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Article

Among the PALMs¹

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Abstract: Born out of the convergence of intellectual traditions and owning a borrowing capacity analogous to the one that engenders creole languages, the study of folklore, or folkloristics, claims the right to adapt and remodel political, psychological, and anthropological insights, not only for itself but for the humanities disciplines of philosophy, art, literature, and music (the “PALM” disciplines). Performance-based folkloristics looks like a new blend, or network, of elements from several of those. What looks like poaching, which is a common practice for folksong and folk narrative, can be examined in the PALM disciplines under names like intertextuality and plagiarism. Nation-oriented traditions of folklore study have convergence, borrowing, and remodeling in their history which are also discoverable in other disciplines. Linguistic and cultural creolization—what happens when people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are forced together to learn from one another—lies at the center of folklore; its study opens paths for research in all humanities fields. The study of folklore, while remaining marginal in universities, is undergoing a self-transformation which should lead to the acceptance of its methods and findings in the PALM disciplines.

Keywords: folklore; interdisciplinary; philology; creolization; cognitive linguistics

[W]hereas we have a unique perspective and theoretical tools that make [our] analysis distinctive and valuable, we do not seem willing or able to translate that analysis into a form with public appeal. (Wilk 2013)

What we actually hear in this volume is academics talking to each other, and hoping or pretending that someone else is listening. (Phelan 2013)

Believe it if you can: a book was once published called *The Wit and Humor of Richard Nixon*. It was an echo of Gertrude’s dinner in Randall Jarrell’s *Pictures from an Institution*: you had to see it not to believe it wasn’t a book with blank pages. A line of such blank books, with titles, ought to be brought out by Trickster Press, which publishes in the field of folklore studies. One could be titled *Folklore Studies in the University World*, since that world mostly ignores the study of folklore.

France is an example of that blankness. There, the word “folk” carries class difference and condescension, the “lore” is re-contextualized as picturesque, unimportant, and lacking profound meaning, and *le folklore* stigmatizes the expressive culture of “the little people” as obsolete. It was seen differently in Third Republic days: when the new secular state was being legitimized, folklore (not under that name) was allowed to be a scientific study. In the twentieth century, field-based studies of oral literature (considered in the United States to be one part of a larger discipline), was fostered by Geneviève Calame-Griaule under anthropological influence. Today, through the national center for scientific research (CNRS), those studies are advanced by a distinguished but insufficiently recognized *équipe* of Africanist researchers, who are consigned to tiny offices in an obscure *quartier*, having been

¹ Regina, F. Bendix has helped mightily in writing this paper; several of her comments are included.

relocated well away from their former quarters in the elegant INALCO building in the rue de Lille. Their meticulous and revealing publications have never established oral literature or dignified *le folklore* as a university study. Nor does the development of a new collaborative discipline look promising, despite extraordinary examples of fusion (Ladurie 1980, 1982).

Qui peut dire si l'on se dirige, dans notre pays, vers une sorte de configuration réconciliée où ne subsisteraient de la coupure d'hier que les séquelles d'une longue séparation, des habitudes de vie à part dont l'on ne se déprend pas aisément? Ou si, au contraire, des replis s'annoncent, un rapatriement vers des territoires à nouveau mieux délimités, davantage de netteté dans le dessein, de fermeté dans les traits disciplinaires? (Lenclud 1987, p. 65)²

In post-Foucault France as elsewhere, continuity of development may not characterize intellectual history after all.

In the United States, university-based folklorists had better have another line of work to fall back on, either within or outside university walls. The University of Pennsylvania at one time offered an illustrious program in folklore and folklife. Despite being headed for a time by a president of the American Folklore Society, and producing graduates who landed excellent university posts, the program brought no large research grants in to the university; the program was subjugated, reduced, and finally extinguished. My tiny case, in another setting, is typical of the place of a folklorist in a university department. Over the four decades during which I taught in a large public university, only two or three colleagues had the least idea why anyone would study folklore, or saw it as anything but a handmaiden (in this case, to literature). Fortunately, the department's curriculum committee looked tolerantly on the introduction of the odd folklore course, and from time to time I taught in a couple of other departments.

The American theory of folklore, out of its disciplinary self-consciousness, puts performance and communication at its center, as others in this volume show. No longer oriented to the past, yet strongly interested in history; no longer confined to adventitious commentary on texts, yet searching human communications ever more deeply, performance-based folklore looks like a new blend, or network, of elements from several parent disciplines. The study of vernacular culture, drawing from all and influenced by anthropology, has moved from seeing songs, stories, or sayings separately to replacing them in their social context, blending "text" with "context". It has moved away from a search for the roots of national character in folklore to an examination of process, of unfolding, of change in time, blending effects with causes; it has moved from study of text or genre separately to study of performance and use. An analogy is gender studies, which grew out of sociology, psychoanalysis, and feminist philosophy. Other disciplines stand closely related to folklore: history, psychology, languages, and *philology*, in the old sense of that word.

Yet it remains true that folklore is a subjugated discipline, looked down on by other disciplines. In social science the closest discipline is Anthropology; in humanistic studies, Philosophy, Art, Literature, and Music, which I name the PALM disciplines to salute their power and beauty. These are "the fields of study most widely accused of having lost their intellectual moorings" (Bok 2003, p. 5). Intellectual moorings are also sometimes hard to find in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, the STEM disciplines so much better financed. Derek Bok points to "the growth of undergraduate business majors, the rise of computer science departments, and the generous compensation offered to professors of management and economics, compared to that paid to colleagues in literature and philosophy" (pp. 6–7). Palming, as any fan of Ricky Jay or Dai Vernon knows, is a card-handler's technique for concealing an object in his or her hand. Wikipedia (which will identify

² Who can say whether in our country we are moving towards a kind of configuration in which all that would remain from yesterday's break would be the aftereffects of a long separation, life-habits not easily let go? Or whether by contrast some shifts are coming, a repatriation back to territories now better delimited, with more sharpness in the drawing, more anchoring in features of the discipline?

those men for you) does not tell you that the technique practiced in universities for holding or concealing some of the studies historically practiced there is to neglect or underfund them. The PALM disciplines know they are being palmed, but lack a class consciousness that would open them to interdisciplinary collaboration. Ought members of PALM disciplines too to have another line of work? Perhaps they can learn from a chronically subjugated discipline like folkloristics, which partly belongs among the PALMs.

Members of humanities disciplines, whether they study literature, philosophy, or art, observe and follow the values, priorities, and conventions of their “textual community”. This term, introduced by the anthropologist George Marcus as an adaptation of the linguist’s “speech community”, is a more precise version of what American folklorists call a “folk group”, in which the members are linked by at least one common factor. Humanities scholars are linked by a good many factors, language first of all. In literate societies, Marcus points out, “oral forms of communication are at least as important as reading” (Marcus 1992, p. 110). Becoming a member of a discipline means learning its jargon; scientific revolutions too seem to require “intense socialization” (Jean Jamin, qtd (Dosse 1997, p. 381)). Psychology, even from the beginning, is an example. Many undergraduates take up the study of psychology in the hope of finding out “what’s going on”, within themselves and others; then they find themselves obliged to learn the terms and methods of a distinct field of study, which seems aimed at training professional psychologists. Philosophy is another example: the American Philosophical Association’s website declares support for “the professional development of philosophers at all levels”. University departments can be more realistic. The Harvard department offers “more an invitation to do philosophy than an introduction to it”. As to folklore, the few departments left have no hope of professionally developing more than a few academic folklorists; most of their graduates, after joining the textual community of folklorists, go into public-sector work. Many have found that membership in that community means becoming a translator to and from others. Quite understandably, scholars poach on each other’s terrain, in hopes of good hunting. Among the folk who continually remodel inherited materials, poaching is a dignified activity. No one objects when Woody Guthrie uses the tune of a love song for a protest against super-patriotism (“This Land Is Your Land”). Folklorists too are poachers. They like to raid “disciplines that do possess distinct bodies of theory, taking a hypothesis here, a concept there, and rearranging them according to the concept [one] is investigating” (Barrett 1984, p. 112). So, one thing folkloristics recommend to the PALM disciplines is an openness to poaching.

Folkloristics as an independent academic discipline is interdisciplinary: it enacts of Lévi-Strauss’s *bricolage*, the assembling of materials from anywhere or everywhere. In America it has drawn from many sources, comprehensively shown in the recent definitive book by Dorothy Noyes (a graduate of that Penn program). Herderian romanticism, anthropological culture theory, Frankfurt school critique, Bakhtinian dialogism, Gramscian resistance, and many more names fill out the list (Noyes 2016). Creativity in folklore studies arises out of the blending (if not the clash) of such distinct discourses, and the discipline has ever been ready to reflect that history. Folkloristics has asserted historical discontinuity from its parent disciplines, as creole languages appear to break from their parent languages. It has claimed autonomy, sometimes unsuccessfully in university departments, but with more convincing evidence on intellectual grounds. Yet established, “pure” humanistic disciplines, like art history or literature, still perceive the study of vernacular art or proverbs as inferior. Consequently, folkloristics finds that to theorize its phenomena, it must imitate them. It has to engage in continual mixing and reshaping of borrowed and inherited elements to create a new, “creolized” inter-discipline, a humanities discipline *hors de la lettre*.

National Folkloristics³

In central Europe, the parent tradition of folkloristics was philology. We don't have such all-encompassing sciences these days. Philology took in "not only all literary and linguistic studies but studies of all products of the human mind" (Wellek and Warren 1957, p. 38). Thus, it was not much different from literature, as Friedrich Schlegel defined it: the verbal expression of "all those arts and sciences, and all those mental exertions which have human life, and man himself, for their object" qtd (Wimsatt and Brooks 1959, p. 248). Before Schlegel, J. G. von Herder had already started romantic folklorists on the search for the roots of national character in an imagined peasant culture. Herder's passion for folklore, inseparable from his conception of a (German) nation, was confirmed by Jakob Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology*. Philology had to help define (well, mystify) the essence of Germanness. If a nation is "an imagined political community", it must have roots in an imaginary, constituted by legends, folksongs, and tales (Anderson [1983] 1991, pp. 6, 12). The same motive lay behind Richard Dorson's efforts to demonstrate an American imaginary a century later through folklore (Dorson 1973).

All disciplines are engaged in generating knowledge. What if one of them, instead of remaining subjugated and stigmatized, transformed itself into a study practiced by twenty university departments in three countries under a profusion of names? That is what has become of *Volkskunde* in German-speaking countries lately. But beginning in the early eighteenth century, what may be called "administrative" folklore collected knowledge about peasants and colonized peoples, to aid in exploiting the economy (Bausinger et al. [1971] 1993, p. 25). The new criterion for nation-building would be authenticity. The rise of mythological study and the positivist ambition for folkloristics to become natural science reinforced the search for authenticity. The idealization of peasants in the earlier part of the century set a model for the containment of diverse cultures two generations later, under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Crown Prince Rudolf in 1884 instigated publication of a 24-volume ethnography, hoping to solidify an empire already fragmenting (Bendix 2012, p. 379). Authenticity gained credibility from ethnographic data imagined to be "old".

Disciplines arose, says Ernst Bloch, as a result of the division of labor in the sciences: "the different areas of capitalist life, which anyway have been torn asunder and reified, have also become distinct areas for specialized study" (Bloch 1988, pp. 18–71). Germany saw a shift "from generalist scholarship (*Universalgelehrtentum*) toward disciplinary specialization and subspecialization" (Bendix 1997, p. 50). Hence the many names for *Volkskunde* today. The most appealing of the names, "European ethnology", rejects the equating of the folk with a nation. The study of German folklore, imitating the lore itself, exercised the power Jacques Derrida calls dissemination, the power of folktales and songs to burst through semantic horizons. As the Frog Prince and other folktale characters take variant forms, folkloristics has spread and taken various shapes. In the universities, "the disciplinary profiles are far from identical and the post-war developments demonstrate the differences with which the discipline was re-established" (Bendix 2012, p. 366).

Perseveringly, German scholars have examined and confronted their students with the ugly deformation of *Volkskunde* under National Socialism. The examination yielded a definition of both the object of study and its discipline, in the "Falkenstein formula": "*Volkskunde* analyzes the transmission of cultural values (including their causes and the processes which accompany them) in their objective and subjective form. The goal is to contribute to solving sociocultural problems" (Dow and Lixfeld 1986, p. 2). The formula, or program, is not limited to post-World War Two Germany; other disciplines could afford to take it up and adapt it. That could be another challenge to them from folklore. Paul Ricoeur poses strict criteria for such a program. Each discipline's version should undergo empirical verification, so that "determinate consequences" can be deduced from

³ Selecting from translated works and commentaries, I argue for viewing the study of folklore as inherently interdisciplinary, making no effort at balanced intellectual histories. A careful reader suggests that I am offering the contours of "creolizing" intellectual moves, as they are apparent from what one knows about the politics of a given place.

its propositions. “In addition, there must be some specific rules of procedure (variously called ‘correspondence rules’, ‘coordinating definitions’, or ‘operational definitions’), so that at least some theoretical notions may be tied down to definite and unambiguous facts”. Finally, “its empirical validation must satisfy the requirements of a logic of proof” (Ricoeur 1970, pp. 345–46). All Ricoeur’s criteria for a theory of folklore are often met by the PALM disciplines. One can analyze the historical moment of Deleuze and Guattari’s proposition that philosophy means the inventing of concepts (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, pp. 15–34), or the role of an institution like the National Gallery in London in “the reproduction of the ideology of the individual male creative genius” (Harris 2002, p. 163) or the causes, processes, and transmission of the classical style in music (Rosen 1972). The Falkenstein formula would doubtless survive translation into all the PALM disciplines.

Other nineteenth-century European folklore studies experienced similar convergences. In Hungary, a political goal, “the search for a national ideal and national characteristics”, effected a literary focus “on the common people and the peasants” (Nemeskürty et al. 1982, pp. 169–70). In Bohemia, folklore studies became a creolized product by spotlighting Czech and Slovak languages and their expressive potential. In parallel to Germany’s “administrative folklore”, mandated primary education in Bohemia led towards a Germanization. One generation’s German and Latin, the basis for the study of Czech-language prosody, was supplanted by writing “aggressively in Czech”. Behind some vehement arguments over forged manuscripts lay the authenticity criterion. By “sacralizing” Czech traditions, the forgery could be ignored, and an imagined community created. This community was the new product of the interplay of converging forces (Hartwig 1999, pp. 65, 67).

Most nation-oriented traditions of folklore study have similar histories of convergence, borrowing, and remodeling. “A useful project would be to do a careful study of one region/state’s entire folkloristic work, especially with a view toward methods and theory, to look at the paths of absorption and rejection of new insights”.⁴ In Estonia, for example, folkloristics and ethnology belong to the rank of the so-called ‘national sciences’ *rahvusteadused*, disciplines that together with the study of language, literature and political history form the basis for the investigation of Estonian culture” (Kuutma 2005, pp. 11–12). Finland, with its enormous archives, could be another example.

An extreme case where dialogue is needed is India. Its diversity impedes the sharing of materials or data among textual communities, in a period when Hindu nationalists are attempting to efface regional identities. India has long known the nationalistic sentiment that animated Herder and Schlegel in Germany and their followers in Ireland and Finland; it was adapted to Bengal under the influence of British scholars (Claus and Korom 1991, pp. 16–21). India can argue that terms like *folklore*, *popular antiquities*, and *regional ethnology* reflect old, unacceptable national orientations of folklore study. The argument does away with any system, since indisputably each language group or ethnic group, no matter how small, defines its own categories of what is “folk”.

Northeast India in particular has long attracted ideas of “folkness” on the part of outsiders. Fought over by the Raj, inhabited by “tribes” who are looked down upon by Hinduized India, speaking innumerable distinct languages, virtually disowned and neglected by central governments, the northeast was assumed to be one of those backward places where folklore is to be sought. Its archaic culture, oral of course, would have to be preserved in writing. But in such states as Meghalaya, Assam, and Mizoram, Indian folkloristics is a model of disciplinary convergence. There, the universities put oral and written literatures together. Literature and ethnic folklore merge into one subject area, so that “in Khasi literature departments, fifty per cent of what they are studying is actually folklore” (Kharmawphlang et al. 2004, p. 18). The merged subject of “folklore literature” in one stroke does away with the old western definition equating folklore with orality; it even promises to give the region an ideological identity. Yet since much of this literature exists only in the form of oral performances—folktales, legends, proverbs, riddles, folksongs—does the merged subject also do away

⁴ Regina Bendix, personal communication.

with the call for more fieldwork? Wouldn't a new Indian folkloristics move beyond the limits of "national" or language-based folklores? Wouldn't it look for regional regularities, and move beyond the search for artifacts into a present-oriented search for process? The subject of "folklore literature" revives obsolescence as part of the definition of folklore.

Russia has its own history of reconceiving folkloristics. At the moment of the Great October Socialist Revolution, the prevailing school had long been looking for reflections of history in the *byliny*, which form such a revered part of Russian heritage. The accepted assumption was that folklore descends from an elite to ordinary people. Then, under Marxist-Leninist criticism, these views had to be set aside, indeed turned upside down. Then the revelations of the formalist study of folktale, groundbreaking work that found its audience only later, also had to be rejected. Henceforward Soviet folkloristics would direct its attention "mainly to the reflection in artistic productions of the phenomena of social life, of class conflict . . ." (Sokolov 1950, p. 148). The dominance of a class-conflict interpretation overcame that "vulgar sociological theory" that folklore descends from the upper classes. In their place, proletarian artists were glorified. Thenceforward, the Marxist-Leninist dominance is an instance of the convergence of one strongly powered manner of thought with another less powerful—a case of intellectual subjugation.

From the convergence emerged a new and unpredictable product, hidden among "normal science" practices, the humanist literary aesthetics of M. M. Bakhtin. This philosopher's contention that literature depends upon the mixing of kinds of language, which is observable in folk speech, drew his study of medieval "folklore literature" into the novel. Reading Rabelais, he points to the power of the "carnival-grotesque": "to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (Bakhtin 1968, p. 34). Every kind of folk speech and genre fits into Bakhtin's conception of the novel; through the multiple voices of the folk, the genre makes its impact. Unpredictable, indeed revolutionary, were Bakhtin's contentions that literary art depends crucially on folklore, and that folk laughter is the greatest weapon against the repressive monologism of the Stalinist state. He opens paths to understanding the ignored element of all humanities studies—communication.

Coming to the west, folkloristics in the land of settlers was bound to exemplify intellectual convergence and mixing. The United States could manage cultural mixing more comfortably than France, Russia or India. With the settlers from Europe came an intellectual immigration (the first of several). The necessity of an *American* folklore, to guide the search for the roots of national character (Abrahams 1988, p. 61), turned out to reveal a mixed character, as the history shows (Zumwalt 1988; Haring and Bendix 2012). The study starts in a "confluence of forces and ideas at work during the 1880s, a dynamic time when new disciplines and organizations were being established" (Zumwalt 1988, p. 1). To trace that confluence and describe the clashes between literary and anthropological folklorists, the historian requires words like *battle*, *bloodletting*, and *struggle*. The matrix of storytelling, singing, and custom was shared identity among members of the folk. By World War Two, the discipline had been squeezed into a marginal position, but there was minimal agreement on two points: folklore is a perfectly distinct object, and the word means both "the traditional cultural forms and the discipline devoted to their study" (Bauman 1992, p. 29). Later the *-istics* was added to denote the discipline, and excellent textbooks refined the definitions for university students. Yet the field remained so marginal among disciplines that the distinguished anthropologist Clifford Geertz felt obliged to call for the inception of such a field, as envisaged by the linguist Alton L. Becker:

In a multicultural world, a world of multiple epistemologies, there is need for a new philologist—a specialist in contextual relations—in all areas of knowledge in which text-building (written or oral) is a central activity: literature, history, law, music, politics, psychology, trade, even war and peace. (Becker 1980, p. 138)

Invisible to the linguist and anthropologist next door, “new philologists” were already exploring the contextual relations of expressive culture. One of them, a prominent theoretician thinking primarily of the arts of the word, proposes that folkloristics be renamed “the philology of the vernacular” (Bauman 2007). In an example of yoking two disciplines together, another folklorist made a brilliant post-Bakhtinian study of a canonical literary classic (a text) based on face-to-face fieldwork about carnival (treating performance as text became a practice of other American folklorists too). The author first shows how Rabelais has been obscured through criticism, then applies modern critical concepts. Contextual relations are an essential element: the author discusses “authorial strategies shared by all four books published by Rabelais; Rabelais’s defenses against misinterpretation in his first two books; Rabelais’s development of new defenses in 1546 and afterward; and finally, the formalization of these new defenses into altered author-reader relations in the *Fourth Book* of 1552” (Kinser 1990, p. 199). What he says about the Rabelaisian text, that it “can be perceived . . . as a series of image systems . . .” (p. 258), holds true for Afanase’ev’s Russian tales, Hungarian ballads, American “urban legends”, and most of material culture. The “new philologist’s” synthesis of literary criticism and folkloristics parallels the “new historicism” in literary studies.

Practicing multiple sciences, and incidentally demonstrating folklore’s capacity to engender “big books”, the folklorist Henry Glassie expounds the contextual relations and text-building of an Irish peasant community.⁵ Glassie synthesizes “history, anthropology, linguistics, geography, archaeology, art, architectural and literary history” (Glassie 1982, p. xiv). With performance as the central text for study, he freely borrows from other disciplines, creating density by yoking together vernacular architecture, oral history, folksong study, economy of folklife, and structuralism, among other disciplines. In phenomenological fashion, Glassie describes the structures of different kinds of material and mental objects, always narrating the moments in which they gave themselves to his consciousness. The result is the kind of “dense” artistic product articulated by the Russian critic Shklovsky in the 1920s: “Density [*faktura*] is the prime characteristic of this peculiar world of deliberately constructed objects, the totality of which we call art” (Erlich [1955] 1969, p. 177). Glassie challenges the assumption that ordinary folk do not require outside experts to theorize their artistry. They “are capable of objectifying their own ways, borrowing other ways, seeing their logic, and siting themselves” (Glassie 1982, p. 601). Similarly, artists in creole societies or other subjugated cultures combine various styles to create a dense new expressivity. Storytellers in Mauritius creolize European and Indian tales; in the French overseas *département* of Réunion, religion encompasses Catholicism, Hinduism, and Islam, along with popular French folk religion and healing. In creole societies, these processes yield a cultural density, to which the intellectual combining of folkloristics are analogous. Hence, along with the “demonstration of how forging together methods and ideas is what comes naturally to a scholar in search of insight” (Regina Bendix, personal communication), I see folkloristics as a discipline appropriating techniques, practicing an intellectual creolization.

The Challenge from Creolization

This word comes out of linguistics, a non-PALM subject that influences all the humanities disciplines. Meanings of the word, however, have not always been in the control of linguists. In New Orleans, for instance, creole identity is claimed by one social group. Linguists use it to refer to a particular turn in their discipline. It was discovered that the languages called creole and pidgin develop through the convergence of diverse linguistic traditions, within specific situations of social contact between people with different histories. Creole and pidgin languages, far from being “hybrid” or “broken”, and therefore inferior to standard languages, are historically discontinuous, autonomous, and emergent. The alleged inferiority turns out to be social: a pidgin language

⁵ A granting authority in Germany remarked to a prominent colleague, “*Volkskunde* is always threatened to be regarded as a subsidiary discipline, because it has not produced any big books”.

“emerges initially between two or more groups speaking different languages *in a context of social subordination*” (McWhorter 1997, p. 145), italics added. That social context links creole linguistics to folklore studies, which gravitate to the productions of enclaved and subjugated groups. Being a process of “expansion spurred by a social impetus”, creolization is “a social process rather than an individual one” (McWhorter 1997, p. 161). Folkloric communication too is intrinsically social. When the linguistic discoveries are applied to the realm of expressive culture, situations of cultural convergence are seen to produce their own, autonomous behaviors and expressions. Such “creolized” folklore has a new artistic shape, as well as new social and linguistic functions. Creolized folklore, such as a version of Cinderella told in the Indian Ocean island of Réunion, is not something deteriorated from an earlier, purer, European state; it is new in important ways. “Sandriyone [the creole teller’s pronunciation of our girl’s name]—her godmother was the Holy Virgin. She was a fairy, that godmother. The Holy Virgin was a fairy” (Haring 2007, p. 269). International folktale tradition, European Catholicism, and African supernaturalism converge to make an unpredictably new characterization. Creolization reminds the scholar to direct attention to the power differences between dominating and dominated groups. It challenges the PALM disciplines, and all the humanities, to view cultural production from the subordinated underside. That’s where the study of folklore has lived for a long time.

Creolization also impels a rereading of a classic essay of the 1920s, in which folklore is being defined as processual and emergent.

What is fundamental to the science of folklore is not the origin and existence of the sources outside of folklore, but the function of appropriation, the selection and transformation of the appropriated material Reproduction does not mean a passive appropriation The transformation of a work belonging to so-called high art into the so-called primitive is, likewise, a creative act. Creativity expresses itself here not only in the selection of the works appropriated but also in their adaptation to other customs and demands a switching of functions takes place in these art forms. (Bogatyrév and Jakobson [1929] 1982, pp. 40–41)

Appropriation, adaptation, transformation: these are the processes that creolization puts in the foreground, asking humanities disciplines to add the context of power differences to the techniques they already use, and to focus on process at least as much as on product.

What about Philosophy?

Born out of the convergence of intellectual traditions and owning a borrowing capacity analogous to the one that engenders creole languages, folkloristics claims the right to adapt and remodel political, psychological, and anthropological insights. It claims that right not only for itself but for the PALMs and all humanities disciplines. The study of folklore looks to philosophy, for instance, for insights and methods that might settle a fundamental issue such as the ontological status of its data—the situated social communications that are observed and analyzed. Philosopher Stuart Hampshire gives a starting point.

After the early experiments of Russell and Wittgenstein, most contemporary philosophers are probably convinced that the idea of “the facts”, which are already individuated in reality independently of our forms of reference to them, is an illusion that cannot be given a sense. We divide and re-divide reality into its segments and sub-segments along the lines of our practical interests, which are reflected in our conventions of reference. (Hampshire 1983, p. 216)

The performance of a song or the citing of a proverb is experienced and analyzed according to the conventions of reference within the discipline. Members of every discipline operate just like the folk: we all acquire our divisions and re-divisions in continuing Bakhtinian dialogue with the voices of others. Hampshire acknowledges “reality”; no more than he would a folklorist go to the idealist extreme of denying that there’s any reality “out there”. The hardheaded John Searle dismisses

“the notion—advanced by thinkers like Foucault, [Paul] Feyerabend and [Richard] Rorty—that science (or knowledge in general) is entirely a product of socialized codes and conventions . . . ” (Norris 1990, p. 97). He is explicit:

I think that the universe exists quite independently of our minds and that, within the limits set by our evolutionary endowments, we can come to comprehend its nature. I believe that the real change since the nineteenth century is not that the world has become unintelligible in some exciting and apocalyptic way, but that it is a lot harder to understand for the rather boring and unexciting reason that you have to be smarter and you have to know a lot more. (Searle 1998, p. 4)

Folkloristics, being committed to knowing a lot more, tolerates the opposition between the Foucault and Searle positions (if these are being correctly represented). Folkloristics relies on the tolerant example of the lore, for example those enduring proverbs people love to cite because they seem contradictory: “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”, but “Out of sight, out of mind” (Mieder 2003, p. 155). Both are true for particular situations; both Foucault’s and Searle’s positions are relevant to the field study of folklore in context. The more proverbs you know, the more eloquent you are.

Looking to another great thinker: Ludwig Wittgenstein assigns to the philosopher the task of describing real uses of language and its systems of rules. Saying so, he disregards the work of linguists, but opens a way for the folklorist, whose task is to describe and perhaps explain people’s real artistic-communicative practice. If “[p]hilosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts” (Tractatus 4.112), folkloristics aims at the clarification or “elucidation” (another favorite word of his) of the implications of human expressions, especially when they take narrative or aphoristic form. What Wittgenstein says of philosophy is equally true for folkloristics: it is “not a body of doctrine but an activity” (4.112 (Wittgenstein [1922] 1974, pp. 29–30)). Most obviously, his well-known notion of language games points to something often noted in folklore fieldwork. Step by step in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein arrives at calling “the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a ‘language-game’” (Wittgenstein 2009, p. 8). The folklorist jumps up to supply empirical evidence, in the form of a list of the language games played in a given society or culture: riddles, rhymes, jokes, legends, myths, folktales, and the other verbal forms often treated as the totality of folklore. All are games.

Folktales always “present a universe governed by a set of game rules acceptable to the listeners”. The great folklorist who italicized these words (Holbek 1977, p. 26) set the class-based society as prior to expressive culture. In that society, the folk are always “the losers of the game”; creolization sees them appropriating and remodeling narratives into games in which they symbolically win. So, their truth becomes what Nietzsche said it was, “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people . . . ” (Kaufmann 1954, pp. 46–47). What a good description of the image systems of myth, legend, folktale, proverb, and riddle—and of the games people construct to symbolize the social problems confronting them. Managing that fantasied universe is their philosophizing.

Philosophy of Folklore Impossible?

A philosophy or theory of folklore is both impossible and necessary. Impossible because any single theory of folklore up to now would have restricted the activities of folklorists and narrowed the scope of the field; necessary because “[t]heory provides a means of networking scholars in a common project and justifying a discipline. Furthermore, it represents a collective point of reference” (Fine 2007, p. 48). A restrictive theory that all myth and folklore must originate in ritual led Stanley Edgar Hyman to seek the roots of African American blues in African ritual, wholly disregarding the cultural mix that is African American culture (Hyman 1963, pp. 291–92). American folklorists show

little interest in theories that might seem relevant, like the version of pragmatism offered by Richard Rorty. Instead of validating their practice from philosophers' models or concepts, they rely on a 1965 anthology by Alan Dundes, which defined the study of folklore through exemplifying its practice and contextualizing it with headnotes (Dundes 1965). Accordingly, American folklorists prefer to focus on the actualities of people's interactions with each other and derive their broader insights from those people. So, Margaret Mills attends closely to a live performance in Afghanistan of an ancient tale from the Arabian Nights (Mills 2007). So, Amy Shuman, in a classically folkloric move making something unimportant important, analyzes a bit of bourgeois Americana: those stories that provoke people to say "Small world, isn't it?" (Shuman 2005). So, Ray Cashman records seventy hours of personal narratives to understand one Irishman's worldview (Cashman 2016). Their path to the largest issues starts at the face-to-face level.

Could that be the message of American folkloristics to the PALM disciplines? At an American Folklore Society forum ten years ago, the question "Why is there no 'Grand Theory' in folkloristics?" received eloquent answers demonstrating that theory is necessary after all (Haring 2016). Confirming my "creolization" view of folkloristics, Dorothy Noyes's history shows theoretical creativity arising out of the blending of distinct discourses. Evidently the skillful use of blending and the attraction of the folk explain why American folkloristics has seemed to lack a grand theory. A distinguished philosopher declares for the impossible, "I do not see how to make a case for or against theory in folkloristics" (Garver 2016, p. 104). But as Noyes shows, the grand American practice puts socially situated communication, or performance, at its center, and requires "transmission, performance, and differentiation" to "hold together the centrifugal field of folklore studies" (Noyes 2016, pp. 2, 15). "Folklorists are perhaps not all of great genius, but they are among the last who held on to the notion of universal science—holistic understanding requires methodological and theoretical creolization" (Regina Bendix, personal communication). If holistic understanding forces praxis into a theoretical role, or if it disassembles theory down to the uncovering of regularities common to many moments of practice, that is probably what Noyes means by *humble*.

Blending

A good deal is coming to be known in cognitive linguistics about blending as a mental or interior process. Of course cognitive linguistics is not among the PALMs, but its authority for them is its discoveries about the mental processes that underlie the production of art, literature, and music. The concept offers a path humanities disciplines can follow to begin the cooperation necessary for their survival.

When textual communities or networks see no need to blend, or even notice each other, an unacceptable price is paid. A famous literary case is the 1968 novel *Le devoir de violence*, by Yambo Ouologuem, whose narrative traditions were distinctly foreign to readers in Europe. Initially well received, the novel is an impassioned, furious look back over several centuries of West African history. In reverence to that history, it is essential to the author's style, as it is for many African novelists, to echo and conform to the oral devices and conventions of his predecessors. The West African *griot* who alludes to or quotes the discourses of his mentors is asserting his loyalty to tradition—to the network. The technique is practiced by a number of African novelists, notably in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, where Amos Tutuola weaves together widespread oral stories quickly recognizable by an African reader. In *Le devoir de violence* Yambo Ouologuem models parts of his novel on passages not from African tradition, but from two European novels. Instantly upon its publication, the "other" network of European readers sent up the red flag of plagiarism. As an African from a former colony, the author was a handy object for excoriation, by an anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*. The reviewer's network, or tradition, relying on the centuries-old translation of Locke's notion of personal property into intellectual property, forbade citations without permission; the reviewer transposed that interdiction from academic criticism to a work of fiction

([Something new out of Africa 1972](#)). The shared and collective thinking of one textual community was rejected by the shared thinking of the other. The notion of blending offers the extreme alternative.

Cognitive linguistics blending theory explains “how the mind creates new mental structures from the input of two or more mental sources ... The blended space contains information which has been partially selected from each of the input spaces in a way that a new structure emerges, resulting from a new arrangement of pieces of information present in the inputs” ([Schneider and Hartner 2012](#), pp. 1, 14). In conceptual blending, the oft-used metaphor “journey” gets specified in many languages as “life is a journey”. When that is combined with another metaphor, that “the mind is a body moving in space”, the blend may be called “life is a journey of discovery (or self-discovery)” —and we have found the skeleton plot of innumerable folktales ([Turner 1987](#), pp. 244–45). Conceptual blending, operating at an unconscious level, “choreographs vast networks of conceptual meaning, yielding cognitive products that, at the conscious level, appear simple ... A single cognitive operation—conceptual blending—plays a decisive role in human thought and action and yields a boundless diversity of visible manifestations” ([Fauconnier and Turner 2002](#), pp. v–vi). Cognitive linguists are not in a position to test blending theory empirically; folklorists observe blending in practice, in the production and consumption of cultural products. Blending is observed particularly in creolized societies, such as former colonies, where people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds have been obliged to coexist (as PALM and STEM disciplines do in universities). In that situation, the crossing of linguistic and cultural boundaries makes for innovation and growth, and creativity arises out of the blending of distinct discourses. African transformations of a single recurrent plot show remarkable inventiveness and variation ([Görög-Karady and Seydou 2001](#)).

Folkloristics Transforming Itself

To the foregoing arguments, the PALM disciplines might reply, “What about folkloristics? Has it no challenges?” The age of Big Data poses four, according to one authority: “(1) collection and archiving; (2) indexing and classification; (3) visualization and navigation; and (4) analysis”. For large corpora of folkloric data, what he calls the “folklore microscope” promises to “to construct a multi-modal network representation of a collection” ([Tangherlini 2013](#), pp. 8, 23). Well, even if we disregard its parlous state in universities, the study of folklore faces a fifth challenge: to initiate closer integration with other forms of cultural study, other discourses in Foucault’s sense “Folklore” too is a discursive practice, which systematically brought into nostalgic existence the manners and utterances of olden time. Social and political forces required folklore to be a distinct entity. Hence to understand their own discipline, folklorists ask what social forces were and are at work to effect the production of folkloristic knowledge.

The challenge to transform comes from a pioneer in the study of inter-ethnic folklore, José E. Limón.⁶ He defines folklore in Marxist terms, as a set of forms of non-alienated labor and human interaction, and cites Marx’s words to describe its social process.

Supposing that we had produced in a human manner; each of us would in his production have doubly affirmed himself and his fellow men. I would have: (1) objectified in my production my individuality and its peculiarity and thus both in my activity enjoyed an individual expression of my life and also in looking at the object have had the individual pleasure of realizing that my personality was objective, visible to the senses, and thus a power raised beyond all doubt. (2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have had the direct enjoyment of realizing that I had both satisfied a human need by my work and also objectified the human essence and therefore fashioned for another human being

⁶ With gratitude to this colleague, I rely here on his address to an American Folklore Society meeting in 1998.

the object that met his need. (3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species and thus been acknowledged and felt by you as a completion of your own essence and a necessary part of yourself and have thus realized that I am confirmed both in your thought and in your love. (4) In my expression of my life I would have fashioned your expression of your life, and thus in my own activity have realized my own essence, my human, my communal essence.

In that case our products would be like so many mirrors, out of which our essence shone.

Thus, in this relationship what occurred on my side would also occur on yours (Marx 1971, p. 202).

The performance of folklore, then, objectifies the specific character of the performer's individuality; it expresses his or her life and expresses the life of the other members of the group. The performer, or artist, acts as a mediator between the individual receiver and the human species. The audience acknowledges the producer as someone who complements its existence; the audience bestows both esteem and love on the performer. Marx's propositions would take in all "folklore literature", as well as cookery, costume, and pottery, but also epic, drama, poetry, painting, architecture . . . In fact, it is a general theory of art, applicable to all the PALMs.

Relevant to this definition is a sixth challenge to folkloristics, potentially devastating: the lore might disappear, as people have said since neolithic times. If capitalist postmodernity diminishes this "site of alternative human production" called folklore, the object of study will vanish. Consequently, "a discipline dedicated to such alternative sites must itself be thrown into crises and either wither or transform itself". The first transformation has already occurred: folkloristics set aside the limitation of folklore to bits from the past, and opened its books and journals to the analysis of present-day neo-paganism, living quilt-making, and Internet communities. Socially situated communication is in no danger of extinction; what withers is the challenge.

The second transformation is more promising. Interdisciplinary collaboration and research are less familiar to humanities disciplines than to the sciences, where neuroscience has already yielded results about the brain, which draw attention and adaptation to the literary realm (Turner 1987; Kövecses 2007), and the new science of geobiology has resulted from collaborative efforts (Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research et al. 2005, pp. 250–51). Some topics that belong to both humanities and social sciences, such as cultural property, seem especially appropriate for study by folklorists. And in fact, since UNESCO adopted conventions on the safeguarding of cultural heritage, the torments of cultural property have been under their gaze (Skrydstrup 2012). As a means of advancing understanding about knowledge production and testing the viability of interdisciplinary collaboration, a project about cultural property was launched, executed, and reported on by folklorists (Bendix et al. 2017). They point out that social sciences have more difficulty than scientists with interdisciplinarity, not for lack of will or dedication but because of practical limitations in the way projects have to be organized. What is most engaging about their report is that in lieu of a journalistic account of how the project went, the authors make their book a broad philosophical critique of any "funded interdisciplinary team research project" (p. 8). It thus becomes a how-to-think-about-it book for both PALM disciplines and social sciences. Such a project might aim at discovering and explicating two kinds of competence: the one that enables sculptors, composers, philosophers, or poets to create and perform artistic communications, and the one that enables audiences or readers to appreciate them. This challenge comes from a transformed folkloristic discipline. I have done no more than adapt a statement by a pre-eminent scholar of Native American narrative (Hymes 1972, p. 52).

I conclude with the strongest of all folklore's challenges to humanities disciplines, in the words of that same scholar.

I have thought that the true problem of aesthetic experience as part of life would be posed by a study of the state of the arts in Florence—not Florence, Italy, on the Mediterranean, but the small town on the Oregon coast at the mouth of the Siuslaw River. Or by an accounting of

the satisfaction in the voice of Mrs. Blanche Tohet of Warm Springs, Oregon, when, having finished fixing eels to dry one evening, she stood back, looking at them strung on a long line, and said, "There, int [sic] that beautiful?" (Hymes 1975, p. 346)

Dell Hymes cited this voice of the folk as part of his testimony in support of the American Folklife Preservation Act, which led to the creation of the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress. Language, gender, class, ethnicity, style: the humanities disciplines are invited to melt away the boundaries and join folkloristics in declaring the universality of creativity and of aesthetic appreciation.

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