

### III. Forschungs- und Tagungsberichte

Merili Metsvahi, Tartu  
Christine Shojaei Kawan, Göttingen

#### VII Jornadas de Estudio de la Narrativa Folklórica ISFNR Interim Conference Narrativa folklórica y Sociedad/Folk Narrative and Society

*Santa Rosa, La Pampa, September 20–22, 2007*

Santa Rosa is a quiet little university town in the Argentinian Pampa where South American folklorists convene regularly. On invitation of the Departamento de Investigaciones Culturales (Santa Rosa) and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano (Buenos Aires), it provided the locale for the first conference of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) on American soil. The meeting was very efficiently organized by María Inés Poduje (Santa Rosa) and Ana María Dupey (Buenos Aires); other members of the academic committee included Martha Blache (Buenos Aires, a long-time former vice-president of the ISFNR), Ana Fernández Garay (Santa Rosa), María Inés Palleiro (Buenos Aires) and Diana Rolandi (Buenos Aires). About 120 participants attended the conference, in their majority Argentinians; approximately ten scholars came from other South American countries, over twenty from Europe and another ten from Asia, Africa and the United States. The papers were delivered in Spanish and English, a few also in Portuguese; the five plenary papers (by Ezekiel Alemi [Nairobi], Roberto Benjamin [Recife], Manuel Dannemann [Santiago de Chile], Diarmuid Ó Giolláin [Corcaigh], Marita Fornaro and Antonio Díaz [Montevideo]) were most aptly translated from or into English by María Graciela Eliggi. The warm welcome and the cordiality of the hosts as well as the overall amiability of the Argentinians created a relaxed and familiar atmosphere, a spirit of friendship prevailing during the conference days after which it was sad to part.

The following report centers on papers we heard (that is, about half of the approximately seventy presentations); as occurs in every multi-session conference, the choice must by necessity be incomplete.

Argentina is generally perceived as a country inhabited by people of European, mostly Spanish (indeed to a great extent Basque) and Italian ancestry. In recent years, however, indigenous groups have increasingly gained in visibility. Processes of recuperation and reaffirmation of ethnic identities were the subject of several papers. Others were dedicated to indigenous South American oral literature: An-

tonio Díaz-Fernández (Esquel Chubut, Patagonia) examined the usage of kinship terminology in ten fox tales of the Mapuche; Ana Fernández Garay compared a Wichí version of the theft of fire, registered in the original language, with corresponding myths from other Wichí groups as well as the Tehuelches. Wolfgang Karrer (Osnabrück) analyzed a central Selknám myth of origin, an etiology of the male initiation rite, connected with a tale about men's liberation from female tyranny. Drawing on Erving Goffman's concept of cognitive frames, he elucidated different states of participation in the rite as well as in the process of narration, with special respect to the belief systems of the observed and the observers, i. e. the scholars.

Papers on traditional folk narratives discussed topics such as the presence of women and female images in mythical, epic and folkloric Persian narratives as well as in classical Persian literature (Mehri Bagheri, Tabriz); the figure of the Latin American trickster Pedro de Urdemales, rooted in the Spanish literature of the *Siglo de Oro*, with special consideration of its usage for social criticism (Manuel Dannemann); or ethnic stereotypization, social and gender aspects as reflected in the character of the ugly black antagonist of the *Tale of the Three Oranges* (Christine Shojaei Kawan, Göttingen). In his plenary paper, Roberto Benjamin provided a survey on the study of folk narratives in Brazil, whereas in another, Ezekiel Alembi showed the role Abanyole children's oral poetry plays for the transmission of traditional knowledge and values and emphasized that studying folklore items outside their original context entails the assignation of other meanings to them than those intended by the community. Fionnuala Carson Williams (Belfast) examined tales used by the Irish Travellers to construct their own identity as well as those employed by the majority to stereotype the itinerants<sup>1</sup>. Based on her own fieldwork results and other Mexican material, Mercedes Zavala Gómez del Campo (San Luis Potosí, Mexico) studied processes of appropriation allowing distinct communities to consider narrative items they share as an authentic part of their own cultural heritage. Biplab Chakraborty (Kolkata) shed light on the structure and context of Indian folk narratives recreated in the literary style of 'Lokaabharan' as well as the application of 'Lokaabharan' to the description of socio-political events. Two papers dealt with problems arising from personal field experiences in the Estonian Setu region: Risto Järv (Tartu) considered issues such as stereotypes related to storytelling and the usage of the term 'fairy-tale' to denote different genres of folklore; Merili Metsvahi (Tartu) discussed the researcher's conceptualization of the narrator as well as cognitive processes developed by the informant.

Presentations concerned with modern forms and contexts of storytelling included a paper on the narrative construction of beliefs in channels of discourse such as oral recordings, e-mails and commercials (Flora Delfino Kraft, Patricio Parente and María Inés Palleiro, Buenos Aires) and a textual and contextual interpretation

<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable that the same tales are utilized by the Roma (Gypsies) or are told about them for the same purposes.

of a version of *Little Red Riding Hood* found on the Internet forum of a religious-nationalistic community in Israel (Rachel Ben-Cnaan and Ravit Raufman, Haifa). María Inés Palleiro dealt with the contextualization processes and poetics of discourse of two oral variants of *Strong John*, one classified as fictional and the other as real, and the recontextualization of this narrative pattern in an urban as well as a literary context. Martha Blache studied the stereotyped positive and negative opinions which the inhabitants of Itati, an Argentinian town bordering on Paraguay, hold about their neighbours.

Life histories and memories were another topic of the conference. Ulf Palménfelt (Visby) suggested that retold memories can be regarded as a subgenre of personal experience narratives. The narrators often comment their stories with the words "I remember it well" which allows them to stand on safe ground and to be subjective at the same time. Nina Vodopivec's (Ljubljana) fieldwork with Slovenian textile workers, part of which she had conducted while working in a spinning factory, revealed that they considered the Communist period less negatively than could have been expected. Yael Zilberman (Beer-Sheba) analysed the life history of a Moroccan woman who had come to Israel at the age of ten. Her life narrative was made up of several social images: resenting the stereotype of the suffering woman, she presented herself as member of an individualistic society who knows what she wants and is free to make her own choices.

Discourse analysis served as a methodological tool in a number of different contexts: Patricio Parente, for example, examined discursive strategies legitimizing UFO narratives collected in the provinces of San Juan and La Pampa. He distinguished these personal experience stories from other supernatural tales, linking them to the representation of social identities and the construction of knowledge. Mojca Ramšak (Ljubljana) drew on George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's cognitive semantics for an analysis of the metaphors which Slovenians employ as a means for coming to grips with breast cancer; war metaphors (e.g., 'to fight with the illness') turned out to be the most frequent ones. Ropo Sekoni (Lincoln University, Pennsylvania) compared the narrative frames used in presidential campaigns by the US press and by liberal local Nigerian newspapers. The main frame of the American news stories was the myth of freedom and competition, whereas the myth of cooperation and solidarity, i.e. a traditional rejection of oppositional politics, served as a narrative frame for the Nigerian stories.

Some speakers focussed on performances. Manuel Dannemann, in his plenary paper, drew attention to the complex processes of communicative reciprocity evolving between the narrator of fairy-tales and his listeners during the storytelling event. Likewise, Marisa Villagra (Amaicha del Valle, province of Tucumán) proposed a revision of the relationship between narrators and their audience, following the observation of strategies of self-protection and co-participation which made a participant become a performer and the others an active audience. Isidore Okpewho (Binghamton) described storytelling events in African cultures, especially from the Western coast area: commonly the narrator chooses somebody from the audience who has to respond to the narrator's questions and to support him with phrases such as "I hear you", "you are right", etc. The members of the

audience are free to contribute to the performance. For example, when a narrative element reminds somebody of a song, the person stands up and begins to sing it. According to Okpewho, narrating is a kind of collective fabulation, its meaning is not so much to provide new stories, but to perform old stories in new ways. Just as in Europe, professionalized artistic forms of storytelling are now gaining currency in Argentinian cities, especially in Buenos Aires. They are the subject of a collective project of Argentinian scholars of which Fernando Fischman and María Inés Palleiro (Buenos Aires) presented a conceptual synthesis.

Folk belief, too, undergoes various kinds of adaptations. Ülo Valk (Tartu) pointed out that applying elements of scientific discourse to vernacular beliefs has become a common contemporary practice. He also problematized concepts and categories (like myth or folklore) introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Stein Mathiesen (Alta, Norway) discussed the changing representations of Sami shamans (*noaidi*). Thanks to the adaptability of Sami magic, the *noaidi* still has a function in contemporary northern Fenno-Scandic society and is now understood as a kind of social therapist, helping people to manage their problems. Torunn Selberg (Bergen) treated the revitalization of the legend of Sunniva, an Irish saint who died as a martyr on the Norwegian island of Selja. Rediscovered at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, her cult was reintroduced in the 1990s through narratives, iconographic representations and a festival held on the island since 2004.

Several papers dealt with the history of folklore studies. Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (Columbus/Tartu) focussed on the notions of borrowing and lending, their explanations by leading representatives of the historic-geographic (or Finnish) method – whose influence on European folklore studies is still remarkable – and the intersections of resp. discrepancies between their interpretations. In one of the plenary papers, Diarmuid Ó Giolláin pointed to the differences between ‘first’ and ‘second modernity’. While the cultural policy during ‘first modernity’ aimed at the creation of nation states, contemporary society is confronted with two parallel discourses: the celebration of hybridity, and the discourse of authenticity underlying the efforts of international organizations like UNESCO which are developing a corpus of policies to protect folklore and traditional culture. In turn, the problems arising in connection with institutionalized, regularized, codified measures of preservation and the reactions they provoke, the changes they entail (in spite of aiming to achieve the contrary), were the subject of papers presented by Ana María Dupey and other Argentinian scholars.

Further prominent themes in Santa Rosa were traditional music, its popular uses and commercialization as well as carnival customs. These were the issues that aroused the most lively and spirited discussions; by way of example, let us just mention the papers presented by Ercilia Moreno Chá (Buenos Aires) on the *desafío*, an improvised poetic challenge between folksingers, by Ricardo Kalimán (Tucumán) on markers of distinction between popular and more refined Argentinian folklore, or Taro Nagano (Tokyo) on dancing adaptations of folktales, as well as the plenary presentation by Antonio Díaz and Marita Fornaro about one of the music bands (the so-called *murgas*) performing during carnival. We look forward

to find all such papers in print in the conference proceedings currently prepared by the organizers.

The lectures at the conference reflected, among other things, the wide range of sources available to folklorists: archives, printed publications, modern media as well as oral materials obtained during festivals, through interviews, etc. Working methods included, in addition to the classical methodology of folklore studies, approaches from the social sciences, cognitive linguistics, narratology, anthropology, comparative religion, and other neighbouring disciplines. The conference in Santa Rosa strengthened our conviction that in the world where we are living, considering folklore outside its context makes less sense than ever. If folklore scholars are open-minded, if they keep their ears on the pulse of time and still remain aware of historic developments and the legacies of the past, our field will be enormous.