapt on the back of his grey-red horse that he was using: "Uh oh, there goes my grey-red horse!" (SÁM 89/1807).

Þeir voru þá á Papós versluninni, þeir komu þrír menn frá Mýrarhreppi og voru að versla, og höfðu fengið sér svolítið neðan í því [voru fullir] karlamir. Svo fóru þeir fram á Klöpp og einn þeirra reið fram af Klöppinni og niður, hestur og allt. En það var nefnilega svo mikil fönn, þegar hann komi niður, að hann skaddaðist ekki, þeir hröpuðu þarna á fönninni, klárinn og hann. En hinir héldu að hann væri dauður, fóru niður fyrir náttúrulega að vita um hann og héldu að hann væri dáinn. Svo hlóðu þeir að honum grjóti, þá steina sem þeir náðu upp úr þarna á Mýrunum. Svo fóru þeir út að Þinganesi og fengu gistingu þar, og nefndu þetta bara ekkert. En um morguninn þegar þeir ætluðu að fara, þá fóru þeir að segja Jóni bónda í Þinganesi frá þessu. Þá var nú sagt að Jón hefði nú tekið svona heldur hart á því [rokið hratt af stað] og fór og sótti karlinn. Hann sat þá og röri sig fram í gráðið og var að syngja, alveg ómeiddur. Og hann fór með hann heim með sér. En það er sagt að annar karlinn hefði sagt þegar Jón snaraði sér á bak grárauðum hesti sem hann var á: „Ó, hann tekur þá grárauð minn.“)

The key point about Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir's repertoire for the present survey is that it shows that women in the Icelandic rural community of the past were far from being a monolithic group. When dealing with women's storytelling in the past, we tend to focus on roles and themes that are specific to women such as housewifery and motherhood, often overlooking the fact that not all women went on to assume such roles when they grew up. Ingibjörg is a fine example of a woman who did not share such "typical" female experiences, living and thriving in a male-dominated environment in which she seems to

have been disproportionately exposed to men's storytelling rather than that of women, and seems to have customized her repertoire of narratives to suit male audiences. This is highlighted not only in her emphasis on rationality, worldly matters, and a personal distancing from certain folk beliefs, but also in her choices of subject and point of view, highlighting the world of men and their experiences. Her repertoire shows that there is obviously plenty of room for further surveys into the different kinds of social reality experienced by women in the rural communities of the past, and the role this played in the formation of women's repertoires.

Þuríður Stefanía Árnadóttir (1888-1982)

The two women dealt with so far in this discussion are in some ways relatively unusual representatives of women in the Icelandic pre-industrial rural community. The first represented those women who were educated and had employment outside the realm of the household, something that was certainly far from common for women in rural Iceland at the early 1900s, although this generation of women had more employment opportunities than those in earlier times (Lilja Lind Pálsdóttir, 2012: 18-21). The second was unmarried and childless, and although such women may have been more common in Iceland in the past than their legacy in historical sources may indicate, it was nonetheless common that women in the Icelandic rural community of the late nineteenth century and early 1900s that they would marry and have children. It is therefore fitting to conclude this discussion on the legend repertoires of Icelandic women by considering the life and storytelling of a woman who can certainly be regarded as having been typical farm housewife. The woman in question is Þuríður Árnadóttir (1888-1982) from the farm of Gunnarsstaðir in Þistilfjörður in north-east Iceland, who told 43 narratives¹¹⁹ (SÁM 92/2739-41; and 92/2758-2762) in four interviews taken by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in her home during the summer of 1977. At the time of the interviews, she was still living at Gunnarsstaðir with her son who takes part in the interviews and occasionally alternates with his mother as the storyteller in the sessions.

As is common for this last generation of married women living in the pre-industrial rural community of Iceland, sources on Þuríður's life and environment are relatively rich. An obituary written about Þuríður and her

¹¹⁹ These narratives include two wonder tales and two retellings of legends told on different occasions. Like Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir (see above), Þuríður was also interviewed by the folklore collector Helga Jóhannsdóttir, who visited Þuríður with her husband Jón Samsonarson earlier in the summer of 1969. Once again, Helga's interview focuses on musical genres and the wonder tale tradition: on this occasion Þuríður tells three wonder tales and no legends.

husband, Halldór Ólafsson (1895-1975) by her niece Sigríður Jóhannesdóttir and her husband Sigfús Jóhannesson provides excellent insight into Þuríður's life. She lived almost her entire life on the farm on which she was born, Gunnarsstaðir. She was the second oldest of eight siblings, and when her mother died in 1908, Þuríður (at the age of 20) became the female head of the household. She thus became responsible for the upbringing of her younger siblings, three of whom were younger than ten at the time. When her father died four years later, her brother took over Gunnarsstaðir, and when he married a year later, his wife took over Þuríður's responsibilities on the farm. This gave Þuríður the opportunity to travel to Reykjavík where she attended evening school in handicrafts, learning among other things to use a knitting machine which later provided her with some income. Several days after her return to Gunnarsstaðir in the spring of 1914, Þuríður's sister-in-law died which led her to take over as female head of the household once again in Gunnarsstaðir, until her brother remarried in 1917.



Figure 5: Þuríður Stefanía Árnadóttir from Gunnarsstaðir. Photo: Courtesy of the Þingeyinga Museum of Photography.

Þuríður's husband, Halldór, had been a farmhand at Gunnarsstaðir prior to their marriage in 1921. For the first two years of their marriage the couple lived on her brother's estates at Gunnarsstaðir. The couple then briefly moved to another farm on Langanes, a peninsula to the east of Þistilfjörður. A couple of years later, they nonetheless returned to Gunnarsstaðir, established a new estate on the farmland there (Sigríður Jóhannesdóttir and Sigfús A. Jóhannesson 1983: 5). The couple had seven children born between 1922 and 1936, and two foster children, born in 1941 and 1947. (Minningar: Gunnar Halldórsson, 2011: 43). In

addition to this, Þuríður also took on the role of a mother figure to her brother's children when her brother's second wife, died in 1939, leaving behind eight children, four of whom were still in childhood (Sigríður Jóhannsdóttir and Sigfús A. Jóhannesson 1983: 5). It is therefore safe to say that Þuríður was engaged in bringing up children for a close to half a century, and it is likely that children and teenagers were the most common audiences for her storytelling. This assumption is also supported by her own frequent remarks in the recordings about storytelling for her children (SÁM 92/2739; 92/2749 and 92/2762), and by her daughter, who recently informed me that her mother often told her and the other children stories, both legends and wonder tales, when she was working and needed to calm the children down (Brynhildur Halldórsdóttir, personal communication May 21st, 2021). As I have noted elsewhere, such storytelling for children by Icelandic women in the rural community of the past was common, and especially in the *rökkrin* (twilight) storytelling sessions that took place in mutual space of the *baðstofa* (living room) on the farm (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir, forthcoming a).

If we consider the living context of Þuríður's storytelling, Þistilfjörður is a broad bay set between two peninsulas, Melrakkaslétta to the north and Langanes to the east. Today, the farms here are found mostly along the coast but earlier they also reached up into the mountains on the west side the bay. The region is characterized by having extensive stretches of low land and shallow valleys and has long been considered very good for sheep farming. The region has unusually many rivers running through it from the highland into the bay, often separating one farm from another. While many farmers went fishing in the bay in open boats, the bay offered poor conditions for landing larger boats (Jóhannes Sigvaldason et al. 1985: 393-397; SÁM 92/2762). Gunnarsstaðir itself lay close to the sea on the eastern side of the bay and as a farm was unusually large. The river Hafralónsá, which separates Þistilfjörður from the neighbouring Langanes peninsula, runs through the farmland, meaning that the farmers of Gunnarsstaðir were responsible for operating the ferry that ran across the river until it was bridged in 1930. This operation, which was sometimes carried out by Þuríður herself, provided some useful extra income for the household, since everyone travelling from Þistilfjörður to the nearest trade post, at Þórshöfn on Langanes, had to cross this river on their way (SÁM 92/2762). The extensive farmland came in the ownership of Þuríður's parents in 1888, the year she was born, and is still owned by her family's descendants (Jóhannes Sigvaldason et al. 1985: 440-449). When her brother took over the farmland following the death of their father in 1912 (see above), it had very little cultivated land but supported 300 sheep and was thus considered a large farm by the standards of the time (B.O. 06.10. 1964: 9). The fact that Þuríður's parents managed to come in possession of such a large farm suggests that they

must have been relatively wealthy, something given further support by the fact that her father was the chairman of the district council (Minning: Margrét Árnadóttir frá Gunnarstöðum, 15.12.1988: 70).



Figure 6: Þuríður's residential history and the settings of her stories.

Like the other women noted above, Þuríður provides information about her sources in several of the recordings, providing useful insight into the social aspects that lie behind her repertoire. Like Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir, Þuríður appears to have adopted slightly more narratives from women than men and, like both of the other women featured in this article, more narratives from male and female neighbours than from household members.¹²⁰ The high ratio of narratives adopted from neighbours underlines the degree to which they must have formed an important part of her social circle, something that is understandable considering the location of the farm and the family's role in operating the ferry which would have brought about regular contact with neighbours. According to Þuríður's daughter and nephew, farmers in Þistilfjörður commonly stayed overnight at Gunnarsstaðir when travelling to and from Þórshöfn (Brynhildur Halldórsdóttir and Jóhann Sigfússon, personal communications May 21st, 2021).¹²¹ As noted by Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir (see

¹²⁰ Þuríður adopts four narratives from female neighbours and five from male neighbours. Three of her narratives are adopted from household members, all of them from women.

¹²¹ Car ownership did not become general in rural Iceland until the second half of the twentieth century. Until then farmers in Þistilfjörður commonly used horses and sledges for their trading trips. Þuríður's daughter, born in 1936 (after the river had been bridged) still remembers being sent outside to count the numbers of sledges that could be seen on the mountain across the river for her mother, who wanted to know how many she could expect for dinner. This, along with the fact that farmers in Þistilfjörður commonly

above: SÁM 89/1761) guests staying overnight evidently played a key role in the oral transmission of legends in the Icelandic rural community in the past, storytelling (and not least passing on new narratives) being one way of repaying hospitality.

One of the features that is noticeably different in the repertoire of Þuríður from the repertoire of the other women is the type of landscape and range of settings mentioned in their narratives. As might perhaps be expected given Þuríður's residential history, her narratives predominantly take place in Þistilfjörður and on the Langanes. Others, however, mention places further away, although this is usually as a means of explaining the background of people and events that have relevance to her home region. There is also less emphasis on mountains and mountain routes than in those narratives told by the other women, partly because Þuríður herself rarely left the area. Instead, we find rivers and lakes dominating Þuríður's narratives, appearing in close to one third of her stories. As noted above, this closely reflects the nature of the landscape of Þistilfjörður. Logically Hafrafellsá, the river crossed by the ferry operated by Þuríður's family is the setting for several first- and second- hand personal experience narratives told by Þuríður, recounting memorable journeys across the river, and one historical legend telling of someone who drowned in the river. Another river that appears twice in Þuríður's narratives is the glacial river Jökulsá in Öxarfjörður, the neighbouring region to the north, which is the longest river in Iceland. One of these two narratives is a ghost story telling of a female ghost called Sólborg who committed suicide while being held in custody for infanticide. The local ferryman is a leading figure in this account, effectively underlining how the occupation and experience of narrators can influence the point of view taken in a story:

When I was a child, a terrible event occurred in Svalbarði: a woman called Sólborg killed herself, it was called the Sólborg matter. Everyone agrees that she clearly used to appear before the arrival of those leading men that were most involved in this matter. [...] Einar Benediktsson was one of those who took this case, and when he went home he had to cross Jökulsá in Öxarfjörður. The ferryman at that time was Vigfús á Ferjubakka, and he took him across. And when he [Einar] was going to pay the toll for his trip, and that of the man who was with him, then he [Vigfús] said: Aren't you going to pay for her? (SÁM 92/2739).

(Þegar ég var krakki þá kom voðalegt mál fyrir á Svalbarði, þegar Sólborg fyrirfór sér, kona, Sólborgarmálið sem kallað var. Það báru allir það [söguðu allir það], að hún sást ljósum logum á undan höfðingjunum sem mest skiptu

stayed for two nights on the local farms (those of Þuríður and her brother) at Gunnarsstaðir when trading, underlines the incredible hospitality offered to others by the family.

sér af þessu máli. [...] Einar Benediktsson tók þetta mál fyrir, þegar hann fór heim fór hann yfir Jökulsá í Öxarfirði. Þá var ferjumaður Vigfús á Ferjubakka, og hann ferjaði hann yfir. Og þegar hann [Einar] ætlaði að borga ferjutollinn þegar hann kemur yfir ána, ætlaði að borga fyrir sig og manninn sem var með honum, þá sagði hann [Vigfús]: Ætlar þú ekki að borga fyrir hana?)

The overall orientation of Þuríður's tradition is a little more difficult to establish than those of the other women examined here, largely because no types of narrative show any clear dominance. She clearly tells slightly more belief legends than historical legends in her sessions with Hallfreður Örn, and considerably more secular personal experience narratives than supernatural memorates. Overall, supernatural traditions and secular history seem to be balanced in her repertoire, and the same applies to personal narratives and those that are more detached. What is perhaps most significant here is the low proportion of memorates dealing with supernatural matters. The implication is that she preferred to keep some personal distance from supernatural narratives, tending to rely on third party accounts of such experiences rather than her own personal experiences or those of her family members, something that of course might be related to fears of negative judgement from others.

This aspect of personal distancing from folk belief can also be seen in the views expressed in the stories or as part of the context given for them. Indeed, Þuríður tells several accounts that appear to express a rather sceptical view towards certain elements of the supernatural tradition, and especially those relating to the earlier-mentioned *huldufólk* and lake monsters.¹²² When asked about the former, she states that there was very little belief in *huldufólk* in the region and no known *huldufólk* settlement (SÁM 92/2740). While Þuríður admittedly tells two second-hand memorates about alleged encounters between her neighbours and the *huldufólk* on a later occasion, she always takes a very sceptical approach in her narration, suggesting in one case that that the person in question must have been hallucinating as a result of illness (SÁM 92/2760). Another account telling of a female neighbour who allegedly spotted a lake monster (a *nykur*), in a lake in the region on a foggy day is given a similar treatment by Þuríður, who claims that the *nykur* later turned out to be two rams that were stuck on an island in the middle of the lake (SÁM 92/2740 and 92/2762). Like the other two women discussed above, Þuríður is nonetheless more open to beliefs about appearances of the dead, telling a total of 12 narratives that deal with this theme (SÁM 92/2739-2740; 92/2760), one of them being a personal memorate. The implications of the above are that in Þuríður's social circle, beliefs in ghosts and the dead were seen as being more acceptable

¹²² On the Icelandic tradition of lake monsters, see, for example, Einar Ól. Sveinsson (2003: 156-158).

than other categories of the supernatural, perhaps reflecting a broader trend that was developing in the Icelandic community at the time, as has been earlier noted.¹²³

Þuríður's ghost stories tend to deal with well-known events and famous ghosts from her home region of Þistilfjörður. Some of the events in question took place in Þuríður's own lifetime and include the so-called "wonders of Hvammur" ("Hvammsundrin"), one of the most famous poltergeist occurrences in Icelandic history, which took place at the farm of Hvammur, next to Gunnarsstaðir, in 1913¹²⁴ and the earlier-noted Sólborg affair (SÁM 92/2739). One nonetheless notes that the ghosts appearing in her stories are overwhelmingly female, outnumbering male ghost at a ratio of ten to two. While Þuríður mostly avoids taking sides with either the ghosts or their victims in her narratives, the victims of these female ghosts tend to be male authority figures (or their female relatives) who, in the process of criminal investigation, are shown to have indirectly caused the women's deaths, as can be seen in the narrative about Sólborg above, and the following narrative about the origin of the ghost called Hlíðar-Gunna:

She was a housewife at Tungusel. She was lying in bed and had just given birth. There was a pauper who had been placed on her farm, and the local sheriffs had heard that the pauper was not being treated as well as they should be and came to check things out. They have a word with her, and she got so furious that she started bleeding incessantly, and she bled out, and died. But she came back in style and started haunting the sheriff. Torfi í Hlíð was one of the two sheriffs; the other lived at Heiði, I think he was called Guðbrandur or Brandur. And he had a daughter called Ísabella, and she [Hlíðar-Gunna] troubled her so much that she went mad. And he was advised to take her over three large stretches of water, that would free her from this affliction. So he took her on a trip through all the local districts, he took her over the river Jökulsá á fjöllum and the river Laxá in Reykjardalur, and all the biggest

¹²³ In a survey on folk belief from 2006-2007, about 70% of women and 50% of men admitted finding the existence of *huldufólk* as being possible, likely, or factual while 90% of women and 70% of men found the spirits of the dead as being a possible, likely, or factual phenomenon. The difference was even greater when asked about experiences of these supernatural beings, with only 6% of women and 4% of men admitting having seen *huldufólk* while 20% of women and 13% of men admitted having seen spirits of the dead (Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds et al. 2008: 25; 34; 83 and 89). What is also interesting here is the fact that women seem to be far more likely to admit to both supernatural belief and experience, something which may have roots in gendered ideas of rationality affecting men to a greater extent than women in modern times.

¹²⁴ In personal conversation, Þuríður's daughter Brynhildur informed me that her mother usually did not want to talk about this event, as she found it too discomfoting. This fact would appear to be reflected in Þuríður's recorded narration of this event, which, for Þuríður, is unusually short and cryptic.

rivers. Maybe also the Skjálfandafljót river. And she was cured when she had been taken far enough. (SÁM 92/2739)

(Hún var húsmóðir í Tunguseli. Hún liggur á sæng. Það var niðursetningur á heimilinu hjá henni, og hreppstjórnarnir voru búnir að heyra að það muni ekki hafa farið eins vel með þennan niðursetning og átti að gera og koma að líta eftir þessu. Og þeir tala eitthvað við hana, nema hvað hún reiddist svo mikið að hún fékk óstöðvandi blóð og blæddi út og dó. En hún gekk svo rækilega aftur og ásótti hreppstjórana. Torfi í Hlíð hét annar hreppstjórinn, en hinn bjó á Heiði, ég held að hann hafi heitað Guðbrandur eða Brandur. Og hann átti dóttir sem Ísabella hét, og hún ærði hana svo hún varð brjáluð. Svo er honum ráðlagt að fara yfir þrjú stór vatnsföll, þá myndi þetta yfirgefa hana. Og hann fór með hana í ferðalag, fór með hana um allar sveitir, hann fór með hana yfir Jökulsá á fjöllum og Laxá í Reykjardal og allar þessar stærstu ár. Og kannski líka Skjálfandafljót. Og hún læknaðist þegar hún var komin nógu langt.)

In Þuríður's narratives, revengeful figures like Hlíðar-Gunna are not the only strong female figures to appear. All in all, human living female characters appear in only about half of her narratives, which is the average ratio in stories told by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson's female informants as earlier noted. What is particularly striking is that these figures tend to appear in active roles underlining their strength, even though their actions are not always shown as being positive. One of Þuríður's narratives, for example, tells of a female farmhand Rifs-Jóka who steals a sheep from a former employer who failed to pay her properly, and walks back home carrying it on her back (SÁM 92/2762). In another story, telling of a haunting by the locally well-known female ghost Fossskotta on a farm in the region (SÁM 92/2740), the daughter on the farm, Ólöf, is shown to be the only person on the farm to show no sign of fear, and is ultimately the one who can scare the ghost away. The best example of female strength in Þuríður's narratives, however, is the following narrative about a wrestling match that took place between a female ferryman and a male fugitive who was on his way to Þistilfjörður at a ferry site west of Jökulsá in Axarfjörður:

When he reached the west side of Jökulsá in Axarfjörður, he came to a farm and there was no one at home except this woman. And he asked her to ferry him over the river. And she said she could not ferry him, there was no one at home. And things go so far that she refused to take him over the river, suspected that he might be wanted. And things progress in such a way that they start fighting. And he gets her down on one knee, a little like when [the god] Þórr was wrestling with Elli [Old Age as in the account told in the *Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson], when he attacked her. And then she said: "Now it is far from clear that two are better than one." He then realized that the woman was pregnant. And he eventually did manage to get across the river, but that isn't part of this story. (SÁM 92/2759)

(Þegar hann kemur að Jökulsá í Axarfirði, að vestan verðu, þá kemur hann þar að bæ og það er enginn heima, nema konan. Og hann biður hana um að ferja

sig yfir ána. En hún segist ekki geta ferjað hann, það sé enginn heima. Og það gengur svo langt að hún vill ekki sleppa honum yfir ána, grunaði eitthvað um að hann sé ekki frjáls ferða sinna. En það gengur svo langt að þau fljúgast á. En hann kemur henni á annað hnéð, eins og Þór elli kerlingu, þegar hann flaug á hana. Og þá segir hún: „Nú sannast það þó ekki, að betur megi tveir en einn.“ Þá tók hann eftir því að kerlingin er ólétt. Svo komst hann á endanum yfir ána, hvernig sem það nú var, það fylgdi ekki sögunni.)

Þuríður's strong emphasis on active female roles, seen in both this narrative and that quoted above, may have something to do with the nature of Þuríður's audiences. As noted earlier, these are likely to have been predominantly made up of children and teenagers of both genders from her and her brother's households, rather than adult males like those noted in the case of Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir above. By placing such a strong emphasis on active female figures in her narration, one can argue that she is offering her young female audiences plenty of good examples of behaviour to follow or avoid, emphasizing the degree to which the legend traditions do not necessarily have to follow male premises and focus on male experience, but can also follow the premises of women. As the accounts noted above show, Þuríður is clearly an example of female storyteller who had strong roots in her local community and was highly knowledgeable about the history and traditions of the area. As noted above, her narratives appear to largely come from her neighbours, underlining the degree to which her home was a form of social hub. While picking up stories from visitors, she herself appears to have predominantly told stories to children and teenagers in her and her brothers' household, keeping a personal distance from supernatural experiences and other accounts of supernatural belief, perhaps to avoid scaring her young audiences as many women that told stories to children in the rural community of the past seem to have done (Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir, forthcoming a). Particularly striking is the strong emphasis Þuríður places on rivers and lakes and not least ferry operators like herself, also underlining strong, independent, and active female figures, thereby emphasizing a legend tradition that seems to operate on female premises.

Conclusions

As the above survey of these women and their legend repertoires has shown, Icelandic women living in the rural community of the past cannot be considered to have been a monolithic group that spent their lives in social isolation on the turf-farms, concerning themselves only with “female matters” related to domestic spaces in their storytelling. While it is certainly possible to talk about certain female traits of women's legend repertoires, such as an apparent higher appreciation for women and their roles, and a preference for certain genres such as the supernatural narratives and memorates, or at least certain types of

supernatural narrative, these traits do not necessarily all regularly appear together in the repertoires of women, and at least in the case of women who were active participants in legend tradition such as the women discussed in this article. As has been underlined by the considerations of these women's social surrounding, none of the women involved were particularly reliant on their own household for new narratives, Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir being a midwife who regularly visited other households as part of her profession, while Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir and Þuríður Árnadóttir were women who lived on farms that formed social hubs within their local communities. The nature of the farms Ingibjörg and Þuríður lived on draws attention to the fact that although most women may have been homebound in the Icelandic rural community of the past, this did not necessarily mean they were socially isolated and restricted to social interaction with the members of their households. The fact that all these women, chosen randomly from a poll of female narrators with large repertoires, have turned out to have been part of large social circles that, among other things, would have exposed them to narratives of people living outside their own households, suggests this feature seems to have been a key feature in the making of female storytellers that came to be particularly active participants in the legend tradition.

While both Þorbjörg and Þuríður appear to have been exposed to more narratives told by women than men, and to have told stories to people of both genders, thereby highlighting two of the more common features of women's storytelling, it is noteworthy that their repertoires also reflect many features more commonly associated with men's legend telling, as with Þorbjörg's emphasis on journeys and highland routes and Þuríður's choice to keep a personal distance from supernatural traditions. Ingibjörg appears to take particularly strong male-dominated approach in her repertoire, telling predominantly stories she learned from men; choosing a more detached mode of narration more commonly associated with male storytelling; and telling many secular narratives and narratives that highlight male roles and experiences. The fact that Ingibjörg never married, had no children and appears to have assumed a more male role in her household (rather than that of the "typical" female) clearly underlines the fact that women living in the rural community of the past did not all share those experiences that we tend to focus on when exploring their traditions, such as household management, romance, childbirth, the upbringing of children and storytelling for children. What is perhaps the most significant difference between Ingibjörg's storytelling and that of the other women is the fact that she predominantly socialized with men in her community, and probably told stories predominantly to men, while both the other women are likely to have more commonly told stories to people of both genders, Þuríður

predominantly telling stories to children and teenagers. It seems likely that this affected their repertoires.

As has been noted earlier, the narratives in the women's repertoires noted above give strong support to the argument that narrators' personal experiences and surroundings tend to be directly and indirectly reflected in the legends they choose to tell. As has been shown here, the geographical settings of these women's narratives closely reflect their residential history suggesting that the women found little interest in (or felt less right to tell) those narratives that took place outside the familiar landscape of their home regions unless the narrative had some special association with important features of their personal histories, as has been seen in the case of Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir. The role of landscape and experience in their repertoires is also reflected in the way Ingibjörg and Þorbjörg tell many narratives about journeys over mountain routes, while Þuríður's places an emphasis on rivers and lakes and the role of ferrymen in her stories. It is safe to say, that these active female storytellers seem to have had one foot in the world of men and the other in the world of women, giving them not only ample opportunities to learn stories from, and share stories with both men and women in their communities, but also the chance to gain life experiences that would have been found interesting by audiences of both genders.

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7 Conclusions

As stated at the start of this thesis, the purpose of this project was to gain insight into a broad range of issues concerning the legend traditions of Icelandic women in the past. The study focused on 200 women born in the late nineteenth century whose legend repertoires were recorded by the folklore collector Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson in the period running from the early 1960s until around 1980. The women in question were born and raised in the relatively stagnant pre-industrial rural society which had dominated in Iceland until the Second World War, and as adults, they experienced large societal changes as Iceland developed into a modern welfare state, changes brought about, among other things, by progress in terms of women's rights and women's suffrage. Some of these women even lived to experience the arrival of the second wave of feminism in Iceland in the late 1970s, and the election of Iceland's (and Europe's) first female president and head of state in 1980.¹²⁵ The situation of these women amidst the twilight of the pre-industrial rural society of the turf-farm and the dawn of modernity naturally means that while some aspects reflected in the sources are representative of the pre-industrial rural society that had prevailed until early 1900s, others might reflect the culture of a changing society in which women were gaining more agency than before and experiencing more choice in terms of occupation and living conditions. Regardless of this, as has been considered in Chapter 3.2 and Article 1 of this thesis, Hallfreður's emphasis on the culture and traditions of the pre-industrial rural society that the women in question experienced during their childhood and early adulthood means that this material provides excellent insight into the legend traditions of the Icelandic rural community of the past.

In its widest sense, the main goal of this research has been to examine how women's gender, and their experiences, social and cultural conditions, and living environments influenced their legend traditions. If we return to the original research questions summed up in the Introduction (see Chapter 1.1), they were the following:

¹²⁵ On the arrival of the first wave of feminism in Iceland, commonly referred to as the era of the *raudsockkuhreyfing* (Eng. Redstocking movement), see Olga Guðrún Árnadóttir (2011). On the election of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the first female president of Iceland, see Páll Valsson (2009).

- In what way can the material in the Icelandic folk narrative archives be said to reflect the gendered power relations of the nineteenth and twentieth century and to what degree can we use this material for reconstruction of women's past traditions from the viewpoint of modernity?
- What seem to be the main narrative spaces in women's legends, and in what ways are their social conditions and experience incorporated into the legends that they tell?
- Which genres, themes and characters dominate in women's legend traditions, and in which ways do they differ from those of their male peers?
- How did women manage to become active legend tellers in a society and environment that generally excluded women from the public sphere, confining them in the personal space of the home?

The thesis has drawn on theories and approaches of a wide range of scholars who have placed emphasis on either storytellers and their contribution to oral storytelling traditions (see Chapter 2.2) or on the wider social context of folk narratives in the rural communities of the past (see Chapter 2.3), scholars such as Almqvist (2008), Dégh (1989 and 1995), Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir (1982, 1988 and 1990), Gunnell (2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012 and 2018), Holbek (1987), Palmenfelt (1993 and 2008), Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (1998, 2004, 2011 and 2012) and Tangherlini (1994, 2008 and 2013) to name only a few. It has also drawn on theories and the body of knowledge dealing with gender-related aspects of narrative traditions that has been assembled by a number of other scholars (see Chapter 2.4), and relied on a wide range of work on both Icelandic history in general and women's history in particular (see Chapters 4.1 and 4.2) for its reconstruction of the wider cultural context that surrounded the traditions in question. Among other things, this research has incorporated into its methodological toolbox a statistical approach for content analysis, documenting and analysing both contextual and content aspects of the repertoires of the 200 women in question, and comparing these to the same features found in the repertoires of a sample group of 25 of these women's male peers. As the research has shown, although rarely used, numbers are a helpful means of gaining insight into folkloric traditions. As I will elaborate on further below, the numbers in question have, among other things, shown that women, at least in Iceland, seem to have made use of different themes in their legend tradition to their male peers and told far more legends involving female characters (see Article 3). They have also made slightly different use of space in their legends to the men (see Article 2); preferred different modes of narration and/or different legend subgenres (see Article 3); and tended to incorporate

legends heard from different people (and of a different gender) than the men (see Article 2). The articles at the heart of this thesis naturally only consider the most common of the many features that the database has revealed. Others will hopefully be examined in more detail in the future. Indeed, as the project progressed, it became ever more apparent that the women in question were actually rather socially diverse, perhaps more diverse than I had expected when embarking on this research, underlining the fact that one needs to be careful about making over broad generalisations about the position of women in the past as well as in the present. There is evidently plenty of room for further study to be undertaken in the future into special social groups of women, and the different emphases that they seem to have had in their legend traditions and repertoire formation.

As will have been seen above, the thesis has consisted of a detailed introduction which was followed by four articles dealing with various aspects of women's legend traditions. The second chapter of the introduction introduced the theoretical framework for the project, examining the body of scholarly works that exists on storytellers and legend traditions, subsequently narrowing the discussion down to the question of gender in folk narrative traditions. This was followed by the third introductory chapter which examined the nature and form of the Icelandic folk narrative archives, addressing, among other things, the usefulness and limitations of these archives for the reconstruction of women's narrative traditions, and examining the other available sources on biographical histories in the past. The fourth chapter of the introduction contained a survey of Icelandic society as it existed during the period in question, the roles of women and the conditions they experienced, and the spaces and social organization that formed part of the Icelandic turf farm. The chapter that followed addressed the overall methodology of the project, the combined use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the incorporation of the craftsmanship viewpoint, highlighting the dynamic that existed between the narrator's individual skills and the wider tradition they formed part of. This chapter also gave an overview of the construction of the database that lies behind this project and the variables documented in the analysis.

The four articles which follow on from the introduction, all of which have been published or accepted for publication, dealt with different aspects of the material. The first addresses the representation of women in the Icelandic folk narrative archives and examines the ways in which this material can be used as a means of reconstructing women's traditions in the past, in spite of the evident marginalization of women in the process of collecting folkloric material, and in many of the extant biographical and genealogical sources dealing with individuals in the past. The second article examines some of the spatial aspects of the women's legend traditions, examining the role of women and their

mobility within the wider social landscape of the Icelandic rural community of the time; their role in the storytelling traditions practised in the cultural space of the Icelandic *baðstofa*; and the ways in which the women in question incorporated spaces into their legends in different ways to their male peers. The third article presents the main conclusions of the statistical analysis of the contextual and thematic components that can be found in women's legend traditions, examining the degree to which these same components appear in the legend corpora of a small sample group of their male peers, highlighting how women's gendered experiences seem to have contributed to the legends they told. The fourth article narrowed the scope down to three women in the sources who had unusually large legend repertoires, providing additional depth to some of the issues addressed in the other articles, and deeper insight into how the individual experiences, conditions and environments of women in the past contributed not only to their ability to become active participants in the legend tradition, but also the formation of their repertoires.

This concluding section of the thesis will return to the main research questions reiterated above, summarizing the key insights provided by the articles, as well as discussing some of the wider implications this project offers for further research into the issues at hand. It will turn first to those conclusions relating to the social conditions of women in the Icelandic rural community, their position in the social landscape of the time and their role in the storytelling traditions of their communities. From there, it will proceed to considering the conclusions relating to the central narrative space of the Icelandic turf-farm community, in other words, the farmhouse *baðstofa*, and the role of women as storytellers in it. Following this, it will return to the differences that have been revealed between the legend traditions of the women and those of their male peers and the implications that these differences provide about gendered experiences in the past and their influence on both legend traditions as a whole and repertoire formation. The conclusion will end by returning to the initial question about the representation of women in the folk narrative archives, addressing among other things the question of how many of the features highlighted by this analysis as common characteristics of women's legend tradition are found in the earlier published folk narrative collections that stem from the Icelandic rural society which have become part of Iceland's cultural memory, and the implications this provides about the hidden roles of women in the creation and transmission of this material.

7.1 Women's Storytelling and the Icelandic Social Landscape

When this project began, there seemed to be little reason to assume that women in the Icelandic pre-industrial rural society had much role in the creation and transmission of the Icelandic legend tradition. As highlighted in Chapter 2.4, most studies of narrative traditions in earlier communities that have been carried out elsewhere have tended to associate men with storytelling in the public arenas of their societies while the storytelling of women has usually been seen as being confined to the domestic spaces of their households. Indeed, in Iceland, at first glance, even in the early 1900s, women appear to have been particularly homebound and socially isolated. This was because, in many respects, the country came somewhat late to the European process of urbanisation, and far into the twentieth century still lacked most of the road infrastructure associated with the modern arena. All in all, this environment did not appear to be particularly conducive for the social interaction of women, or for them to be involved in storytelling for wider audiences than their own immediate families. As Articles 2 to 4 have all shown, however, many of the women in the sources have very large legend repertoires. This raises the key question of how so many women managed to become active participants in the legend tradition practised in the society of the time.

This question is answered in part by the residential histories of the women that this project has brought to light, which point to a process that existed in earlier times which we can, perhaps, term “a female form of mobility”. As highlighted in Article 2, many women in the pre-industrial rural community can be regarded as having been comparatively mobile, although their form of mobility was evidently different to the everyday mobility of men which was associated with their recurrent travels and the other external roles they assumed as part of the organization of the turf-farm. As this article showed, many women in the sources (close to half of the women featured in the project) lived as adults in areas different to those in which they grew up. As discussed in Chapter 4.1, this female form of mobility may have a background in the ways in which the gender-system affected people's relationships with places, prioritizing the male inheritance of family farms and discouraging widows from continuing running a farm. One of the things the sources brought to light, and, among others, the accounts the women themselves gave with regard to their residential histories, was that many women moved between regions and even different parts of Iceland relatively often, something which led to them being exposed to different cultures and the narrative traditions of the many different places in which they were settled for shorter or longer periods of time. This female form of mobility is therefore highly likely to have been very beneficial to both the establishment of large legend repertoires among women and the

migration of stories between different parts of Iceland in the past. The former feature is underlined by the fact that women of geographical mobility appear to have had, on average, larger legend repertoires than those women who had a more limited geographical footprint. It also highlights the importance of residential change for the ability of women to become active participants in the legend tradition.¹²⁶ In short, while the lack of roots in their new areas may have deprived women of the safety net of their own blood families, it appears to have given them an advantage in the oral storytelling tradition: they came with repertoires which were new and fresh in the ears of their new audiences.

With regard to potential influence of female mobility on the legend tradition, as von Sydow (1948b) noted in his early observations on the migration of oral stories and the role of storytellers in it, stories rarely migrate on their own or with the coincidental encounters of storytellers from different regions but more commonly with active tradition bearers who migrate to a new region where they adapt their repertoires to new audiences and environments. This might potentially explain the high number of largely unaccredited migratory legends dealing with female heroines and their interaction with *huldufólk* and outlaws in the nineteenth-century folk tale collection of Jón Árnason (see, for example, Jón Árnason 1954: 8-121 and II: 189-283).¹²⁷ The role of women in the migration of oral stories in Iceland in earlier centuries is an excellent subject for further research in the future.

Another aspect relating to female mobility and the storytelling of women in the social landscape of rural Iceland in the past relates to the everyday mobility of certain women, their sociability, and the influence of all of these on their ability to become active storytellers. As shown in Article 2, many women in the past did indeed engage in short-term, seasonally related travels, and especially

¹²⁶ Another effect on legend repertoires potentially caused by the residential changes experienced by many women at this time is seen in the way in which they seem to sometimes bridge the geographical gap that existed between themselves and their earlier communities by telling stories that took place in their childhood region, giving themselves an active role in events taking place there (see for example dream narrative examined in Article 3). It is also worth noting that, as Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir (2003a and 2013) has shown in her examination of how women in the past used their writing skills and limited spare time, they mostly used this spare time to write personal letters to distant friends and family, underlining the fact that they often spent much of their lives geographically separated from these individuals.

¹²⁷ As shown further below, men appear to have had less interest in telling legends with female characters than women and were therefore not likely to have been the primary sources of narratives with female lead heroines (something that appears to be the case with a majority of these kinds of Icelandic migratory legend). Indeed, as this project shows, they also appear to have rarely told stories about the *huldufólk*, which form the largest group of Icelandic migratory legends.

those older women who no longer had any household responsibilities and could therefore become *orlofskonur* (lit. holiday women) during the fall, travelling to friends, relatives, or former masters in other regions. As the article shows, these women evidently played an important role in the storytelling traditions that took place in the *baðstofur* of farms up until the early 1900s, sometimes even assuming the role of professional storytellers who were invited to the farms simply for the purpose of oral storytelling.

The role of the *orlofskona* disappeared from the Icelandic social landscape at a time when other groups of women were starting to become a prominent part of the social landscape of Icelandic society. These were women with occupations, such as teachers, midwives and nurses, who, because of their occupations, had better opportunities to meet and socialize with people outside their households. As shown in Articles 2 and 4, the role of the midwife appears to have been particularly well-suited as a means of becoming an active female legend teller with a large legend repertoire, not least because this was a career that women took on for their entire lives, rather than an occupation they were expected to retire from upon marriage, as applied to most women with an occupation at the time. It is clear that women who assumed the role of the midwives in rural Iceland in the past not only experienced similar exciting, recountable experiences to men in the shape of travel across the countryside in all kinds of weather, but also earned respect in their local communities for their experience and knowledge, something which gave their narratives additional importance. Even more important perhaps was the fact that this employment often led women to dwell for several days in households elsewhere in their districts, giving them ample opportunity to learn and share stories on a new platform away from home, something that will be further considered below.

If we return to the domestic storytelling space itself, it needs to be remembered that, as has been addressed in Article 2, in strict terms, the Icelandic turf-farm was far from being a private space of intimacy and family life, but was rather a space in which the public and the private merged. In addition to the families of farmers, most turf-farms in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s housed large numbers of unrelated workers, all of whom brought with them a range of narratives from elsewhere. As has been highlighted in Article 4, some farms even became the social hubs of their regions, and especially those situated on the popular travel routes to trading centres and fishing stations. In the pre-industrial rural society, farms of this kind assumed the role of guest houses in their regions, naturally providing the inhabitants of these farms with a good source of new narratives to adopt into their repertoires, and a fresh set of audiences to tell their legends to. As has been seen especially in the repertoire of Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir, which was examined in Article 4, the travelers encountered by women on these farms were

presumably predominantly male, something which may explain why Ingibjörg's repertoire seems to contain more apparently masculine traits than those of most other women in the sources. This is another feature that deserves further research.

To summarize: while most women in the Icelandic pre-industrial rural society were somewhat confined to their households, it is wrong to assume that they were socially isolated and confined to social interaction with their immediate families. It seems clear that they often became prominent figures in the social landscapes of their local communities, many of them becoming active participants in the local legend tradition. Indeed, as has been stressed throughout this thesis, in most Icelandic *baðstofur*, which up until the 1900s formed the predominant social space in Icelandic rural society in which most cultural practice and education, including oral storytelling took place, there is a good reason to believe women played a central social role in narrative traditions. The conclusions of the thesis relating to this role will be examined in more detail in the following subchapter.

7.2 Women and the Cultural Space of the *Baðstofa*

One of the best-known cultural spaces of the pre-industrial farming society of Iceland is the practice of the *kvöldvaka*, which took place in the *baðstofa* during the winter evenings. This work-related cultural gathering has been the subject of many ethnographic accounts and several scholarly works, the most prominent being the thesis by Magnús Gíslason (1977) in which Magnús reconstructs the structure of the *kvöldvaka* gatherings and their cultural environment. It is noteworthy that Magnús' work, based largely on men's written accounts of the event (see Chapter 4.2), makes few observations about gender and the gender roles associated with the culture of *baðstofa*, something perhaps understandable given the fact that, as has been noted in various places in this thesis, gender was still a little-known paradigm in ethnographic research in the 1970s. As has been discussed in Article 2, it now seems evident that the scholarly focus on the cultural practices of the main *kvöldvaka* and what took place after the light was lit in the *baðstofa* in the evenings may have resulted in another important platform of oral storytelling being overlooked, namely the storytelling that took place in the so-called *rökkri* (Eng. twilight storytelling) which took place before the lights were lit in the *baðstofa*, and which was largely in the hands of women.

As Article 2 notes, descriptive accounts of the cultural practices that took place in the *baðstofa* during the informants' youths imply that there two different kinds of cultural gathering took place there during the winter nights, rather than just one. These events or gatherings were generally characterized not

only by a different kind of setting and performances of different genres, but also, to a large extent, by the way in which they involved performers of different sexes: During the *kvöldvaka*, the *baðstofa* was lit and served as an undivided public space in which men, predominantly, assumed the role of entertainers and cultural educators, either chanting *rímur* poetry or reading out loud, often from religious works or Icelandic saga literature. The earlier *rökkrin* was somewhat different. This was a time when many of the men who had earlier been engaged in outdoor work took a nap in the largely unlit *baðstofa*, which was now essentially broken down into several “private spaces”. In this period, a low-key storytelling session would often take place in one corner of the room, most often involving women who entertained children and other members of the household who did not need to sleep. If nothing else, this underlines the fact that women during the late nineteenth century and the early 1900s also played an important cultural role in the key narrative space of the turf farm. What needs to be examined in later research is whether this was a much older tradition.

Another feature that the accounts of the informants bring to light with regard to the *rökkrin* storytelling sessions is the nature of stories told at this time. As noted in Article 2, the informants tell of both wonder tales and legends being told in these sessions when they were young, ghost stories being the most cited theme of legends, although they were apparently sometimes unpopular among some parents in the households. Interestingly, many informants also mention *huldufólk* and outlaw legends being told at this time, something which lends weight to what was stated above about the potential background of such stories found in the earlier published collections of Icelandic folk legends. It nonetheless remains unclear whether those stories told about the *huldufólk* during the earlier *rökkrin* sessions resembled the mono-episodic short experience-based narratives commonly found in the repertoires of the women focused on in this project or the more complex multi-episodic kind of migratory legend found in Jón Árnason’s collection, as noted above. As has been pointed out in Chapter 2.4, it is interesting to note that the multi-episodic migratory legends so common in the earlier Icelandic folk narrative collections of the later nineteenth century turned out to be quite rare in the repertoires of the women in this project, the only real exception being legends about the midwife to the fairies which, at least in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, seem to have been adopted as an occupational narrative told by Icelandic midwives (see Almqvist 2008). One explanation for this might be that by the time the women came of age and started to form their own repertoires, the longer multi-episodic legends were no longer told orally because, unlike in the period in which their mothers and grandmothers were growing up, these legends could now be found in published form in books. Another possibility is that many of the other

migratory legends failed to remain relevant enough to be maintained in women's oral repertoires in the early 1900s because of their often androcentric, and now outdated, view of women. (On this view, see further Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020, 2021, 2022a and forthcoming.) There might, however, be yet another reason for the disappearance of such narratives from women's repertoires, which might have to do with the platform on which these stories had been told, namely that the cultural space of the *baðstofa* was gradually ceasing to exist in the first half of the twentieth century. While in their childhood, the women had experienced twilight oral storytelling by adults, and especially by older women, when they were adults, the *baðstofa* had gradually ceased to function as a communal hybrid space for work and private life. With the introduction of the electric light and separate bedrooms for household members, there was no longer any good reason to distract and entertain children with long oral stories such as wonder tales and migratory legends about *huldufólk* and outlaws.

7.3 Legend Traditions and Gendered Experiences

While the women and men in the Icelandic pre-industrial rural society shared many aspects of experience, conditions and environment, the prevailing gender-system and ideas of gender roles resulted in men and women experiencing different social realities. The comparative section of the project in which the legends told by the women are compared to those told by a small group of their male peers underlines this feature, and the fact that these different social realities and experiences had a strong influence on the legends men and women felt encouraged to tell. The influences in question, discussed in Articles 2 and 3, relate not only to the subject matter of legends, their themes, spaces and characters, but also to more context-related features, such as the forms of the legends and their means of transmission. This subchapter will draw together the main conclusions relating to the gender-related differences found in the data that lies behind this project, and will give some further consideration to wider implications of men's and women's different experiences in the past and their relationship to the legend traditions.

As noted above, one of the main gender-specific differences found within the Icelandic legend tradition was the means by which legends were passed on from one storyteller to another. As examined in Article 2 and some extent also in Article 3, the data that lies behind the thesis contains a great deal of information about the previous narrators of those legends contained in the narrators' repertoires, in other words, about whom they learned their legends from. This aspect of the data implies that while women appear to have predominantly learned their legends from female members of their own households, and especially from their mothers, the men appeared to have

predominantly learned their legends from male friends and neighbours. This, of course, is something that clearly reflects the different roles and social realities experienced by men and women in the pre-industrial rural society of Iceland, in which the men were predominantly responsible for the farm's external affairs. These affairs, in many cases, would have been dealt with in cooperation with male neighbours, typical examples being the autumn round-ups in the mountains and the annual travels to fishing and trading stations. It is probable that men's roles as the heads of their households and the androcentric gender system that existed in the Icelandic rural society may have also given men more freedom to engage in leisure-related visits to neighbouring farms.

In Article 4, however, we have encountered a number of women with unusually large legend repertoires who appear to have challenged this generally dominant pattern. It is noteworthy that one of these women, the midwife Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir, appears to have learned most of her legends from her female friends and neighbours rather than from her mother, reminding us of the fact noted above that midwives lived very different lives to most other women in their communities, in the sense that their profession allotted them with the same kind of localized mobility that men had in their everyday lives. The key difference here is that Þorbjörg's work as a midwife brought her mainly into the domain of other women in her local community, a domain in which she would hear their legends and presumably share her own.

The same article introduced us to Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir, who grew up as a foster child of her paternal grandfather on a farm that was a designated resting place for travellers. Unlike most other women, Ingibjörg appears to have learned her legends predominantly from men from outside her own household. The most likely explanation for Ingibjörg's male-oriented repertoires is the role of her household as a resting place for travellers, who would largely have been men. She can thus be said to have been particularly exposed to men's narratives.

The third woman examined in Article 4, Þuríður Árnadóttir, also failed to conform to the overall pattern, once again adopting more legends from male and female neighbours than from her own household members. Interestingly, she was someone else who lived in close proximity to a popular trading post, living on a farm situated close to a riverbank where a ferry was operated across the river. Along with the rest of her household, Þuríður was responsible for operating the ferry in question, something which would naturally have exposed her to frequent encounters with travellers and their narratives.

The fact that all three women noted above turned out to have "male traits" in terms of how they adopted legends into their repertoires potentially implies that those women who experienced localized mobility or lived in farms that were social hubs of their communities were more prone to become active

participants in the legend tradition. Arguably, it was their situation or their jobs that brought them into contact with a greater range of narratives than many other women would have experienced. Since the article in question only focused on these three individuals who were chosen at random from a pool of women with large repertoires, their individual characteristics cannot be generalized to be said to apply to the entire group of active female legend tellers in the past without further research.

As noted in the Introduction, gendered patterns with regard to oral narrative genre has been one of the most commonly examined subjects in the work of folklorists dealing with storytelling from a gender perspective. As examined in Chapter 2.4 and Article 3, earlier research into gendered storytelling in European communities has indicated that women tended to tell more stories with supernatural content than men and especially supernatural memorates. This also turned out to be the case in the Icelandic material examined as part of this project, the women's legend corpora appearing to include a far higher proportion of supernatural legends than that found in the male sample group. While both sexes evidently told personal experience stories, the women told far more supernatural stories than the men. This suggests that there was, and perhaps still is, a transnational feature of European storytelling traditions, whereby women feel more encouraged to tell supernatural experience stories, or (perhaps even more likely), men feel discouraged to pass on such stories. This difference in approach, which is potentially reflected in the results of the 2006/2007 survey of Icelandic folk belief (in which women seem to be more prone to supernatural belief than men [see Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds et al. 2008]) is an interesting subject that warrants deeper investigation than this present project has allowed. Nonetheless, as suggested in Chapter 2.4 and Article 3, it is probable that this difference has some background in gendered ideas and gender discourse in the Western World, in which the concepts of reason and rationality have tended to be associated more with men rather than women. Such gendered discourses in European societies, in the past as well as in the present, are likely to have placed more pressure on male storytellers to avoid recounting supernatural personal experience narratives, not least when narrating for other male audiences in their communities.

Gendered choice of character is another feature in the narratives of Icelandic storytellers in the sense that similar patterns have been observed in a number of other studies of folk narrative in European communities. As has been outlined in Chapter 2.4, these studies have suggested that men tend to marginalize women and their roles in the narratives that they tell, telling far less stories with female characters than women, who tend to include male and female characters in more even proportions in their stories. As Article 3 has pointed out, the same pattern can be seen in the Icelandic material. It is likely, as suggested by

Tangherlini (1994: 147-148), that androcentric culture in past rural communities bears at least some of the blame for the marginalization of women and their roles in those narratives told by male storytellers. However, as noted in Chapter 2.4, the marginalization of women and their roles in men's narrative naturally cannot be said to be solely a thing of the past. While women may have always had to adapt their storytelling to some extent to male audiences and interests which tend to dominate the wider tradition, they are less bound by such emphases on male characters and their achievements in a female-dominated narrative setting. In this context, it is interesting to note what Article 3 has pointed out about how those legends that the women featured in this thesis appear to have adopted from narrators of their own gender commonly involve an increased number of female characters.

In addition to the above features, one also notes a number of particular themes that appear in significantly different proportions in the repertoires of the male and female narrators featured in this project, themes which once again highlight to some degree the different experiences and interests of men and women in the rural society of Iceland in the past. These experiences and interests are, of course, conditioned by societal norms and ideas relating to gender. As has been shown in Article 3 and to some extent also in Article 2, and also touched on above, the starkest difference between men's and women's narrative themes concerns the way in which the supernatural tradition is dealt with. While both men and women told a similar proportion of stories concerning the dead, it is evident that the women told significantly more stories about dead males, figures who often turned out to have been previously known to the women, and who, as was common for men in the pre-industrial rural community of Iceland, had met untimely deaths either on land or in the sea. Arguably, the experience of loss and the concerns of the women for their male relatives and friends found an outlet in the strong emphasis on narratives about dream omens and other stories concerning accidents at sea in women's repertoires. The preponderance of such stories naturally highlights the fact that the rural pre-industrial rural society of Iceland was not strictly agricultural but also relied heavily on fishing, something which until the early 1900s was primarily carried out by men in open fishing boats, working in highly dangerous conditions during the unpredictable Icelandic winter season. As the articles in question have pointed out, these dream narratives told by women (who, as has been noted, were largely restricted to domestic spaces of their own households), offered them a means of access to the tragic events in question, perhaps providing them with a therapeutic means with which to process grief and other emotions by means of storytelling.

The main differences between the repertoires of men and women relating to narratives about the supernatural can nonetheless be seen most clearly when it

comes to the supernatural traditions concerning *huldufólk* which seem to have been predominantly the field of women. Indeed, this theme appears to be almost entirely absent in the legend repertoires of the men examined here, as has been noted in Articles 2 and 3. Also interesting is the fact that the theme is particularly common in those legends that women adopt into their repertoires from other women, as has been examined in Article 3. These features lend weight to what has been stated in earlier folkloristic studies of Icelandic legends by scholars such as Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir (1982, 1988 and 1990) and Bo Almqvist (2008). As noted in Article 2, women's interest in stories of the *huldufólk* is potentially connected to the fact that the world of the *huldufólk* can be said to represent a hidden dimension of the farm's domestic space. In short, situated on the borders of the farm, the *huldufólk* are *innangarð* (lit. inside the fence), to use the terminology introduced by Kirsten Hastrup (1990: 264-165) in her work on history and mentality in Iceland in earlier centuries. It is certainly evident that by the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, *huldufólk* traditions had become very much part of women's traditions in Iceland, not only adding a mystical dimension to the everyday environment of women in the domestic sphere, but also supplying them with a useful means of talking indirectly about some of their personal concerns, values and problems. The question nonetheless remains whether this particular part of Icelandic folk belief originated as part of a female tradition, and was thus predominantly shaped and shared by women over the course of the centuries as they moved into the modern era, or whether this was a more recent development that resulted from the rise of rationalism noted above. The fact that a considerable number of sources are available on the development of the ideas relating to the *huldufólk* and belief in nature spirits in Iceland that date back to the thirteenth century if not earlier (see, for example, Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 71-134; and Gunnell 2007),¹²⁸ it would be interesting to examine these developments more closely from a gender perspective. However, as is the case with most of the legendary material found in the Icelandic printed folk narrative archives, these earlier sources also tended to be written down almost exclusively by men (many of them bishops and other servants of the church) who had inhabited the androcentric rural society of the Icelandic Middle Ages, something which may very well distort the images of these beliefs and their associated practises given in these sources.

The frequent mention of the *huldufólk* and dreams in women's legends brings us back to certain spatial features in their traditions. Scholars have earlier

¹²⁸ Of particular interest is an account written by a priest preserved in the *Hauksbók* manuscript (see, for example, Finnur Jónsson et al. 1892-1896: 167) which is assumed to have been recorded in the fourteenth century, in which the priest laments the way in which women leave out food offerings for nature spirits in the hope of protection.

noted the way in which those places mentioned in legends tend to give a good sense of the environment that the narrators experienced in their everyday lives, ranging from the routes they travelled to the overall expanse of landscape that they knew around their homes (Trausti Dagsson 2014: 8–9; Gunnell 2016: 30–32). Bearing this in mind, as Article 2 shows, a comparison of the narrative spaces that come to light in the legends told by the women as opposed to those that appear in the legends told by men underlines the degree to which women seem make slightly more use of the domestic spaces of their farms in their legends than men. The men refer more often to uncultivated spaces such as the highlands and the sea in their legends, underlining the fact that such spaces predominantly belonged to men’s sphere of activity and experience. In spite of this, and given the degree to which most women were confined to the domestic spaces of their households, it is interesting to note how much mention is made of wilderness spaces in women’s narratives, a surprising 40 per cent of their narratives taking place in such spaces. This may bring us back to what was stated above about the large number of first- and second-hand experience narratives about dreams and omens in the women’s repertoires, many of which transcend the local spaces occupied by the women, linking them to events taking place in distant places such as the sea.

7.4 Women, Folklore Archives and Representation

The final conclusions of this project relate to the wider implications this research has with regard to the Icelandic folk narrative archives as a whole and the material they contain. As mentioned above, the legends told by both the women and the men examined in the project appear to be highly localized, in the sense that they are closely associated with the places and landscape that the narrators knew and experienced in their everyday lives. Among other things, this underlines the fact that the Icelandic legend tradition of the past was far from being something that was shared nationally, and conveyed some form of “national spirit”, as some of the early folklore collectors of Icelandic legends may have wished, and as they certainly tried to achieve with their collections published under labels such as *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (Icelandic Folk Stories and Fairy Tales) (on this, see further Gunnell 2010a and 2022d). For a legend to be adopted into a repertoire, it needs to be meaningful for the narrator, in the sense that it needs to connect with her or his life experience, landscape and community. As this project has shown, this fact serves to remind us that the legend tradition of Iceland was something that was not only divided regionally, but was also, at least to some extent, something that was divided by gender-lines as the different environments, different roles and different experiences of men and women appear to have made different kind of legends meaningful for them, all depending on their different backgrounds. Uncovering the ways in

which these different conditions and different experiences of people in the past shaped the legends they chose to tell to others has been an exciting new research opportunity for a folklorist studying the oral tradition from the perspective of narrators, something that has been greatly facilitated by the comparatively recent digitalization of not only the materials in the folk narrative archives, but also a wide range of other information about the social context and lives of the common people in the past. Arguably, this project, which has attempted to reconstruct the legend traditions of Icelandic women in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s, has been able to touch on just a small number of the many features that characterize women's traditions, focusing primarily on those elements that separate them from those of men. There is little question that the database created for this project and the material that lies behind it offers the potential to take up a wide range of other research topics in the future, and not least those relating to how different social groups of women in the past found meaning in the different themes, characters and forms that have shaped the Icelandic legend traditions over the course of time.

As has been regularly stressed throughout this thesis (and particularly in Article 1 and Chapter 3.1), the collection and documentation of Icelandic legends in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was something almost exclusively carried out by men, members of a predominantly androcentric society that allotted women with little individual agency. As noted at the start, this naturally raises important questions about how women, their narratives and their traditions, fared in the process. The fact that much fewer women than men are referred to by name in the printed folk narrative archives of this period in Iceland was one of the main reasons why I initially chose to work with the audiotaped source material of Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson for this project, something which involved a large number of female legend tellers and reliable documentation of their repertoires. Of course, this does not mean that the Icelandic printed material is useless for future gender-oriented studies into women's legend traditions (as Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir has demonstrated, for example). Indeed, it is clear that this material includes narratives from a number of female narrators, some of whom evidently had relatively large repertoires (see further Chapter 3.1). In many ways, this present project can be said to have opened useful doorways for assembling even more source material about women's traditions from the printed archives, especially considering that fact that (as has been noted above) women tend to place more emphasis on female characters and the *huldufólk* as narrative themes. While early printed folk narrative collections, such as Jón Árnason's nineteenth-century *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur and æfintýri* (1862-1864; extended 1954-1961) may not include as many names of female storytellers as we might wish, there is little question that they tend to include very large chapters on the *huldufólk* and other stories

involving female characters and roles, which often lack accreditation. Bearing in mind what has been said above, the likelihood is that many of the stories of this kind that are unaccredited have women's voices behind them.

All in all, it is my hope that this present project, which has aimed to shed new light onto the lives and traditions of the Icelandic women of the past, has helped reveal a number of new means of understanding the ways in which these women experienced and voiced their feelings about the world that they inhabited.

Complete Bibliography

(Please note that when references are made to several pieces of work published by the same author in a single year, the references (a,b,c and so on) refer to the references given in the introductory chapters and conclusion, rather than the individual articles, which naturally have their own bibliographies. Also note that in line with Icelandic convention, Icelanders are listed here by their Christian names rather than by their patronyms.)

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Appendix I

The original Icelandic texts behind the translations given in the articles.

Article 1:

Page 129:

Konur sem voru okkur samtíða, því það var tvíþýli, þær sögðu okkur sögurnar. Sérstaklega var það ein kona, sem sagði okkur sögur, alltaf í rökkrinu, á kvöldin. Og við vorum þarna öll í kringum hana, upp í rúminu, allt í kringum hana til að gleypa þessar sögur í okkur. Og sumt var nú draugasögur, og við þorðum ekki um þvert hús að ganga, eins og sagt var, fyrir myrkfælni. (SÁM 89/2022).

Page 129-130:

Hún hét Elín Bárðardóttir. [...] Hún var ekki lærd ljósmóðir, hún var ólærd en mjög nærfærin við bæði menn og skepnur. Hún var ákaflega greinagóð kona, ég held að hún hafi verið svona dálítið fjölvitur. ...Ekki veit ég hvort hún hefur verið skyggn, en ég held að hún hafi vitað lengra en nef hennar náði fram í tíman af hyggjuviti. Það hefur ekki endilega þurft að vera af skyggni. En það var ákaflega gaman að hlusta á gömlu konuna segja frá. Þetta var allt svo rökfast hjá henni. En ég var nú svo ung, ég var ekki nema fimm og hálfis árs, þegar ég man eftir þessu atviki, að hún tók á móti barni hjá móður minni og þá hlustaði ég á ýmsar sögur sem hún var að segja þó ég sé búin að gleyma þeim núna í aðaldráttum. ...Það sem hún sagði okkur krökkunum, það voru aðallega útilegumannasögur, huldufólkssögur, tröllasögur og ævintýri. Og hún trúði því statt og stöðugt að álfar væru til. Og þá sagði hún móður minni þetta að okkur áheyrandi. (SÁM 88/1564).

Article 2:

Page 139:

Ég kom að Breiðabólstað árið 1900. Og hún kom á hverju einasta hausti og sagði sögur. Náttúrulega krökkum helst, en allir hlustuðu á, allt fólkið, það langaði til að heyra það, af því að það þótti gaman af þegar hún var að segja þær. Og það var í mörg ár, hún dó 1911, gerði það alveg svona fram að því, ég held að hún hafi komið síðast 1910. Hún sagði okkur sömu sögurnar, náttúrulega eftir pöntunum, maður vildi fá að heyra þessa og þessa, og það voru

sumar sem voru sagðar oftar en aðrar... Það voru þessar: Kisa kóngsdóttir og Þorsteinn glott og Hnoðri, og Álagaflekkur og Rautt hnoð... [On Supernatural legends:] Ég heyrði hana aldrei segja svoleiðis sögur... Hún sat á tali við húsbænduna, og þá bar margt á góma, náttúrulega fróðleikur eins og gerist og gengur, þá var talað um menn og málefni, og þá gátu komið náttúrulega vísur og eitt og annað, eins og alltaf í samtali (SÁM 89/1793).

Page 148:

Við urðum svo myrkfælnar, að pabbi og mamma vildu ekki láta segja okkur svona sögur, því að við þorðum ekki eiginlega þá neitt að fara út úr baðstofunni. Það var verið að segja okkur þetta, og við sátum á rúmunum í baðstofunni og settum fæturnar upp í rúm því að við héldum að þetta kæmi undan rúmi kannski. ... Og það var nú slæmt að amma dó því að hún hefði nú sagt manni þetta, stundum í rökrinu. (SÁM 89/2048)

Page 152-153:

<p>Ég þekkti nú formann einn, sem reri í sama plássi og ég, á Guðlaugsá, þarna á Ströndinni. Ég reri tvær vertíðir þar. Og þá var maður þar, átti heima í Fjörðunum, hét Guðmundur Benediktsson, og var mesti aflamaður. Brást aldrei aflinn, aldrei nokkurntíma. Jæja, það var stein, skal ég segja þér, það var stein á þessum vegi sem var þarna frá Eyrinum út að Núpnum, sem var á kafi á flóði en stóð upp úr í fjöru. En það var visst mið alltaf, fyrir steininn. Ég reri þarna tvær vertíðir og bar aldrei á neinu, ég passaði alltaf að fara nógu djúpt. En annars mátti fara fyrir ofan steininn, en það var víst aldrei farið. En einu sinni kemur þessi Guðmundur með farm af kúfiski frá Staðareyrum, var í félagi við aðra menn. Voru sex á bát hlöðnum kúfiski, og lentu á steininum og drukknuðu þar allir. Þetta var nú sorgarsaga (SÁM 90/2323).</p>	<p>Nóttina sem vitaskipið <i>Hermóður</i> fórst herna í vondu veðri, fórst úti fyrir Reykjanesröst held ég hafi verið, hann fórst á leiðinni frá Vestmannaeyjum til Reykjavíkur, það man ég nú með sanni. Sömu nóttina, þá dreymir mig að maðurinn minn, sem var þá löngu dáinn en hafði verið lengi á Hermóði og segir: „Getur þú ekki tekið til fötin mín því ég er að fara um borð í <i>Hermóð</i>.” Hann hefur vitað af þessu, hann hefur vitað að <i>Hermóður</i> var að farast, því hann var búinn að vera lengi á vitaskipinu <i>Hermóði</i> áður (SÁM 89/1913).</p>
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Page 155:

Hann hét Hermann og vildi endilega fara að stækka húsið. Þá kemur til hennar kona, hana dreymdi hana, og biður hana fyrir alla muni að láta hann ekki stækka húsið. Hún bað hann þess nú, en hann gerði það nú samt fyrir það, stækkaði húsið. Svo veturinn eftir missti hann 50 fjár, hann missti allt féð og þá fór hann vorið eftir. Þá flutti hann út að Bjarnarnesi og þegar hann var að fara síðasta flutninginn með konuna og barnið, 12 eða 13 ára dreng, þá urðu þau svo veik að þegar þau komu út undir Barðsvík, að hann þurfti að leggja þau í land. Og þau fóru þar í land. Svo fór hann, svo hélt hann út og kom aldrei aftur. Sást ekki meir (SÁM 89/2073).

Appendix II

List of Informants, Their Place of Birth and Repertoire Size

Name of Informants	Place of Birth	Legends
Aðalheiður Björnsdóttir (1897-1977)	Syðri-Brekkur in Þistilfjörður, N-Þing.	3
Amalía Björnsdóttir (1891-1984)	Vað in Skriðdalur, S-Múl.	2
Anna Jónsdóttir (1889-1974)	Hrappsstaðakot in Svarfaðardalur, Ey.	15
Anna Jónsdóttir (1893-1979)	Hóll in Breiðdalur, S-Múl.	3
Anna Steindórsdóttir (1890-1980)	Vallanes in Vellir, S-Múl.	16
Anna Tómasdóttir (1878-1968)	Neðri-Lækjardalur in Refasveit, A-Hún.	4
Arndís Baldurs (1899-1990)	Saurbær in Vatnsdalur, A-Hún.	1
Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir (1892-1986)	Vatnadalur in Kollsvík in V-Barð.	5
Arnfríður Lárusdóttir (1898-1981)	Miðfjarðarnessel in Langanesströnd, N-Múl.	8
Ásdís Jónsdóttir (1877-1973)	Helgustaðir in Fljót, Skag.	9
Áslaug Gunnlaugsdóttir (1900-1980)	Mjósyndi in Flói, Árn.	6
Ástríður Thorarensen (1895-1985)	Þúfa in Landeyjar, Rang.	7
Bjarney Guðmundsdóttir (1893-1974)	Höfði in Jökulfjörður, N-Ís.	18
Björg Jónsdóttir (1900-1992)	Rauðsdalur in Barðaströnd, V-Barð.	2
Björg Sigurðardóttir (1900-1971)	Jökulsá in Flateyjardalur, S-Þing.	17
Dóróthea Gísladóttir (1886-1982)	Ráðagerði in Leira, Gull.	8
Dýrleif Pálsdóttir (1887-1976)	Möðrufell in Eyjafjörður, Ey.	7
Elín Árnadóttir (1886-1973)	Pétursey in Mýrdal, V-Skaft.	3
Elín Grímsdóttir (1891-1992)	Krossavík in Vopnafjörður, N-Múl.	6
Elín Hallgrímsdóttir (1893-1988)	Grímsstaðir in Mýrar, Mýr.	4
Elín Jóhannsdóttir (1888-1970)	Ballará in Skarðsströnd, Dal.	11
Elísabet Friðriksdóttir (1893-1976)	Brekka in Kaupangursuveit, Ey.	2
Elísabet Sigurðardóttir (1894-1986)	Rauðholt in Hjaltastaðapínghá, N-Múl.	6
Elísabet Stefánsdóttir (1888-1984)	Jórvík in Breiðdalur, S-Múl.	5
Erlendína Jónsdóttir (1894-1974)	Skálateigur in Norðfjörður, S-Múl.	10
Filippía Valdimarsdóttir (1891-1973)	Stóru-Hámundarstaðir in Árskógsströnd, Ey.	3

Geirlaug Filippusdóttir (1876-1970)	Kálfafellskot in Fljótshverfi, V-Skaft.	22
Gróa Ágústa Hjörleifsdóttir (1886-1973)	Sel in Grímsnes, Árn.	5
Gróa Lárusdóttir Fjeldsted (1880-1970)	Berserkseyri in Eyrarsveit, Snæ.	9
Guðbjörg Bjarman (1895-1991)	Miklibær in Blönduhlíð, Skag.	2
Guðbjörg Jónasdóttir (1893-1993)	Kista in Vatnsnes, V-Hún.	9
Guðfinna Guðmundsdóttir (1895-1991)	Finnbogastaðir in Víkursveit, Strand.	4
Guðlaug Andrésdóttir (1892-1985)	Kerlingardalur in Mýrdal, V-Skaft.	5
Guðlaug Sigmundsdóttir (1895-1988)	Gunnhildargerði in Hróarstunga, N-Múl.	17
Guðmundína Árnadóttir (1886-1968)	Lokinhömrur, V-Ís.	1
Guðmundína Ólafsdóttir (1888-1980)	Stakkar in Rauðisandur, V-Barð.	9
Guðmundína S. Guðmundsdóttir (1878-1979)	Hergilsey in Breiðafjörður, A-Barð.	11
Guðný Hallbjarnardóttir (1891-1971)	Flatey in Breiðafjörður, A-Barð.	1
Guðný Jónsdóttir (1885-1967)	Múli in Álftafjörður, S-Múl.	8
Guðríður Þórarinsdóttir (1888-1971)	Drumboddsstaðir in Biskupstungur, Árn.	9
Guðrún Antonía Jónsdóttir (1890-1974)	Núpar in Berufjörður, S-Múl.	6
Guðrún Einarsdóttir (1899-1980)	Kálfshamar in Skagabyggð, A-Hún.	12
Guðrún Filippusdóttir (1884-1976)	Kálfafellskot in Fljótshverfi, V-Skaft.	28
Guðrún Finnbogadóttir (1885-1972)	Klúka in Tungusveit, Strand.	11
Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir (1885-1971)	Svertingsstaðir in Hálsabæir, V-Hún.	3
Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir (1884-1968)	Bjarnarhöfn in Helgafellssveit, Snæ.	6
Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir frá Melgerði (1889-1982)	Þrúðardalur in Kollafjörður, Strand.	3
Guðrún Hannibalsdóttir (1874-1972)	Neðribakki in Langidalur, N-Ís.	18
Guðrún Jóhannsdóttir (1897-1987)	Þorkötlustaðir in Grindavík, Gull.	76
Guðrún Jóhannsdóttir (1891-1989)	Stakkar in Rauðisandur, V-Barð.	18
Guðrún Jónasdóttir (1882-1972)	Kaldakinn in Fellsströnd, Dal.	1
Guðrún Jónasdóttir (1894-1996)	Fjósar in Laxárdalur, Dal.	4
Guðrún Jónsdóttir (1876-1971)	Miðdalskot in Kjós, Kjós.	5
Guðrún Jónsdóttir (1894-1972)	Ystibær in Hrísey, Ey.	12
Guðrún Kristmundsdóttir (1892-1978)	Hvalnes in Skagi, Skag.	4
Guðrún Magnúsdóttir (1886-1969)	Raufarfell in Eyjafjöll, Rang.	16

Guðrún Ólafsdóttir (1897-1987)	Hjallaland in Ögursveit, N-Ís.	2
Guðrún Sigurðardóttir (1883-1971)	Birnufell in Fell, N-Múl.	2
Guðrún Vigfúsdóttir (1888-1974)	Grímsstaðir in Fjöll, N-Þing.	9
Gunnfríður Rögnvaldsdóttir (1895-1987)	Uppsalar in Álftarfjörður, N-Ís.	67
Gunnþóra Guttormsdóttir (1895-1988)	Ketilsstaðir in Vellir, S-Múl.	1
Halla Loftsdóttir (1886-1975)	Kollabær in Fljótshlíð in Rang.	9
Hallbera Þórðardóttir (1882-1971)	Stóra-Fjarðarhorn	42
Halldóra Bjarnadóttir (1895-1987)	Arnarnes in Dýrafjörður, V-Ís.	16
Halldóra Finnbjörnsdóttir (1885-1977)	Hóll in Bolungarvík, N-Ís.	3
Halldóra Gestsdóttir (1890-1977)	Hjarðardalur in Dýrafjörður, V-Ís.	4
Halldóra Helgadóttir (1884-1980)	Kirkjuból in Vöðlavík, S-Múl.	8
Halldóra Magnúsdóttir (1875-1970)	Ketilsstaðir in Holt, Rang.	11
Halldóra Sigurðardóttir (1876-1972)	Fljótstunga in Hvítársíða, Mýr.	1
Helga Bjarnadóttir (1896-1979)	Klúka in Bjarnarfjörður, Strand.	19
Helga Hólmfríður Jónsdóttir (1895-1976)	Purkey in Breiðafjörður, Dal	3
Helga Sigurðardóttir (1888-1971)	Snæbjarnarstaðir in Fnjóskadalr, S-Þing.	3
Helga Þorkeldsdóttir Smári (1884-1974)	Lykkja in Kjalarnes, Kjós	5
Herdís Andrésdóttir (1884-1970)	Fremri-Brekka in Saurbæ, Dal.	16
Herdís Jónasdóttir (1890-1972)	Reykir in Hrótafjörður, V-Hún.	4
Herselía Sveinsdóttir (1900-1983)	Mælifellsá in Fremribyggð, Skag.	9
Hólmfríður Jónsdóttir (1896-1982)	Hlíð in Þistilfjörður, N-Þing.	10
Hólmfríður Jónsdóttir (1893-1988)	Stóra-Fjall in Mýrar, Mýr.	2
Hólmfríður Pétursdóttir (1889-1974)	Gautlönd in Mývatnssveit, S-Þing.	3
Hulda Á. Stefánsdóttir (1897-1989)	Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur, Ey.	3
Ingibjörg Blöndal (1897-1977)	Tunga in Vatnsnes, V-Hún.	5
Ingibjörg Briem (1889-1979)	Eyrarbakki, Árn.	2
Ingibjörg Eyjólfsdóttir (1887-1986)	Djúpvogur, S-Múl.	12
Ingibjörg Finnsdóttir (1880-1972)	Kjörseyri in Hrótafjörður, Strand.	5
Ingibjörg Hákonardóttir (1883-1971)	Haukadalur in Dýrafjörður, V-Ís.	7
Ingibjörg Halldórsdóttir (1893-1976)	Álftagerði in Seyluhreppur, Skag.	2

Ingibjörg Jóhannsdóttir (1898-1992)	Bjarnastaðagerði in Unadalur, Skag.	14
Ingibjörg Jósefsdóttir (1898-1994)	Hólmar in Vopnafjörður, N-Múl.	5
Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir (1887-1971)	Svínhólar in Lón, A-Skaft.	29
Ingunn Árnadóttir (1899-1983)	Brekka in Núpasveit, N-Þing.	15
Ingunn Thorarensen (1896-1982)	Breiðabólstaður in Fljótshlíð, Rang.	22
Ingveldur Magnúsdóttir (1891-1985)	Stígshús in Eyrarbakki, Árn.	9
Jakóbína Þorvarðardóttir (1885-1978)	Arnarstapi in Snæ.	21
Jófríður Ásmundsdóttir (1881-1977)	Höfði in Þverárhlið, Mýr	3
Jóhanna Elín Ólafsdóttir (1889-1980)	Stakkaberg in Klofningur, Dal.	57
Jóhanna Eyjólfsdóttir (1875-1969)	Skaftárdalur in Síða, V-Skaft.	3
Jóhanna Guðlaugsdóttir (1894-1989)	Staður in Staðarsveit, Strand.	32
Jóhanna Guðmundsdóttir (1891-1983)	Reynivellir in Suðursveit, A-Skaft.	2
Jóhanna Jónsdóttir (1889-1993)	Bakki in Svarfaðardalur, Ey.	7
Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir (1989-1979)	Tjaldbrekka in Hítardalur, Mýr.	1
Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir (1885-1970)	Sæból in Aðalvík, N-Ís.	5
Jóna Ívarsdóttir (1895-1976)	Kirkjuhammur in Rauðisandur, V-Barð.	6
Jóney M. Jónsdóttir (1900-1994)	Hellnar, Snæ.	1
Jónína Benediktsdóttir (1888-1981)	Viðborð in Mýrar, A-Skaft.	24
Jónína Eyjólfsdóttir (1887-1989)	Flatey in Breiðafjörður, A-Barð.	15
Jónína H. Snorradóttir	Húsar in Ásahreppur, Rang.	15
Jónína Oddsdóttir (1884-1977)	Vatnsdalur in Fljótshlíð, Rang.	5
Jósefína Eyjólfsdóttir (1893-1977)	Skildngarnes in Reykjavík, Gull.	20
Júníana Jóhannsdóttir (1893-1965)	Einarslón in Breiðavíkurehri, Snæ.	1
Karítas Skarphéðinsdóttir (1890-1972)	Æðey in Ísafjarðardjúp, N-Ís.	3
Katrín Daðadóttir (1881-1974)	Litli-Langidalur in Skógarströnd, Snæ.	6
Katrín Kolbeinsdóttir (1897-1982)	Hlíð in Grafningur, Árn.	32
Katrín Kristleifsdóttir (1894-1991)	Uppsalir in Hálsasveit, Borg.	2
Katrín Valdimarsdóttir (1898-1984)	Bakki in Bakkafjörður, N-Múl.	7
Kristín Björnsdóttir (1897-1978)	Skógarströnd, Snæ.	10
Kristín Einarsdóttir (1899-1992)	Vopnafjörður, N-Múl.	1
Kristín Friðriksdóttir (1881-1970)	Syðri-Bakki in Kelduhverfi, N-Þing.	10
Kristín Guðmundsdóttir (1893-1976)	Stórolfshvoll in Hvolhreppur, Rang.	3

Kristín Jakóbína Sigurðardóttir (1891-1991)	Snæbjarnarstaðir in Fnjóskadalr, S-Þing.	21
Kristín Jensdóttir (1892-1983)	Árnagerði in Flótshlíð, Rang.	3
Kristín Jóhannesdóttir (1881-1976)	Sigmundarhús in Helgustaðarhreppur, S-Múl.	5
Kristín Jónsdóttir (1886-1976)	Vorsabær in Ölfus, Árn.	6
Kristín Pétursdóttir (1887-1976)	Svefneyjar in Breiðafjörður, Snæ.	2
Kristín Pétursdóttir (1890-1984)	Miðdalir, Dal.	7
Kristín Sigurðardóttir (1892-1967)	Hvammur in Skaftártunga, V-Skaft.	1
Kristín Snorradóttir (1888-1981)	Laxfoss in Stafholtstungur, Mýr.	1
Kristín Tómasdóttir (1893-1975)	Skammidalur in Mýrdalur, V-Skaft.	1
Kristjana Þorvarðardóttir (1887-1976)	Arnarstapi, Snæ.	4
Kristlaug Tryggvadóttir (1900-1981)	Engidalur, S-Þing.	13
Kristrún Jósefsdóttir (1887-1978)	Hólar in Hjaltadalur, Skag.	5
Kristrún Þorvarðardóttir (1873-1967)	Arnarstapi, Snæ.	4
Lilja Árnadóttir (1887-1981)	Jörfi in Haukadalur, Dal.	4
Lilja Björnsdóttir (1894-1971)	Kirkjuból in Ketildalir, V-Barð.	13
Lilja M. Jóhannesdóttir (1896-1992)	Enniskot in Víðidalur, V- Hún.	5
Málfríður Einarsdóttir (1899-1983)	Munaðarnes in Stafholtstungur, Mýr.	19
Málfríður Ólafsdóttir (1896-1978)	Trostansfjörður in Arnarfjörður, V-Ís.	15
Malín Hjartardóttir (1890-1988)	Uppsalar in Svarfaðardalur, Ey.	5
Margrét Björnsdóttir (1892-1976)	Staffell in Fell, N-Múl.	1
Margrét Jóhannsdóttir (1868-1970)	Skáрастаðir in Miðfjörður, V-Hún.	2
Margrét Júníusdóttir (1882-1969)	Syðrasel in Stokkseyri, Árn.	2
Margrét Ketilsdóttir (1887-1981)	Auðsholt in Ölfus, Árn.	4
María Guðmundsdóttir (1889-1973)	Hvítanes in Landeyjar, Rang.	3
María Jónasdóttir (1893-1976)	Árn.	11
María Maack (1889)	Staður in Grunnavík, N-Ís.	15
María Ólafsdóttir (1880-1970)	Múli in Ísafjarðardjúp, N-Ís.	1
Marta Gísladóttir (1893-1985)	Eystrahraun in Landbrot, V-Skaft.	5
Matthildur Björnsdóttir (1888-1980)	Smáhamrar in Tungusveit, Strand.	2
Nikólína Sveinsdóttir (1888-1967)	Reykjavík, Gull.	8
Oddný Guðmundsdóttir (1889-1975)	Bakki in Landeyjar, Rang.	56

Oddný Halldórsdóttir (1891-1971)	Vopnafjörður, N-Múl.	2
Oddný Hjartardóttir (1898-1971)	Borðeyri in Hrútafjörður, Stand.	7
Ólafía Jónsdóttir (1882-1979)	Sveinseyri in Dýrafjörður, V-Ís.	20
Ólafía Þórðardóttir (1888-1976)	Barmar in Reykhólasveit, A-Barð.	10
Ólöf Jónsdóttir (1874-1972)	Keisbakki in Skógarströnd, Snæ.	34
Pálína Jóhannsdóttir (1896-1986)	Laugasel in Reykjadalur, S-Þing.	4
Pálína Konráðsdóttir (1899-1992)	Húsabakki in Seyluhreppur, Skag.	7
Péturína Björg Jóhannsdóttir (1896-1985)	Hvammur in Vatnsdalur, A-Hún.	14
Ragnheiður Benjamínsdóttir (1882-1971)	Ásmundarnes in Nessveit, Strand.	2
Ragnheiður Rögnvaldsdóttir (1886-1980)	Hergilsey in Breiðafjörður, A-Barð.	6
Ragnhildur Bjarnadóttir (1893-1986)	Rauðaberg in Mýrar, A-Skaft.	2
Ragnhildur Jónsdóttir (1895-1977)	Reynisholt in Mýrdalur, V-Skaft.	3
Ragnhildur Sigurðardóttir (1885-1979)	Vilmundarstaðir in Reykholtsdalur, Borg.	1
Rannveig Einarsdóttir (1895-1990)	Strönd in Meðalland, V-Skaft.	18
Rannveig M. Stefánsdóttir (1885-1972)	Reykjavellir in Neðribyggð, Skag.	3
Signý Jónsdóttir (1884-1967)	Neðri-Hundadalur in Miðdalir, Dal.	3
Sigríður Árnadóttir (1876-1975)	Steinadalur in Kollafjörður, Strand.	8
Sigríður Árnadóttir (1890-1974)	Saurbær in Bakkafjörður, N-Múl.	4
Sigríður Benediktsdóttir (1883-1972)	Hvoll in Saurbær, Dal.	7
Sigríður Bjarnadóttir (1886-1974)	Hnappavellir in Örfasveit, A-Skaft.	10
Sigríður Daníelsdóttir (1883-1973)	Ásar, A-Hún.	2
Sigríður Einars (1893-1973)	Munaðarnes in Stafholtstungur, Mýr.	28
Sigríður Gísladóttir (1874-1972)	Broddadalsá in Fellshreppur, Strand.	2
Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir (1882-1968)	Syðrivöllur in Flói, Árn.	2
Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir (1893-1975)	Höfn in Dýrafjörður, V-Ís.	61
Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir (1896-1982)	Hvítanes in Landeyjar, Rang.	23
Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir (1892-1985)	Brekka in Gilsfjörður, A-Barð.	7
Sigríður Helgadóttir (1884-1977)	Ásbjarnarstaðir in Stafholtstungur, Mýr.	3
Sigríður Jakobsdóttir (1893-1989)	Ásólfstaðir in Þjórsárdalur, Árn.	46
Sigríður Jónsdóttir (1898-1987)	Sigríðarstaðir in Ljósavatnsskarð, S-Þing.	19

Sigríður Jónsdóttir (1895-1987)	Norðurgötur in Mýrdalur, V-Skaft.	6
Sigríður Ólafsdóttir (1895-1986)	Gestshús in Álftanes, Gull.	1
Sigrún Guðmundsdóttir (1897-1987)	Lómatjörn in Höfðahverfi, S-Þing.	3
Sigrún Jóhannesdóttir (1892-1989)	Melar in Fnjóskadalur, S-Þing.	9
Sigurást Kristjánsdóttir (1891-1980)	Stekkjarröð in Eyrarsveit, Snæ.	17
Sigurbjörg Benediktsdóttir (1896-1985)	Arnarvatn in Mývatnssveit, S-Þing.	14
Sigurbjörg Björnsdóttir (1886-1984)	Langamýri in Vallhólmur, Skag.	13
Sigurbjörg Jónsdóttir (1898-1985)	Geirastaðir in Mývatnssveit, S-Þing.	18
Sigurlína Valgeirsdóttir (1900-1992)	Norðurfjörður in Víkursveit, Strand.	19
Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir (1892-1982)	Ytra-Skógarnes in Miklaholtshreppur, Hnapp.	78
Þorkelína Þorkelsdóttir (1891-1982)	Útverk in Skeið, Árn.	10
Þórunn Ingvarsdóttir (1888-1981)	Grenivík in Hrísey, Ey.	40
Þórunn Kristinsdóttir (1896-1990)	Brjánsstaðir in Skeið, Árn.	14
Þórunn M. Þorbergsdóttir (1884-1975)	Rekavík bak Látur, N-Ís.	14
Þuríður Árnadóttir (1888-1982)	Gunnarsstaðir in Þistilfjörður, N-Þing.	41
Þuríður Björnsdóttir (1888-1971)	Staffell in Fell, N-Múl.	49
Valgerður Bjarnadóttir (1889-1978)	Hreggstaðir in Barðaströnd, V-Barð.	18
Vilborg Kristjánsdóttir (1893-1993)	Hjarðarfell in Miklaholtshreppur, Hnapp.	31
Vilborg Magnúsdóttir (1892-1983)	Ytri-Ásláksstaðir in Vatnsleysuströnd, Gull.	10
Vilborg Torfadóttir (1896-1987)	Kollsvík, A-Barð.	16
Vilhélmina Helgadóttir (1896-1986)	Hof in Höfðaströnd, Skag.	25
Aðalsteinn Jónsson (1895-1983)	Fossvellir in Jökuldalur, N-Múl.	13
Árni Jónsson (1896-1995)	Holtsmúli in Landssveit, Rang.	55
Bernharð Guðmundsson (1881-1969)	Grafargil in Önundarfjörður, V-Ís.	7
Björn Jónsson (1879-1966)	Lýsudalur in Staðarsveit, Snæ.	3
Einar J. Eyjólfsson (1897-1983)	Suður-Hvammur in Mýrdal, V-Skaft.	11
Gísli Björnsson (1876-1977)	Höskuldarstaðarsel in Breiðdalur, S-Múl.	2
Guðbjartur Jónsson (1884-1970)	Krókur in Kjalarnes, Kjós.	1
Guðmundur Andrésson (1870-1969)	Bjarnastaðir in Hvítársíða, Mýr.	5
Guðmundur Magnússon (1878-1972)	Votamýri in Skeið, Árn.	3
Gunnlaugur Jónsson (1900-1986)	Sigurðarstaðir in Bárðardalur, S-Þing.	8
Hávarður Friðriksson (1891-1967)	Lágidalur in Ísafjörður, N-Ís.	3

Hrólfur Kristbjarnarson (1884-1972)	Heiði in Biskupstungur, Árn.	7
Jóhannes Guðmundsson (1890-1980)	Flaga in Þistilfjörður, N-Þing.	5
Jón Ingólfsson (1891-1982)	Breiðabólstaður in Reykholtisdalur, Borg.	2
Jónas A Helgason (1896-1977)	Grund in Langanes, N-Þing.	4
Konráð Jónsson (1891-1974)	Kagaðarhóll in Uppásar, A-Hún.	9
Kristófer Kristófersson (1888-1970)	Breiðabólstaður in Síða, V-Skaft.	3
Magnús Þórðarson (1895-1983)	Sléttaból in Síða, V-Skaft.	11
Óskar Níelsson (1895-1985)	Bjarneyjar in Breiðafjörður, A-Barð.	7
Sigfús Stefánsson (1978-1969)	Geirastaðir in Hróarstunga, N-Múl.	6
Sigurður Norland (1885-1971)	Hindisvík in Vatnsnes, V-Hún.	5
Stefán Árnason (1887-1977)	Fjall in Skeið, Árn.	3
Þórarinn Helgason (1900-1978)	Þykkvibær in Landbrot, V-Skaft.	10
Þorgímur Einarsson (1896-1980)	Hallbjarnarstaðir in Húsavík, V-Skaft.	6
Þorvaldur Magnússon (1895-1976)	Fótur in Seyðisfjörður, N-Ís.	7
