



## **LANGUAGE AND THE ORIENTATION OF FOLKLORISTS: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS**

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### **Abstract**

This piece discusses the interplay of folklore, folkloristics, and nationalism, bringing to light some of the complications arising in this conjunction. Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe is discussed, then focus is placed on the use of language as a primary vehicle for all folk ways, moving from a theoretical dimension, to folklore in practice. Some examples from Ghana are cited, to complete this folkloristic cycle that moves folklore from theory to a performance. The artistic function of folklore is important, not as an end in itself but as a means to achieving a higher end, which is the transmission of historical and cultural information. Content analysis was carried out on some European and Ghanaian literatures. Ghanaian indigenous music comes in the form folk music that displays the collective efforts of the ethnic group, with anonymous creativity. Not only does the music entertain its patrons but it also contains admonitions to the listener/dancer. While dancing to the rhythm provided by the drummers, the lyrics sang by the African drummer continue to warn the dancer to be wary of pretentious allies. One cannot rule out the issue of subjectivity in many of the accounts, but with the right scientific tools, credible records can be found in other documented sources for serious academic work.

**Keywords:** Language, Orientation, Folkloristics, Theoretical, Ghana.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Scholars have always preferred to use a term in their languages to refer to folklore, whether as a body of data or a field of study. Ben-Amos (2000:3) says that the German word *Volkskunde*, Swedish, *folkminne*; and the Indian, *lok sahitya* all cannot be neatly translated as the English “folklore”, (then hyphenated, “Folk-Lore”) a term which was first coined by the Englishman, William Thoms (1803-1885), after the concept *Volkskunde* was used by the Grimm brothers, Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1785-1859).

Thoms (1846) defined folk-lore as ‘the lore of the people’, following his reading of Jacob Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie*, and came up with an English translation of *Volkskunde* Folklore in 1846.

Folklore has mostly been defined depending on the point of view of art as an *object*. Social anthropologists look at it from “verbal art” or “oral literature”. It however, is not just limited to the study of cultural and social phenomena and we should thus not just be looking out for *finished products*.



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In Alan Dundes' view folklore has come a long way, from being considered the collection of quaint antiquities and simplicity of the folk, to one of being a scientific discipline comprising a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, and a kind of art. A 'folk' were thought to be peasants, but now it is interpreted as 'a variety of diverse groups, both rural and urban.'

Anthropologists consider folklore as literature, while students of literature regard it as culture. The common conception among these groups is that folklore is an exotic area worthy of academic curiosity. The definition of *folk* as 'a group that speaks the same language' was a view shared by Giambattista Vico, Herder, and the Grimm brothers, Friedrich Schlegel and Wilhelm von Humboldt.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study largely draws from historical data from the field of folkloristics. It looks at the field of folklore from its early scholars, through the years, to contemporary oral practitioners, with a view to discussing the lore using theoretical lenses.

### **Europe and the Development of Folkloristics.**

Finland and Germany are two countries that have played highly significant roles in the history and development of folklore, and the establishment of folkloristic, the scientific study of folklore, as an academic discipline. Abrahams (1993) says folklore, the study of the ways of the folk, emerged in the sway of Romantic Nationalism, in the nineteenth century. A 'folk' is any group of people who share at least one common linking factor, be it nationality, ethnicity, religion, occupation, or kinship<sup>1</sup>. "Romanticism" was a reaction against the alien word, one different from the perceiver's, and the categories of thought promoted by the alien word. More particularly and more immediately, romanticism was a reaction against the last resurgences of cultural power in the alien word, Volosinov (1973: 83). Language thus played a key role in the theoretical orientation of folklorists. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), whose career was profoundly shaped under the influence of Lowth, saw a radical interrelationship of language, poetry, and history; and his conception of tradition was one that comprised a vernacular literature and national identity (Bauman and Briggs, 2003: 163).

Literary scholars began to rediscover, and recognize the virtuoso of literature from the Middle Ages. They also saw degeneration in literature from its exceptional level to its current forms, (Dick, 2005:58). Poetry had fallen from being the preserve of nobles and aristocrats, into the hands of the rabble. A century after this, 'folk' poetry was celebrated as the best form. Beginning from the end of the eighteenth century (in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), romantic nationalism in turned nations to cultural formations which sought to build separate independent national identities. Each nation wanted a symbolic estate (a flag,



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sacred texts), ideas about a national heritage (common history, folk culture, national heroes and villains), and notions of national character, values, and tastes (Lofgren, 1993: 217-8).

On the German epistemological front, Percy and Herder were two principal architects who influenced Gottfried August Berger (1747-1794) in his writings in this direction. Herder's orientation in the late 1760's had a very important influence on the early Romantic Movement, and proved very useful in the reorientation of the worldview of the cultural role of the people. The 'Folk' was not viewed as part of a compound, but as a separate term. It was regarded as a 'simplex'. The view of a *folk* being 'a group that speaks the same language', was a view shared by Giambattista Vico, Herder, and the Grimm brothers, Friedrich Schlegel and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Vico's 'The New Science' focuses on the social and cultural evolution of man, the essence of humanity, and anticipates a comparative science of ethnology/cultural history. These are the beginnings of folklore and cultural anthropology. According to Vico, history is a creation of man, that is, the collective spirit, in which the people assumed the role of a cultural force of the first order, and created their own, *individual national identities and histories*. The individual character of every society, culture, and epoch, historical anthropology, can be compared with others'.

Herder was born in the year of Vico's death, and views different cultures with a new degree of historical relativity that recognizes the achievements of the most remote ethnic groups, and not measuring them against European standards. This was revolutionary, and would set the tone for the recognition of the individuality of each people, a key concern to Herder's historical and anthropological views. The creative genius of every nation is expressed in language, folk literature, and myth. His other concerns were that, he believed in pluralism, and that, we have no common basis to measure all cultures, the existence of popular traditions and ancient customs, and that the original language was poetic. He also undertook the study of myth, and the preliterary authorship of the Homeric text seriously. To him Homer was 'the greatest folk poet', the ideal primitive man. Again, each human society relates in a certain way, to an ideal "humanity", or other human societies. Like the Grimm brothers he was an avid collector, of folk songs. The semantic field of 'folk' came to encompass 'nature' and 'nation', and *Volk* came to stand for people as a nation, L. *populus*, nation, people belonging to a historical subdivision of a nation, or to a tribal society, L. *gens*. G. *Stamm* and the people of the lower class, the uneducated, often regarded as the 'common people', the rabble, L. *vulgus*.

Herder's use of the concept of *Volk* to encompass a sense of *Nation* had tremendous influence on the Romantic Movement; it gave it a mythic conception of "soul" and "mystery" and thus idealized it. Following from Herder, Jacob Grimm extended the semantic analysis of *Volk*. His contribution is a huge addition to the Romantic folklore initiative. He dwelt on the senses of folk as 'nation', and folk as 'the common people'. Thus, the common people make the nation; the same notion is what Marxism will draw upon for its ideology.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century scholars turned to the culture of the common people to collect relics from the past. The people's cultural potential, as well as a philosophy



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of their history reflects in many of their works. Mythology, truth of poetry, and the anonymous national tradition vis-à-vis the individual's creations were recognized.

Following from earlier German scholars like Ludwig Tieck, Herder, Achim von Arnim, Clemens Brentano, and Joseph Gorres, the Grimm brothers collected fairy tales, local and historical legends which they called folk tales (*Sagen*), and mythology. The Grimm brothers immersed themselves in collection, and would become the architects of German folklore and popular literature. They also undertook a project on the historical dictionary, along the same lines as Stith Thompson's *motif index*.

In their commentaries, the Grimm brothers asserted that their *Marchen* were nationally significant because current stories bore similarities with other stories from early Germanic peoples, and, at the same time, bore resemblances to those of other Europeans. This was seen as an embodiment of the ethos of the peoples that indicates continuity and national distinctiveness.

Twentieth century Nazist ideology in its ethnocentric and supremacist view will counter this view, and assert that 'a Volk can live happily at the present and in the future only as long as it remains conscious of its past and its great ancestors'. They denied a polygenesis of folktales, or that they reflected primitive thoughts of lower class people of long ago. The German folktale had suffered a gradual decay due to an infusion of foreign, non-Aryan elements, (Kamenetsky, 1977: 171-2). This attitude stood in the way of expanding folkloristic studies beyond German borders, thus, blurring the scholarly perspective of folklore. Folklore has thus been used to define social, national and ideological boundaries. Hans Naumann first espoused the idea that folklore descends from the intelligentsia and trickles down (a degenerationist view) to the peasantry, in a *gesunkenes Kulturgut*. This position gives the backdrop upon which the Nazist supremacist doctrine of the Aryan *Herrvolk* (master race) is built. Soviet ideology will reverse this interpretation of "folk" from that of an intelligentsia to that of a proletariat.

In European philosophy, the formative concept of folk was seen as a cultural venture, before folklore became an academic discipline. The nineteenth century was a fertile period for the growing field of folklore studies. It was fuelled by Darwin's theories of evolution, which established European civilization at the height of cultural progression, and thus 'legitimizing' the ultimate superiority of modern European culture. The American, Franz Boas, who was educated in Germany, would challenge the assumptions of evolutionary thought (see Bronner 1984:60)<sup>2</sup>.

As stated earlier, international folkloristic begun in the nineteenth century in the context of Romantic nationalism, with the Germans, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Friedrich Karl von

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<sup>2</sup> Boas argues that universal ideas are not identical; they vary, and that, ethnological ideas cannot be compared. He called for historical studies of individual societies with a view to finding out the relations of societies. This will later have a tremendous impact on the discipline of anthropology, in America.



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Savigny (1779-1861), Herder, among others playing key roles. The Grimms brothers were as interested in language as they were in folklore. Wilhelm Mannhardt is one of the greatest mythologists of the nineteenth century, and he used questionnaires to collect folklore, in a bid to compare, and explain the living superstitions of the peasantry. This class of mythologists wanted a scientific approach to folkloristics, where empirical data was sought to explain folk life in Europe. They felt (in the degenerationist tradition), that the customs of the ancestors should be collected before they disappeared completely.

Reinhardt Kohler defined folklore in the scientific world to encompass all folk traditions – legends, folktales, songs and rhymes, proverbs, riddles, and superstitions. He had the technique of citing parallels, and cited many of the Grimm brothers' tales. His interest in superstitions led him to collect parallels in statements (across Europe), for example, 'an angel is said to have flown into the room', when there is a moment of silence following a lull in conversation in a room.

Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900) claimed myths were as a result of a disease of language, and primitive man used them to explain the rising and falling of the sun (solar mythology). This was discredited in the twentieth century. The Germans believed language is a tool through which we sift and synthesize our experiences.

Yeats (1999)<sup>3</sup>, who was more interested in an authentic representation of data, criticized the Grimm brothers' for reworking the tales they collected. He maintained that informants should be represented as faithfully as possible; their information should not be coloured by the investigator's opinions. Yeats loved Irish folklore, which influenced his poetry, but he is criticized as not having used his writings to further Irish nationalism.

Early German folklorists, as we see, have contributed a lot to the development of international folkloristic, both in terms of material and methodology, even if the distortionist Nazi used it for their selfish ideological interests.

Finland has had the most nationally and internationally acclaimed academic folklorists. Elias Lönnrot (1802- 1884) started collecting folksongs, what will develop into a symbol of Finnish nationalist pride, *Kalevala*, the national epic. *Kalevala* came to stand for Finland (i.e. its poetic name, 'the land of heroes').

These anonymous orally transmitted poems tell of the adventures of three legendary Finnish heroes, Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen, and Lemminkäinen, and were not published prior to the nineteenth century. The Swedish-Finnish writer Zakarias Topelius compiled and edited a number of fragments in 1822. About 12,000 lines were collected and edited by Elias Lönnrot, and published in 1835, and an edition containing nearly 23,000 lines was published in 1849. The *Kalevala* were then translated into English, German, French, Swedish, and other languages.

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<sup>3</sup> In Dundes 1999: 47-53.



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Others in the Finnish school are Julius Leopold Krohn (1835-1888) and his son, Kaarl Krohn (1863-1933). Their methodology focused on the origins of the epics, whether they diffused from east to west or vice versa. This was christened the Historic-Geographic method. The Krohns and other proponents of this approach tried to find genetic relations between folktales, with the various versions seen as cognates of a parent archetype. To them, it was possible for tales to have polygenesis or monogenesis, especially when the focus was on the investigation of a single, simple motif. If two or more motifs clustered in sequence they suggested a monogenesis and diffusion, not polygenesis. In its comparative tradition, the Finnish folklorists studied forms throughout their area of distribution, and during the period the scholar had knowledge of these forms. They sought knowledge about changes in variants over space and time. Antti Aarne (1867-1925) will follow the Krohns lead and develop the first system of classifying tales.

Vladimir Propp criticizes this classificatory system as having ignored the functions of the motifs by which they are classified. Stories that repeat motifs will not be classified together, while stories that diverge widely from each other may be classified together because the classification must select some features as salient.

The data base upon which the classification is done is argued to be inadequate, and thus cannot be said to be representative enough. There are no logistics to engage in any extensive comparative studies (Krohn, 1999: 40-41).

This method of folkloristic inquiry will attract the interest of American folklorists Stith Thompson, who translates and expands Aarne's work into what is now called the Aarne-Thompson (AT) system of classification. Hans-Jorg-Uther and Hasan El-Shamy<sup>4</sup> also followed this tradition . The latter has worked extensively on tales from the Arab world.

Coming into the twentieth century, folklore studies, which has now assumed international character and gained a place as a major academic discipline, is now viewed from various perspectives – structuralist, functionalist, performance, semiotic, etc. Axel Olrik (1864-1917), at the turn of the century, observed that folkloristic has now become an international discipline, and there is the need to not only study particular narrative forms, but to also compare these forms with others and identify the epic laws that regulate them. Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) saw folklore as a 'living' rather than a 'dead' survival from the past. He saw the discipline as a scientific one, with his adopted homeland, France, as a laboratory. Gennep asserted that virtually all rituals (and rites of passage) share the tripartite sequential structure of separation (preliminal rites), transition (liminal rites), and incorporation (postliminal rites). This anticipates structuralism by several decades. Two primary divisions exist in society: the sexual separation between men and women, the magico-religious separation of the sacred and the profane.

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<sup>4</sup> Stith Thompson (1953, 1955, and 1987 translation and expansion of Antti Aarne) employs this Historic geographic method. Also see El-Shamy (1995, and 2006)



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James G. Frazer (1854-1941) was an arm-chair ethnographer who believed all humans had passed through the same periods of savagery to civilization, and he relied on a comparative methodology. Peasants still lived in a state of barbarism, according to him. Propp (1895-1970) adheres to the outmoded nineteenth century three-stage unilinear evolutionary theory of savagery, barbarism, and civilization. His structural analysis, which is synchronic in approach, has been useful to both folkloristic and linguistic theory. He adhered to the myth-ritual theory which saw all contemporary folklore as having derived from primitive ritual. Levi Straus reviewed Propp's morphology negatively, and in his response, Propp argues that he adopted the term 'functions' to capture the '...recurrence of functions [and] [sic] that all wonder tales consisted of identical functions and had identical structure.

Carl Wilhelm von Sydow (1878-1952) of Sweden initially started using the Finnish method, which he later criticized and abandoned. He first proposed the *oicotype/ oikotype*, the local or regional type of a folktale, and by extension, any item of folklore. He was interested in how folktales were transmitted, and asserted that tradition-bearers carried tales with them to new locales. He challenged the view of folklore as the common property of the common people, in 1932. Each society has its tradition bearers.

Jungian analytical psychology (which believes in the ultimate unknowable pan-human archetype that emerge from the collective unconscious to become manifest in myths and fairytales) is a foil to Freudian psychoanalytical psychology.

Folklorists in the *folklore as tradition* school (for example, Archer Taylor, Axel Olrik) see folklore as *tradition*, that is, material handed down vertically from an older to a newer generation. Older folklorists have been characterized as "spiritual archaeologists" who try to reconstruct the tradition in its Ur form, and try to place it in time and space. The danger of regarding tradition as historically concluded is that it blocks the view of tradition as an emergent process. It is not a "lively fossil which refuses to die", as observed by Charles Francis Potter. . Modern folklore encompasses a multitude of forms, from oral, through written, to electronic modes.

Alan Dundes says that the term 'folk' can refer to any group of people, whatsoever, who share at least one common factor and have some traditions it calls its own. A feeling of group identity is a key factor. In all societies, a part of the folklore is esoteric, and known only to specialists like witch doctors, fiddlers, or weather prophets.

Tradition, as a process, upholds and remodels ideas, verbal forms, attitudes, and norms. The period of national romanticism was suspicious of this process because the feeling was that it could endanger tradition. The feeling then was that the olden days were better, and that the good bearers of tradition had died. Contrary to this belief, however, the process recreates tradition every time, and thus engenders it. This then leads to the view of folklore as an integral part of culture. It can be adapted to newer environments within which it finds itself. Folklore is thus transcultural (super organic), and even when items of folklore travel into newer cultures, we can still identify them as variants of the same type of phenomenon. The



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Functional approach to folkloristic was championed by the Anglo-Polish, Bronislaw Malinowski. It is folklore studied through the study of culture; the whys, and the how of cultural expressions. Folklore communicates culture. Folklore should not just be seen as collectible material. Ben-Amos (2000) argues that folklore, in its cultural context is a process. The Product cannot be separated from the process. They are in a continuum. It is an artistic and creative communicative process.

As a communicative situation, it must necessarily be a two way process, between two people, a producer and a receiver, through a common language/ medium, and some common culture.

Folkloristic communication is also a social event, which binds the participants in socially defined ways. *Folklorism* “is an interest and idolizing of culture forms and cultural traits which belong to the past, especially to the older rural culture”,(p.50). It has its roots in the patriotic movements of the late nineteenth century.

The folkloristic material dies each time it is dated and the genre changes from time to time, but folklore, as a phenomenon, does not die. The study of communications of tradition in small groups is important as a means to a better grasp of traditions. We also need to study the link between folklore and folklorism in order to understand present day events.

A holistic cultural anthropological research is advocated, instead of aesthetic textual representations of research findings. Hymes (2000: 59) cites Dan Ben-Amos as saying that Folklore is concerned, not just with materials, but with the communicative process that goes on between a performer, aesthetically marked material, and an audience,. This places a premium on folklore as a communicative process rather than a mere text, material, or product.

Folkloristics, the study of folklore, has moved away from being text centered, and has progressed from being viewed from a Darwinian perspective, where folklore materials survive in their primate forms, to Marxian - Freudian lines that highlight the class struggle and suppressed libido, to a structuralist, a functionalist school, and a post structuralist, to a semiotic, and communicative approaches to folklore. The comparative folklorists used a historic geographic method to reconstruct the complex folktale, whose variants they think came about as a result of human activity. The original tale (the *Ur-* type), they say, originated from one place and diffused to other places, and molded into sub-types, or *oikotypes*. The paradox is that folklore studies seem to be in a constant flux. Dorson (1963) observes

“ one paradox of folklore studies is seen in their shuttling back and forth between opposite poles of emphasis [and that], the materials of folklore lend themselves equally to comparative, international, or cross-cultural theorizing and to inward, national self-appraisal” p. 96.





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Folk narrators or singers, for example, will select material for their art from a general repertory, the collective pool known to their group. Though I will not dismiss Milman Parry and Albert Lord's hypothesis of on-the-spur-of-the-moment creativity in oral poetry, as exemplified by the Serbo-Croat bards of Yugoslavia, I do believe memorization has an important part to play in their creativity. It acts in concert with the stock formulas these epic singers use.

Placing oral transmission within a psychological perspective, J. C. Jung breaks away from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, which overemphasizes the effect of sex on the human subconscious, and explains that humans have primordial images or "archetypes" in their "collective unconscious" from which they draw to create and re-create newer forms. Abrahams (2000: 23) asserts that folklore "... aids in the management of tensions which arise in the course of transactions between men, and reinforces the sentiments upon which social continuity depends." Thus, expressive folklore provides cultural guidelines for behaviour that helps the social group to handle the unexpected, and also be able to notice an item of folklore when it is performed.

According to Tarkka (170-171), intertextuality is what knits together text, text production, and text reception, and it is closely related to post structuralist poetics. It stands opposed to the 'genetic' links between texts. Genetic links form the central idea in comparativist, evolutionist, and diffusionist theories of folklore. Texts that have no genetic relations could still speak to each other.

Abrahams' (1993: 5) observation is a good one to sum up the issue of nationalism in folklore, and in folkloristics:

The arguments for national identity can easily be perverted by those seeking to redress historical inequities through the use of force. ... Nation states will continue to attempt to mystify their regimes and their sense of homeland.'

Nationalists do this by means of 'powerful fictions', and constructing a reflexive folkloristics to identify these problem areas for political and social discourse.

Folklore, as can be seen from its use within these two countries, Germany and Finland, has been a tool which human societies have tried to use to carve a national identity. The same is found across the world, where folk life centers and centers of 'national culture' are established to synthesize what they feel gives them a sense of *nation*. We can find this parallel in the institution of the Smithsonian Institute and museums in the United States. This obviously leads to the problem of commodification of folklore and its attendant problems.

### **Africa's Contribution to the Field of Folklore**



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A Ghanaian academic and statesman who has contributed a lot to the development of contemporary Ghanaian culture through folklore is Professor Kwabena Nketia. He is a musicologist who has profound interest in folklore. Writing about Ghanaian folklore in 1958<sup>5</sup>, he identifies three variants of particular importance to folklore in Ghana. These include proverbs, folktales and folksongs. He says proverbs have a universal presence among Ghanaian ethnic groups as they are employed by all the groups. Their value rests in the mastery of the techniques of deploying them to enrich their users. Nketia (ibid) cites Rattray and Danquah who maintain that proverbs are accordingly drawn upon for the purpose of illustrating or defining our concept of the universe, our beliefs, our values, and so on.

Nketia (1958) says folktales can be seen in the same light as the proverbs. They are traditional in the sense that their themes, plot and the characters are well known by the group. He also identifies a category of folk tales (Nketia (ibid) found in folk songs. A good many Ghanaian indigenous music comes in the form folk music that displays the collective efforts of the ethnic group, with anonymous creativity. The moment of instantiation makes the difference between a good, and a poor performer.

Writing about African music, Nketia (1974: 223) maintains that on special occasions such as festivals and African religious rituals, social relations can be dramatized by means of dance drama. The exception here is that communication is done more through the songs than the dance. In the traditions of the Bono area of the Ghana, during the worship of the Ntoa god, derogatory songs are sang to get rid of all ill-feeling being harboured during the year. Worshippers of the god say the god commands her worshippers to do so. Hardly does any African social event takes place without the accompaniment of music.

Nketia and his contemporaries have, between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, used folklore to give the Ghanaian, and African a voice to sing his song and dance his dance. They have popularized the folk songs, which have found their ways into marching tunes for the military, patriotic songs, and indeed, given Ghana her 'other' Anthem, "Yen ara asaase ni".

Ghanaians employ their folklore to give their language and culture life and continuity. The Dagombas of Northern Ghana, who speak the Dagbani language, have developed the institution of the drummers (the *lunsi*) to cater for praise singing of their kings/chiefs. The *lunsi* also relive the history of the Dagbon past (Oppong 1973:13). This institution of drumming is said to have been originated in Dagbon under Naa Nyagsi who reigned between 1416 and 1432 (Salifu, 2011). Oral media are the main avenues for the transmission of Dagomba cultural history. Salifu (2011:3) cites Vansina (1954:50), Davidson (1974:20) and Paredes (1994) that notwithstanding its ability to maintain stability.

The Dagomba drummer has a repertoire of knowledge in the history and traditions of the Dagbon kingdom. There are now audio and visual recordings of the history of kings of the

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<sup>5</sup> See "The Ghanaian", vol. 1, 1958.



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Yendi Nam<sup>6</sup>. These renditions make use of a vast amount of both colloquial Dagbani vocabulary and poetic diction. For instance, the use of the address term, *n sira (n yidana)* ‘my lover/husband’ for the patron of a drummer, of the performer implies there is a special bond between him and his target audience. Archaisms are also found in their narratives. Dagbon drummers eulogize past Dagbon kings or ancestors for their heroic deeds in order to inspire the living to emulate the noble roles played by these venerable ancestors. In this regard, the drummers in the past had the potential of inciting the youth to go to war. The challenge posed to the patron in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century cannot, however, be taken as seriously, as was done in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The stakes are different now than then. A patron may now ‘fight’ the battle against illiteracy and squalor among others and not a physical battle to win territory or a vacant title to chieftdom.

Many of the narrations centre on neighbours such as the Gonjas, Basaris, Mamprusis, and Konkombas. The narrations of the epic battles are often committed to memory and handed down from generation to generation. In fact, this is not peculiar to the Dagombas as every African society has often preserved their history much the same way. This drum tradition is well developed and is akin to the role played by the griots, the *jeliba*, of the Mali. Oppong (1973:15) reports of a battle between Dagbon, under the reign of Naa Andani, and the Germans who were passing through Dagbon to Sansanne Mango in Togo in 1896. Though the year is often not stated the drummers always recount events in the battle to their listeners. This often serves as a source of primary data for historical research. One cannot rule out the issue of subjectivity in many of the accounts, but with the right scientific tools, credible records can be found in other documented sources for serious academic work.

Dagbani culture falls under cultures that Dr. Osumare<sup>7</sup> calls a dance culture. Almost every social occasion is accompanied with music provided by drummers. The praises they sing to their patrons are couched in verbal art which they employ with flair. In fact, in Dagbon, music and dance is ubiquitous at funerals, weddings, outdoorings or naming ceremonies, and at the enskinment of chiefs. To this end, Hickens in Nketia (1974)<sup>8</sup> aptly observes that the African “is born, named, initiated into manhood, warriored, armed, housed, betrothed, wedded and buried to music.”

Salifu (2008:31) states that people perceive the drummer in Dagbon primarily as an entertainer. Not only does the music entertain its patrons but it also contains admonitions to the listener/dancer. A case in point, according to Salifu (ibid), is a popular Dagomba traditional dance called *Naani goo* (trusted thorn). While dancing to the rhythm provided by the drummers, the lyrics sang by the drummer continue to warn the dancer to be wary of pretentious allies. This story certainly is not a fiction in the annals of Dagbon history as it relates of the story of Naa Andani Naani Goo who reigned Dagbon between 1876 and 1899.

<sup>6</sup> The Dagbani word ‘nam’ refers to a chieftdom.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Halifa Osumare was a Fulbright scholar from the U. S who presented a seminar paper at the Institute of African Studies on the topic ‘A Marriage of Social Science and Dance’ on the October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> See J. H. K wabena Nketia, “the Musical Heritage of Africa”



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Naa Andani went to assist his brother Naa Abdulai Nagbiegu (1849-1876) to fight the Basari<sup>9</sup> but was deserted by his kinsmen, who wanted to see him fall in the battle so that they could ascend to the Yendi throne.

Another prominent citizen of Dagbon who has contributed significantly to the development of Dagbane culture through folklore is the late blind musician, Issahaku Mogulo. He was from Zokuga, a village under the Tampion in the Savelugu-Nanton district of Ghana. Bearing a simple stringed musical instrument made from a hollow wood called *mogulo*, he traversed the length and breadth of the Dagbon traditional areas entertaining his patrons with folk tunes accompanied by the rhythm from his simple hand-made device. He contributed immensely to the development of Dagbon culture through music. Heroic exploits of ancestors of his royal patrons were highly eulogized while the misdeeds of those who showed acts of cowardice were despised.

The life and works of Issahaku Mogulo was deeply enmeshed in factional chieftaincy dispute of Dagbon between the Abudu and the Andani royal gates. He was a well-known Andani sympathizer much to the dislike of members of the Abudu gate. As a result, most his performances were to the adoration of the Andani royal gate. Mogulo, through his performances, was able to chronicle some of the rivalry between the royal gates of the Dagbon kingdom in recent memory. When the Vo Naa was enskinned in the late 1980's by the Yaa Naa Yakubu Andani, and members of an opposing gate challenged this coronation and decided to attack him at the village, the ensuing conflict saw the chief prevailing upon the assailants. This served as a fertile source for one of Mogulo's songs.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has outlined various theories of Folklore and interplay of folklore, folkloristics, and nationalism, and highlighted the complications that come up in this conjunction. European cultures have been looked at, and matched against some African examples, focusing on the use of language as a primary vehicle social interaction.

We notice that, folklore is an art, but not an end in itself. It is used to transmit historical and cultural information. We need to do a content analysis, especially folk music to unravel history, the concept of national identity, and the poetic genius in the creative artist.



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