

THE ROOTS OF THE TWO ETHNOLOGIES, AND ETHNILOGY*

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Translation by the author

Social sciences and humanities study differences and similarities between communities: nations, peoples, tribes, ethnies. Both ethnologies have their own historical roots that have strongly influenced their intellectual organization, their development and their findings.

In this paper, I try to study the roots of these two disciplines (which I consider both mine, having had my education in both, and having worked under both labels).

I am talking about two academic fields: anthropology and folklore. Both have been called ethnology, depending on the country and the point in history. They could legitimately be called sister disciplines, and there has certainly been some sibling rivalry between the two. Of course, my discussion will remain general, and does not pretend to be exhaustive or complete or definitive. What I want to present here are some reflections on the early history and the original character of these two fields.

Folklorists have often repeated that the term folklore, which is now accepted in many languages--including lately by the French Academy, introduced by Lévi-Strauss--and was created by Thoms in 1846.¹ This, they say--implicitly or explicitly--marked the beginning of the discipline. Nothing is

further from the truth. The study of the customs of the people, of the folk culture, started by a royal decree in Spain in 1850; in Sweden in 1630.² Many other examples could be given already for the period before Herder.³ The folklore archives in Turku, Finland, burnt down in 1827, but enough information was preserved to know that systematic collection had been done by Henrik Gabriel Porthan and his students. His publication was *De Poesi Fennica*, 1776-1778, just before Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* of 1778. After Herder, research became intensive in many European countries, especially those that had a national (linguistic) majority subjected to an alien power, who held the economic and political reins.

I will confess in passing to a painful ignorance: I do not know what the great civilizations of Asia did with their oral literatures. I will talk, then, of what I know at least partially: folklore as a discipline based on European developments, and from the Euro-American realm spreading to other continents.

For the European world, to be sweepingly general, these two disciplines (and perhaps most other academic disciplines), have existed for approximately two hundred years. The first of these centuries was devoted to exploration, the first field work, the collecting of data. The second century saw an intensive development in method and theory. The last decade or so has been marked by an examination of *la raison d'être* of the disciplines, of ethical questions, or, as the French would say, *déontologie*.

It must be said that in both disciplines (what I am saying may sound hostile) workers have always worked in good faith and it is because in the early history of both of these disciplines, that people were

sufficiently naive to pronounce such principles as valueless research, folklorists less than anthropologists, anthropologists, yes, without realizing that all research that touches human beings and is done by human beings, is value laden.

Anthropology vs. Folklore

Where, then, is the most important difference between these two fields? I will take as a basic axiom the fact that an anthropologist studies a group from the outside and a folklorist studies a group from the inside. I must underline here that I am talking about the classical period in both disciplines and not talking about the most recent history, in which anthropologists have begun to study their own people, partially because the Third World is more and more reluctant to receive anthropologists. Leaving modern developments on the side, one can say, a bit jokingly, that classically anthropology has been a quest for the queer and folklore a quest for the quaint. My argument entails the chain of propositions which follow:

- An anthropologist studies the other, a folklorist studies his own.
- Anthropology is born of colonialism, folklore is born of nationalism.
- Colonizing countries have anthropological museums, colonized countries have folklore archives.
- If you find an important anthropological museum, you can 'predict' that the country has had colonies.
- If you find important folklore archives, you can 'hypothesize' that the people have been colonized.
- Where you find important, established folklore archives, you can 'predict' the advent of political independence.
- Where there are folklore archives, there is first-

hand research. Where there are no folklore archives, there is second-hand research.

- There is a correlation between the wealth or abundance of facts and a shortage of theory in folklore (I am still speaking of the classical period).
- There is a correlation between the scarcity of materials and a proliferation of theory in anthropology. (Louis Dumont put that in a discussion neatly, he said, "Anthropology is like a pyramid upside down: heavy on theory, thin for the base").
- Anthropologists have been classically "city boys" (This I must attribute to David Arberle who said that in my presence one day). Inversely, typically, folklorists have been "country kids".
- To start with, the anthropologist has not understood the language of the group he studies. In contrast, the folklorist has been studying populations whose language was his own.
- As a consequence of this, the task of the anthropologist has been to translate and to interpret his findings regarding other cultures, and the task of the folklorist has been to translate his own. The anthropologist has had the need to construct theories to explain, even to himself, an alien culture which he did not understand.
- Folklorists have not had much need for theory construction because they have understood the object of their study intuitively, in the fashion that a member of a culture understands his own culture.
- The scarcity of materials in anthropology is due to the problems of communication.
- The over-abundance of facts, the state of being snowed under, is due to the ease of communication in folklore.

The growth of interest in folklore is clearly connected with a search for a collective identity which is typical of nationalism.⁴

At the same time, where there has been a great interest in oral tradition, the tradition of written literature has often been very short. When *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, was published in 1835 the general public expressed its joy saying: "We too can have a history, we too can have a literature." ⁵ This is a statement that I have heard also regarding African literature, Quebec literature, and so forth. It seems to be an automatic response to the canonization of oral tradition in certain cultural circumstances. When in the last century writers like Taché established "Les Soirées Canadiennes," the Canadian Nights, they were confronting exactly this task of creating a national literature.⁶

It is interesting that literary tradition in the French language is very old but that Quebec already in the last century felt alienated enough from France to deny French literature as their high literature, and since they did not have high literature of their own, they turned to oral traditions to have their literature. And in the absence of high national culture, people turned to popular art and popular material culture to establish what they call their patrimony. A French visitor, the director of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, the museum of folk art and tradition in Paris, Jean Cuisenier, made the remark in Quebec that the word "patrimoine" had a radically different meaning in France. In France, the word means the paintings, the buildings, the sculpture, the different styles and periods of high material culture and art history, whereas in Quebec it automatically represents furniture, peasant houses, and so on. The culture "du petit peuple," of the humble who then inherit the earth.

For the third world, this concept of

patrimony is clear. Melville Herskovits writes "the development of nationalistic movements, whose leaders are greatly interested in finding out their historic past . . . has done much to encourage the study of oral tradition."⁷

Lévi-Strauss has called anthropology the daughter of colonialism. There is now a sizeable literature on the topic.⁸ He writes:

Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historic process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is the daughter to this era of violence.

Diane Lewis has written: "Anthropology emerged out of European colonial expansion." ⁹ As opposed to this, folklore is a child of nationalism and national romanticism. Folklore is born out of defense and a search for national identity, in order to resist external influences, which, in the cases we are talking about, were often very political. Thus, it is not an accident that, in today's Quebec, folkloric books, folkloric objects and folkloric records are in high demand.

I can also say that colonized countries have folklore archives and that colonizing countries have anthropological museums. England has had the British Museum a long time, but no folklore archives. Ireland has 3 million pages of oral literature in the Irish folklore archives but no international museum. The United States has the Smithsonian Institution, the Museum of Natural History in New

York, all full of beautiful objects from so-called primitive cultures, that is, American and Canadian Indian, but for a long while there was no national folklore archive in the United States. We all remember January 2, 1976, when President Ford signed the American Folklife Bill to establish a national fund for folklore.

Anglophone Canada has an anthropological museum, the National Museum of Man, but folklore archives are only budding. Opposed to that is Quebec, that has folklore archives which are established and well known, but does not have an anthropological museum. For the Museum of Quebec is a "National" museum.

The Estonian folklore archives are in Tartu, built by Operatus Eesti Selts, the learned society of Estonia, founded in 1836. The Finnish folklore archives, always competing in size and fame with the Irish archives (but easily winning), are supported by the Finnish Literary Society which was founded in 1931 for the purpose of collecting and publishing folklore. Neither Estonia nor Finland has an international anthropological museum.

One can also remark that when an imperialist power is about to lose its influence, interest in the country's own culture grows. Thus, folklore seems to become more important with the waning of the empire. In the United States, the blossoming of folklore activities coincides somewhat with the end of American "great missions" such as the Vietnam war. France is a stage for a great resurgence in folklore at the moment, and this can be tied with the Algerian war, with the ceding of Indochina, and so on. In multi-ethnic societies, which are always societies in which one ethnic dominates and several others are dominated, the original growth of folklore

studies has been due to two phenomena: the loss of security of the majority, for example, by the ending of colonial activities, but also the will for self-determinism of minority elements who clamour to prove their own identity. For the Soviet Union, Robert Austerlitz has recently observed that the identity of tiny minorities, for example, those that live in Siberia, is encouraged and supported by the study of folklore and linguistics, whereas the identity of important minorities, for example, Ukrainians, is discouraged for evident reasons.¹⁰ A similar situation has existed in Canada. For example, the multiculturalism policy, which is based on the findings of the Biculturalism and Bilingualism Commission, has historically been more interested in numerically large groups but has not supported francophone studies, nor studies of Germans or Ukrainians. That these groups have been studying themselves is a different thing. A disillusioned scholar has already said that if two immigrants arrive from Outer Mongolia, there will be a collector waiting at the airport for them, whereas the more important the group is, the less it is studied. This has some parallels with the story of the prodigal son.

It is easy to document the case of institutions, and it is because of this that I have used the argument about the absence and presence of folklore archives in a nation is proof of aggressive colonial history. Otherwise, we could assume that big nations do not have folklore archives. This is not true. You can have a small colonizing power, for example, Holland. You do not find folklore archives even though you find a small population, and you find a history of intensive colonization. The same is true in Belgium. I dare say that the difference between Norway and Denmark lies here too. Denmark

colonized Norway and Iceland, and I do believe that folklore studies have been more intensive, relatively, in the two latter. We must also note in passing the presence of an anthropological museum in Denmark.

I will now invert these propositions. Now to say that wherever you find important folklore archives which are well organized, which are well developed, this stands witness to a history of having been colonized. Some examples follow:

- Finland, with 800 years of foreign domination, 700 years under Sweden and 110 years under Russia, now sixty-five years of independence.
- Estonia has approximately the same history of domination and established archives with independence declared in 1920.
- Norway was colonized by Denmark and Sweden and has important archives.
- Ireland was colonized in 1078 by England. The Irish Folklore Commission was established in 1936. Independence was achieved in 1922.
- And now, am I toying with a condition which can be turned into mathematics, saying: What can we expect in Quebec if folklore archives were established in 1944?

In all these cases there is a history on conscious language politics. Quebecers often say that they have been asked to "speak white" during their history of colonization. Finland had Swedish as its official language for centuries. So much that developing independence as a country under the Tzarist regime was symbolized by Swedish as the official language and as a measure of autonomy. In 1850, twenty years after the formation of the Finnish Literary Society, an imperial decree forbade the publication of things other than religious tracts in the

language of the majority. A collective battle followed for the development and acceptance of a standard Finnish language. This lasted until the declaration of independence, in 1917, and goes on today. This work consisted of a compilation of dictionaries and grammars, of systematic collecting and publishing of oral literature, of the foundation of a school system and of a reaction to panslavism, leading to the great general strike of 1905. At the same time people translated their Swedish names into Finnish, or in many cases retranslated ancient Swedish translations of their original Finnish names.

The language politics of Norway are relatively well known. As in Finland, it was a conscious effort to create a national language by a reconciliation of different dialects. In Ireland, language is protected as a tool of identity.

Thus folklore has always served linguistic goals. The collecting and study of folklore have been central in the definition and development and maintenance of a language. One must also remark that folklore is more than a tool for language; it also has an intrinsic value as a cultural product, and as a witness of cultural identity of a group, in itself it has an inestimable value in the richness of human cultures.

Folklore studies follow the same model. Here we can formulate the following proposition: where you find folklore archives, you find first-hand studies. I will note some countries in which this is especially true: Norway, with Asbjornsen, Moe, Reidar Christiansen; Finland, with Julius Krohn, Kaarle Krohn, Antti Aarne, Uno Holmberg-Harva, Martti Haavio, Matti Kuusi, et. al.; Ireland, with Sullivan and Duilearga. This hypothesis can be tested in various conditions.

The compliment of this proposition seems

to hold true also. Where one does not have folklore archives, most important studies are second-hand studies. Do not forget that I am talking about the classical period. Take the United States for example. The best known old folklorists were Stith Thompson and Archer Taylor, and both of them were prolific producers, but wrote little first-hand study. Their works are well known: for Thompson, the **Type-Index**, the **Motif-Index**, **The Folktale**, and finally "The Star Husband," which is most important in many ways of Thompson's studies because it is a direct application of a variant of the Finnish school under American conditions. If I understand correctly, it is based on a student's work, and of course the comparative notes are based on already published work. The same is true for **The Tales of the North American Indians**. (Taylor: **The Proverb; English Riddles...**)

If we take this conglomeration of phenomena into account we can begin to understand the peculiarities of British folklore studies. It is remarkable that at the time when for a hundred years there were famous anthropologists in England, even in anthropology, folklore was neglected. Ruth Finnegan has said that "the neglect of oral literature in Great Britain in the last generation has been evident as surprising... The absence of interest in oral tradition among British Social Anthropologists is unquestionable." Richard M. Dorson, who believed so in the Great Team of British folklorists, had to admit that folklore in England has been a problem child. His Great Team has always seemed to me somewhat artificially created. But when the empire disappeared, folklore could be born in England. We may mention just a few names: Iona and Peter Opie in the fifties, Katharine Briggs in the sixties, and Venetia Newell in the seventies.

Katharine Briggs says, "when, finally, people started to value the national heritage of traditional literature in England, a great deal had already disappeared." She points out the absence of folklore archives in England and emphasizes that in Ireland, in Scotland and in Wales "excellent national schools have been established." ¹¹

Anthropology and Theory, Folklore and Practice

It is possible to distinguish the two disciplines by the emphasis put by folklorists on the diachronic dimension and by the anthropologists on the synchronic. The first scientific method in folklore was that of the historic-geographic school, also called the Finnish school, established in 1872 by Julius and Kaarle Krohn, Antti Aarne, and their students and co-workers. The application during decades, by Stith Thompson and his students, by Luc Lacourcière in Quebec, and by Marie-Louise Ténèze in Paris, is not really an application of the method so much as it is an application of some of the products of that method, most notably the **Type-Index**. But in all these cases, and as we have seen, for the same reasons, large documentation was compiled in national archives, with the exception of the United States, except for the evolution of the Library of Congress and a very important phenomenon, namely the early issues of the **Journal of American Folklore**, which to me acts as a national folklore archives of the United States.

The Finnish school, the first school, is not the least, despite the great negligence with which consequent generations treated the school in Finland. But the school did produce scientific collections, did organize archives and indices. Lauri Honko has maintained that the independence of Finland rests

for a large part directly on the publication of a national epic, the **Kalevala**. In Finland as well as in Quebec, folklore publications enjoy a large popular audience. One could always say that if your colleagues do not always read you, the people will.

When I speak of the historicity of folklore facts I will not speak of how they reflect yesterday's culture. The comparison of the variants of a tale, for example, can retrace cultural groups, cultural channels, cultural movements, cultural geography, and it can show by what roads foreign influences come. With the exact comparison of the variations it is possible to determine cultural contact between different populations. This is, of course, basically a philological method and corresponds, for example, to the study of linguistic loans. Dialectology, folkloristics, and the study of material culture produce, on the whole, parallel results. The distribution of dialects and dialect areas correspond to material culture areas such as types of sickle, or types of sleighs, or clothing, or houses, even to the distribution of tale types or singing styles. With these diverse means of distribution studies of culture traits, it is then basically possible to trace prehistoric movements of different "tribes". (cf. Gudmund Hatt: the bear cult and the distribution of the snowshoe! And both correspond to six great myth themes!)

There has been a close cooperation between anthropology and folklore in the United States. The best known case of that is really the establishment of **American Anthropologist** and the **Journal of American Folklore**. Boaz, and for Canada such persons as Marius Barbeau, were simultaneously both anthropologists and folklorists. And of course the

diffusionist school corresponded with the historic-geographic school. It is worthwhile to take a look at Boaz's **Tsimshian Mythology**. It contains comparative tables of the North Pacific coast. The goal of the fieldwork was the collection of oral traditions. Very often, Boaz's students did this in a very forceful way. This was a folkloristic anthropology. And here folklorists, let us say Thompson, responded by works such as **The Tales of the North American Indian**, which is known to make comparisons within the vast funds of narratives that were collected and published between 1880 and 1920, the "golden age of American Anthropology". We can also make reference to the works of Robert Lowie, Gladys Reichard, Ruth Benedict, and others.

Now to turn to the interest for theory in anthropology. To joke about it, it is an up-and-down movement: at times it is fashionable to be a symbolist, at times it is totally taboo. When Max Müller had faded symbolism was a forbidden area for people like Malinowski, and of course, the generation just before us. The senior generation now, from Lévi-Strauss to Mary Douglas, from Victor Turner to Clifford Geertz, is again turning to symbolic interpretations--not to mention such fringe folklorists as Bettelheim.

A very common accusation and self-accusation among folklorists and toward folklorists is the lack of theory and a common accusation towards anthropology is that there is too much theory. Why does folklore lack theory?

Folklorists have been members of a group, the object group, the group they study. They have gone to the field speaking the language, if not the dialect, then at least a language that was intelligible to the informants. If one of the functions of theory, and I think it should be, is to render the

objects of study intelligible, there has simply been less need for theory in folklore than in anthropology because understanding has been implicit, intuitive, and direct. We can now return to Diana Lewis once more. She says "The anthropologist who is forced to study his own culture would find more difficulty to reify and to dehumanize his own group."¹²

Due to the initial facility for mastery of the language of their informants, folklorists have clearly collected more materials than have anthropologists. The very wealth of these materials has influenced the order of priorities. Classifications started the minute there was too much material to master without organizing. This is why folklore has spent decades in practically cataloging and organizing archives. This has been the life work of many well known folklorists.

A second thing that this has led to is a compilation of collections. Maybe the inverse of it can be found within the following question. How many museum anthropologists have been in the forefront of creating theory? If we excuse people like Edward Sapir, and perhaps Margaret Mead, but in both cases I have the feeling that the museum job was more a research job than a curator job.

In our time we have seen a resurgence of theories in folklore inspired by semiotics, socio-linguistics, anthropology, structuralism and other. Why? Because, so to speak, the spadework has been done. Folkloristics, looking at the traditional life of its own group, linguistically defined, normally has also sought to establish a stable, traditional culture. The situation of co-existence and interaction of different groups have not been admitted as objective study and I am not now talking about comparative studies, after the

collection has been brought home and made available. I am talking about a very long standing ideal of pure cultures, very often purified cultures, purified in the process of fieldwork, cultures seen in a state of stability, equilibrium and describability.

We have had a tendency to admit only one system. Would it be **ethnic studies**, would it be "ethnology" that could describe a situation like that of Canada where many groups of different sizes exist simultaneously, where cultures of different origins survive and develop despite the uniformity of the dominant society, be this uniformly realistic or not? If the ethnologist who calls himself folklorist and the one who calls himself anthropologist look towards facts at the center or at the core of traditional culture, ethnologists should look at frontiers. Thirty percent of Canadians are supposedly bilingual. That means that at the same time they are bicultural and sometimes more than bicultural. They are to a degree neither insiders nor outsiders in the conflict of cultures, they are mediators. The "hyphenated Canadians" have always had the task of linguistic and cultural translation. Even in a crowd a poor man is marginal, says a Finnish proverb. A member of a minority culture has difficulties: marginality, prejudice, intolerance, stereotypes, and let's admit it, ignorance. This is always the consequence, the result of cultural conflict, and, it influences the rights, the economic situation, the educational opportunities, and the comfort of minorities. In French the word **étranger**, stranger, and in English too, has the connotation of meaning strange. What a strange thing ...

NOTES

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1. See, for example, Richard M. Dorson, **American Folklore**, Chicago, 1959: 1.
2. "There has been almost continuous research work, enjoined in part by state authorities, in part through private initiative, ever since King Gustavus Adolphus ordained in 1630 that antiquities, customs and manners should be collected all over Sweden", **Journal of the Folklore Institute I: 1/2 (1964): 20.**
3. See Jouko Hautala, **Finnish Folklore Research**, Helsinki, 1968: 11-38; Linda Dégh, "Folklore and Related Disciplines in Eastern Europe", **Journal of the Folklore Institute II (1965): 103-119.**
4. "... the study of ethnography in Greece began in the first years of liberation from the control of Turkey, around the year 1830... the Greeks were obliged to defend themselves against theories which denied their national individuality and jeopardized their independence." Démétrios Petropoulos, "The Study of Ethnography in Greece". **Midwest Folklore II: 1(1952): 15;** "In the minds of Norwegian officials... there was a feeling of patriotism mingled with their desire to investigate." Brita Gjerdalen Skre, "Folk Life Research in Norway", **Midwest Folklore II: 2(1952): 221;** "... the struggle for national independence of many Central and East European peoples living under Austrian, Russian, or Turkish rule were all closely connected with the discovery of folk poetry. As a reaction against foreign oppression, nationalists sought to restore the cultural heritage of their people as a claim of readiness for political independence." Dégh, op. cit." 104.

5. See Hautala op. cit., p. 25-26: "Finnish literature, which was at this time embryonic, had been given what the period held as most valuable in literature: an ancient epic, a national epic." He cites the president of the Society of Finnish Literature who said that the resultant force of the publication of the **Kalevala** was: "She (Finland) can say to herself: 'I, too, have a history!'"
6. See Luc Lacourcière, "The Present State of French-Canadian Folklore Studies", Richard M. Dorson, ed., **Folklore Research Around the World, Journal of American Folklore** 74, no.294 (1961): 373-382, esp.: 374-375.
7. Melville J. Herskovits, "The Study of African Oral Art", **Journal of American Folklore** 74(1961): 451-456.
8. Claude Lévi-Strauss, **Current Anthropology** 7(1966): 126.
9. Diane Lewis, "Anthropology and Colonialism", **Current Anthropology** 14,5(Dec.,1973): 581-602.
10. Robert Austerlitz, "Folklore, Nationality, and the Twentieth Century in Siberia and the Soviet Far East", **Journal of the Folklore Institute** XII, 213(1975): 203-210.
11. Katharine M. Briggs, "A Dictionary of British Folktales in the English Language", **Journal of the Folklore Institute** II: 3(1965): 272-275.
12. Lewis op.cit., p. 589.