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CHALLENGES IN FOLKLORISTICS: A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT

Abstract: Folklore represents a very rich and wide subject, which is constantly in the process of evolving. This subject, which is a study object in folkloristics, presents a wide spectrum of opportunities for research and treatment with a multidimensional approach, both from its study discipline and many human and social disciplines. This interdisciplinary intertwining, gave folkloristics a general setting of theories and methods for common studies, while remaining open to an interdisciplinary approach, with the main purpose of analysis and studying of phenomena and different cultural occurrences, not only within the same culture, but also in relation to the other ones.

In this paper, through the comparative methodology the methods used for research and study of folklore in the past will be analyzed, as well as those used in folkloristics nowadays. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the reason and the necessity of the study of folklore that is produced today, as well as the challenging situation in which folkloristics is found.

Keywords: folklore, folkloristic, disciplinary challenges, multidimensional approach, fieldwork.

Introduction

In order to examine the development of Albanian folkloristics it is necessary to impose that we focus on its origins, which were consolidated with the establishment of institutions focused on the study of folk culture, which included both material and spiritual heritage. This happened in the middle of the 20th century, the period when most of the institutions in the region were established. With the establishment of the Institute of Albanology in Prishtina, more precisely the Department of Folklore within this institution, the primary task was the collection of materials from the field, its systematization, archiving, and analytical interpretation of the researched material. The application of the *imprimis* empirical methodology, as a necessity for the study of folklore, resulted in the publication of 28 volumes of different oral literature materials classified into separate volumes according to the genres of those oral genres.

In addition to volumes of folklore material, studies on the genres of oral literature were also published, with a philological-ethnographic model of research, while in theory, they were largely based on philological theories as indispensable for the study of oral literature. Thus, in Albanian folkloristics, the object of the study was primarily oral literature defined within a concept of folklore, which was defined as folk culture, a pure genuine creation of artistic literature created by people. Every other form of this literature was considered a degradation of the

original folk literature, as a deformation that had partially eroded the authenticity of traditional culture.

Folklore is also defined as a creation of particular groups of people which communicated orally within the group in which they knew each other. This definition of folklore is built upon the interaction that occurs within these groups and these groups simultaneously create, convey, and compose the audience that accepts and approves a certain folk creation. Based on this fact, the preventive censorship of Jakobson and Bogatyrev, besides the oral interpretation and dissemination or conduction, also presents the characteristics of this concept of folk creations (Bošković-Stulli, 1971, 17-30). This concept on folklore was prevalent until the beginnings of the 21st century and according to the data, this concept was also acceptable for some other cultures in the region (Јафазановски, 2015, 12).

But, in addition to the analysis conducted on these studies, within the discipline of folklore, there were also contemporary research streams, more as an individual selection of theoretical concepts and methods for a different approach to folklore, which was expected due to participation in conferences, contacts between researchers, as well as study visits in the region (in Europe and beyond). With the continued effort to the advancement of folklore studies, a multidisciplinary approach was seen as something necessary, which could be achieved by expanding the concept of folklore studies.

If we get back to the history of folkloristics, we will find that folklore studies alongside with those of ethnology - as two disciplines that deal with the study of traditional culture in general - are relatively “new” compared to other studies of social and humanistic sciences. Cocchiara believes that the inception of these disciplines in Europe date from the mid-18th century onwards, although their study objects are defined clearly in the second half of the 19th century. During this period, radical political and social changes took place due to new movements in Europe, more specifically, when the bourgeoisie uprooted the feudal social order (Cocchiara, 1985).

The term folklore, used for the first time by the Englishman William Thoms and composed of words *folk* and *lore* (which means “folk knowledge”), created difficulties in defining these two composing words of the term. So, the American folklorist Dundes, by the word *folk* defined a group composed of two or more people who share at least one common factor (Dundes, 1965). Such groups are usually classified by occupation, age, region and regional or national belonging/affiliation. Russian folklorists, on the other hand, took as a basis the class character of folklore, opposing it to the official art of the high classes. Gusev (as cited by Lozica) believes that in socialist societies, folklore is not a creation of a certain class but a creation of people (Lozica, 1979, 36).

This definition in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe was preceded by the “German *Volkskunde* tradition or a paradigm”, which represents “the standard term for study tradition in German language and means ‘studies about folk/nation’”, which is usually translated as “folklore” in other European languages, including the Albanian language (Doja, 2016, 10). This term systematically refers to the rejection of lie and nostalgia of outdated picturesque traditions, as something that initially was applicable only to rural areas and to poor and illiterate peasants.

Depending on the approach of the study, in addition to the term *Volkskunde* in German, the term *Völkerkunde* is also used, for the differences of which terms the researcher A. Doja points out that: "...derived from a historicist and museum-oriented tradition in which *Völkerkunde* dealt with the culture history of external others and *Volkskunde* with the historical others of the national cultural tradition... If in the national context the historicist model for *Volkskunde* led to Herder's notion of *Volksgeist*, in the new colonial context the natural science model for *Völkerkunde* led to a continued revitalization of Herder's notion of *Naturvölker*, natural or primitive peoples with little or no culture and no history, who, thus, could reveal the true nature of humans" (Doja, 2014, 320-321).

The term folklore is also used with a double meaning. One concerns the object of the study, which is folk wisdom, thought and verbal artistic creation (Ben-Amos, 1971, 3-15), while the other concerns the naming of the scientific discipline that deals with this field. In order to avoid any ambivalent meaning, around the '60s of the 20th century, in the frame of American anthropology, a new term "folkloristics" was proposed for this discipline, which had the folklore as a study object (Dundes, 1965).

According to the American scholars Sims and Stephens, the concept of folklore contradicts the old *Volkskunde* tradition. They base the concept of folklore on the data, which means that although folklore is an unofficial knowledge created by the daily life experience, it has creative dimensions with expressive artistic values. "Folklore is not just another form of anthropology or literary study. The study of folklore touches every dimension of human experience and artistic expression. It has grown out of the study of literature, it has roots in anthropology and contains elements of psychology and sociology. In many ways, it is the study of culture, visual and performing arts, sculpture, architecture, music, theater, literature, linguistics, and history rolled into one" (Sims & Stephens, 2005, 3). In this sense, more than "one extraordinary and very important dimension of culture" or "a traditional, informal and non-institutional part of culture", the folklore itself seems to come closer to the anthropological notion of "culture" as a whole (Doja, 2016, 11).

Given that the issues dealt by folklore are related to the study of the human beings and their spiritual, social and material side, issues that brought them closer to the humanistic sciences, a number of scholars denied the existence of folkloristics and its autonomy. But, folklore as a discipline began to be widely used among scientists of different countries around the world, despite some critique that was made regarding to the term. To reach the point for the folklore to be accepted as a discipline, there were disputes among folklorists themselves, depending on the way they defined folklore. Some of the researchers based these doubts on the fact that they considered folkloristics as an auxiliary discipline, which borrowed research methods from ethnology, psychology, sociology, linguistics, etc.

But, if we approach it from a different perspective, this intersection of disciplines, as a general background of common theories and methods of study, we can say that it has influenced the interdisciplinary nature of folkloristics. This interaction is evident: folklore studies focus on deciphered texts of oral literature (literary science); told stories with folklore background that depends on the context

(such as rites) communicate with ethnology; folklore, as an inherited social behavior that is carried with or without consciousness from the past generations, means communication with sociology; when folklore appears to us as a remembrance of generations, carried from ancestors and it is conveyed to descendants then it relates to history; when folklore touches every dimension of the human experience, then it collides with anthropology.

Therefore, in practice, these mutual connections and combinations of research methods within interdisciplinary contacts had influenced in developing folkloristics. We ought to bear in mind that folkloristics' research object is part of the general culture which makes possible the intertwining of all these sciences in its research. This is why Sims and Stephens consider that: "The study of folklore encompasses so many types of expression that it's almost impossible not to find something to enjoy within the field. Whether you are interested in literature, psychology, sociology, history, biology or technology; whether you take a practical hands-on approach to your studies or prefer a more theoretical, philosophical approach, there are more aspects of folklore that touch on all those things. It's a matter of adjusting the lens... – the unique way of understanding people, art, expression and communication that folklorists bring to their investigations" (Sims & Stephens, 2005, 29).

So, the subject of study in folklore presents a wide range of research possibilities. Thus the need of plurality of methods. Furthermore, folklore research also offers to other disciplines because it is open to interdisciplinary approach, with the sole purpose of analyzing and examining different cultural phenomena and occurrences, not only within the same culture, but also in relation to other cultures.

The challenges of folklore in contemporary times

The Albanian society in modern times is characterized by educational and cultural developments, migrations, fading of contacts between generations, as well as the rapid development of the technology of communication. These factors have contributed to the spiritual culture and folk creativity which made these parts to gradually move outside of its traditional circulation spaces, bringing to the surface a transformed folklore, which is losing the support of the social strata that conveys it. This means that the interactive process between the performer and the receiver has become more complicated. Therefore, this transformation of oral folk literatures' essential features, such as: interpretation, preventive censorship, oral dissemination or conduction, dictate that the concept of folklore should expand in contemporary studies.

The new relation between folklore and its audience, which is being established through advanced technology, undoubtedly has brought up a significant question: the essential characteristics of folklore, especially in the terms of oral communication. What does this mean? This means that the ratio of exposure of the past times in a uniform communication horizon, according to Bausinger, led folklorists to return to research short-term processes and smaller groups of people (Bausinger, 1982, 13).

This new form of communication is becoming a carrier of the traditional culture in general, but also of the spiritual one in particular, part of which is also folklore creativity that preliminarily is reconstructed by changing traditional practice of the performance which means that it is starting to get adapted to an audience that wants to follow it. Virtual space creates a new form of consumption of traditional creations, as well as of the new ones of contemporary folklore. Generally speaking, a characteristic of this popular culture is that the recipient, and in this case the Internet user, selects the topic of interest.

The virtual space (The Internet) being the most indispensable form of communication nowadays, expands the concept of folklore and it offers a 'netlore', which means that newer forms of folklore are dispersed throughout the Web. This means that contemporary studies of folklore, social and humanistic sciences are trying to overcome the gap of the differences between researching what was once 'old' and what is now 'new', in regards to the research object. This notion includes: gossip, jokes, the so-called urban legends, chain letters, and so on. The mentioned gap is further deepened at the intersection of the notions of "netlore" and "newslore". Frank Russell, a professor of the subject of communication, in his study "Newslore, Contemporary Folklore on the Internet" by the notion of *newslore* summarizes this term by forms such as: jokes, urban legends, various editable digital photographs, simulated news, press releases, in-office memos, parody songs, poems, political and commercial announcements, posters and advertisements, even cartoons and short action movies. Frank supports Dundes' conclusions that if the old rural folklore reflects American rural values and mentality, then it is just as likely that the mainstream urban folklore will reflect upon important themes for contemporary American urban life. Therefore, according to Dundes, by dismissing longevity and orality as parameters of tradition, folklore remains as an artistic expression that displays a group's values, no matter how they circulate and for how long they circulate (Frank, 2011, 8).

For a conclusion, I would add, that the traditional spiritual culture prevalent in the virtual world today, does not represent the wholeness of the old traditional culture, but it represents an actual traditional culture, where due to various factors, something is always lost or transformed. This means that the old tradition is not lost, but it means that we accept new forms and occurrences that emerge at certain times. These, by themselves, may become part of one's "cultural tradition" in the future and they, simultaneously, will create a path for interdisciplinary research of this culture including folklore as a part of it.

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ПРЕДИЗВИЦИТЕ НА ФОЛКЛОРИСТИКАТА: НОВ ПОИМ НА ПРЕДМЕТОТ НА ИСТРАЖУВАЊЕ

Резиме

Фолклорот претставува многу богат и обемен продуктивен предмет, кој е непрестано во процес на создавање и затоа е неопходно да се третира преку мултидимензионален пристап, како од својата студиска дисциплина, така и од многу други хуманистички науки. Комбинацијата на разни дисциплини, со истражувачки пристап кон интердисциплинарната природа на фолклорот, истовремено обезбедува и употреба на вообичаени теории и методи на овој вид истражување. Оваа интеракција е докажана во фолклористичките студии, а имено: за дешифрираните текстови на усната народна книжевност, кои се ориентираат кон науката за книжевноста; кога се раскажуваат разни фолклорни творби во зависност од контекстот што ги иницира (обредот) и во ваквите случаи, фолклористиката комуницира со етнологијата; кога фолклорот како наследно социјално однесување се пренесува несвесно од минатите генерации, па затоа комуницира со социологијата; кога фолклорот се појавува како сеќавање на разни генерации, пренесено од предците до потомците, тогаш се доближува до историјата; кога фолклорот ја допира секоја димензија на човечкото искуство, тогаш се спојува со антропологијата.

Денес ни е прикажан еден трансформиран фолклор, кој ја губи поддршката на слоевите што го проследуваа од една генерација до друга и каде што интерактивниот процес меѓу изведувачот и примачот станува посложен. Новиот однос на фолклорот со аудиториумот, што се создава преку секојдневната напредна технологија, како и непрекинатата употреба на виртуелниот простор за комуницирање, ја доведува во прашање усната комуникација.

Тргувајќи од употребата на виртуелниот простор, како најнеопходна форма на комуницирање, како за студиите од хуманистичките и од општествените науки (посебно и за современата фолклористика), се јавува потребата за премостување на јазот меѓу формалните поими и новите поими во фолклористиката. Затоа, за фолклористиката е потребно и опфаќањето и истражувањето на фолклорот што се произведува денес, како дел од актуелната традиционална и современа култура.