



# The Role of Folklore in Modern Culture

Kato Bukenya T.

Faculty of Business and Management Kampala International University Uganda

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the multifaceted role of folklore in shaping and reflecting modern culture. Folklore, encompassing oral traditions, myths, rituals, and artistic expressions, is more than a vestige of the past—it is an active, evolving force that continues to influence literature, media, identity, and social values. By examining folklore through historical, literary, and anthropological lenses, the paper highlights how traditional narratives are adapted and preserved in modern contexts, such as film, digital media, and community practices. It also investigates the tension between preservation and transformation, particularly in light of globalization and changing cultural dynamics. The study demonstrates that folklore is not merely a record of cultural memory but a living dialogue between tradition and innovation, deeply embedded in the formation of group identity, artistic expression, and collective values.

**Keywords:** Folklore, cultural identity, oral traditions, modern media, rituals, mythology, ethnography.

## INTRODUCTION

In common usage, the term folklore has two principal meanings: a substantive, denoting certain oral genres (in particular, tales), and an adjective, folkloristic or folklore-historical, denoting a certain scholarly discipline. As academic disciplines, the folkloric lore is numerous and diverse (folklore on languages, on music, on dances, etc.). All folklore disciplines have in common that the focus of their attention is culture and its importance. Yet, diverse and multifaceted as they are, the folk (1) lore is not a haphazard collection of materials. On the contrary, they refer to a defined whole, namely, folklore in context. Unfortunately, the terms folklore, folk-literature, and folklore artefacts are popularly used without reference to the phenomenon with which they are concerned. A detailed presentation of the subject's mythology, legends, and tales is, of course, impossible within this brief essay. In particular, some elegance in the use is lost when attention is successively drawn to folktales, then folklore, and finally oral lore in setting off from the bearers of oral traditions. The semantics of the term lore present two implications. Lexically, it is the knowledge of a group; culturally, the extent of that knowledge. Since lore includes every sort of knowledge, there is no folklore without non-folklore. For purposes of classification, both folklore and learned lore need to be differentiated further into subtypes. Together with ethnography and cultural anthropology, folklore forms the broadly defined science of folk culture. Despite the general connotation of folk, certain subdivisional implications are suggested by these classifications. Oral-spoken and learned-literate are above all modes of culture or cultural behaviour. But they are also modes of human expression or human communication. Thus, classical literature may be both learned-literate lore and learnt-theoretical-rules lore. On the other hand, social language is both learned-spoken lore and learnt-pragmatic-rules lore [1, 2].

## Historical Context of Folklore

As surely as folklore is imminent, it is also language that inspires concord and creates time. The world counts once more—balanced on the edge of legend, linear fate relinquished. Suddenly aware of what must have been for centuries, ranging beyond the present, an instant is irreversible. Folklore can mean different things to different people and even become different things as it travels from place to place across various technological media of transmission. This ontological instability may confront the analyst with truths about her sense of time, place, history, tradition, and the social imaginary. These truths may turn out to be uncomfortable. At the most general level, and at the time being, folklore and folklore studies can be construed as the people and their cultural production (tradition-based, expressive, and made durable and collective) and the science or knowledge intent on the analysis of these. Though both

“folk” and “lore” are in principle shared by both, immanent in what was once popularly regarded as folklore is the writing that from an early date acted upon the folk both negatively through censorship and positively through parody and thus ineluctably collation. If widespread agreement can be reached among the analysts about the general definition of folklore and folklore studies as people and their cultural productions of any kind on the one hand and science or knowledge (both in the broadest sense) intent on the analysis of these on the other, specific discussions about folk imaginative, communicative, and material productions or the collecting and preservation of these from a very oralist perspective ring oddly to the ears of some analysts and by the same token do not seem to have made deep inroads into folklore studies proper. Furthermore, the dominating notion that all folklore is oral is, in Khun's terms, a paradigm and would most likely continue to be engaged in successive paradigmatic investigations. Today, folklore can be effectively made and widely circulated using writing, print, recordings, photography, and so on in a manner exceeding the scope of the oral, thus inviting scholars, too, to take an interest in folklore in the “modern” sense [3, 4].

### **Types of Folklore**

In the absence of clear terminology, folklore has generally been designated folklore, folklore, tradition, popular literature, pop-lore, oral literature, orally-transmitted literature, folk speech, folk-beliefs, humorous-art, folk songs, folk melodies, pop tunes, music of the people, ceremonial art, art of the people, folk dance, games of the people, folktales, ballads, fables, myths, etiological tales, folk tales, proverbs, riddles, jokes, tall tales, and so forth. Because certain folklore forms are popularly, though erroneously, designated as fairy tales or ballads or riddles, or songs with the implication that no other forms belong to the relevant genre, the more general terms occasionally create further confusion. The nature of folklore is best characterized through the types of folklore forms that exist. In the following pages, the character of folklore is defined concerning four general criteria: (1) the mode of communication, (2) the characters of the communicants, (3) the compositional and performance requirements of the artistic communication, and (4) the elements that are communicable through art. The easiest folkloristic question to answer is the question, What is folklore? As defined in common dictionaries, folklore is the unrecorded stories, sayings, and customs of a people. To this definition, folklorists have added the term artifact — clay pots, flint tools, etc. Oral traditions, oral literature, popular art, and folk art, stylized and traditional variational communicative genres, simultaneously center upon a common subject matter. On the question of who composes and performs folklore, the best answer is that composition and performance take place in small groups with knowledge of mood changes between in-groups and out-groups. It is incidental to the existence of folklore that certain folklore is old, known by many people, and known widely [5, 6].

### **Folklore and Identity**

The folklore is connected with the personal, family, and local history; with the memory of former life, sometimes lived in rather complicated circumstances; with deep emotions, both joyful and painful. Folklore shapes the slice of the past that is recognizable and known. The world of belief and fairy tale is seen as wonderful, exotic, but there are no attempts to apply this knowledge to cope with today's life and try to influence the present situation. Folklore is also perceived as out-of-date and useless, only fostering old traditions that could disappear. Yet, the narratives, songs, social practices, rituals, and festivals are more than static vestiges of the past. They are the present-telling past, images of the past which remind us of life once lived in fullness. Such records transmit emotions and mental concepts. They contain past conversations and reveal the shaping of social spaces: family grounds, backyards, towns and villages, neighbouring landscapes, rivers, hills, woods, workplace. The events that happened, the tasks that were done took place there. Future time and direction of living matched with the biographical aspects of the past, envisaging hopes, fears, and wishes. Such conceived spaces become colourful landscapes growing multi-dimensional remnants of stories; the group social memory becomes manifold, developing an even more complex dynamic image with a thousand faces. Those portraits exhibit inner knowledge of the town, its life and routine, the subterranean lands, the neighbours and their practices, and transform into an existential landscape. The displayed cognitions and evaluations reveal a great deal about the perception of local geographical, topographical, architectural, political, economic, social, and cultural spaces. The images of the past remind us how the town survived the post-war chaos and later drastic changes, tragic loss of people and traditions, and devastated buildings, but also spectacular victories and lively festivals. With the heritage and its witnesses, the closely felt connection is transformed into the most precious riches, producing an identity, with feelings of unity, attachment, and belonging [7, 8].

### **Folklore in Literature**

Literature on folklore study is less than 100 years old, with its recognition as a separate field emerging only recently. Literary criticism of folklore can be traced back to Edmund Spenser in the late sixteenth century. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

century. The study of poetry and folklore developed parallel histories until their connection in the late nineteenth century, primarily through scholars grounded in traditional historical learning from Europe. The categorization of folklore as an object for collection and analysis was part of broader interests in social and religious anthropology during that era. Folklore became universally defined in literary contexts, encompassing all forms of written or oral compositions. In a narrower sense, particularly in fieldwork, it referred to the cosmologies, traditions, and performances of rural societies often regarded as inherently oral. This suggests that reliance on textual tradition could undermine folklore; cultures may view sacred texts as central, treating them as essential to daily life. In literate cultures, lore's role as a societal reflection can remove it from the realm of folklore, as it is institutionalized and deeply connected to the past [9, 10].

### **Folklore In Media**

Modern culture provides visual stimulation through advertisements, films, video games, and other media. The validity of images is determined through common social interpretive frameworks and an understanding of the natural world. Myths provide the foundation that new media iterations are built upon, providing common themes, plots, and archetypal characters. The form of media may be new, but the story is old. New films are retellings of existing narratives, but the audience's understanding of the narrative's validity is fully maintained. On the other hand, new television series showcase more varied cultures and how that culture impacts the individuals portrayed. Modern myths consist of an established story structure to which audiences adjust, traditions in visual representation that tame exuberance and passion, common patterns in storytelling, and iconic supernatural beings. With the blockbuster success of movies, the movie industry helps to shape a progressive understanding of social and cultural perspectives in a way that visual media have done for decades. A similar response has occurred within the print publishing industry, which is increasing the number of books representing these perspectives. Young adult novels will join the canon of narrative work, telling these important stories. Modern narratives are beginning to show just how cultures are grown, changed, misrepresented, and thriving, and as modern culture continues to develop in all of its forms, so does modern mythology. Modern mythology is both familiar and transformative. It retains the original structures, themes, and characters that audiences identify with on a fundamental level while also challenging and developing those aspects in a way that remains completely authentic to the culture being portrayed [11, 12].

### **Folklore and Art**

Folklore is the collective memory of nations, epochs, cultures, and peoples. Folklore is the only source and basis of the national art culture of a people. It expresses human thoughts, beliefs, and ideas, as well as the eternal problems and phenomena of life. It knows no political, social, national, or regional borders. In every era and everywhere, folklore has been created, preserved, and handed down from generation to generation to stop time. Its means and methods differ in artistic literature, the visual arts, music, theater, etc., but here, too, there are significant commonalities, typology of forms, techniques, and genres. Folklore has been the subject of the activity of every nation for centuries, regardless of the level of their artistic culture and development. A people either has its folklore or it does not exist as a people. Wealthy, multi-layered folklore is a measure of its artistic maturity, the originality of its cultural characteristics, its emotional and mental depth, breadth, and varied perception of life and nature. Works of folk origin occupy a prominent place in Albanian music, both sacred and secular. Besides the epics of Gjirakastra and the songs of Kukës, the songs of the Albanian noble Gajtan Kercova, Zenel Gega, and Misto Muci must be mentioned as products of a cultivated art. Bouzouka, which is a folk instrument used in the folklore of southern Albania, has produced dozens of composers with wider or narrower mindfulness. On the one hand, popular creation has been at the time and grounds for much thought in professional art, such as the songs of the Epirus troubadours, the violinists of Dropulli, the singers who accompanied the Naun, and the songs of the heroes of the Third National Awakening. On the other hand, their importance within classes of importance has diminished. The scope, thought, and form of many popular songs are outstanding. Only one or a few songs of such a character enter professional creativity as themes or thematic layers, while the rest remain beyond the field of creativity, denoted as anonymous [13, 14].

### **Folklore and Rituals**

Folklore encompasses a vast array of cultural phenomena, making it challenging to discuss all types meaningfully across various disciplines. However, folklore can have a broader meaning that includes shared beliefs, values, and community narratives. It represents all non-official knowledge and encompasses the beliefs and behaviors developed within sociocultural communities. While some definitions focus on the phenomenology of folklore, a comprehensive understanding poses challenges due to varying disciplinary perspectives. Definitions based on forms often neglect the meanings associated

with folk cultures, resulting in typologies that may not apply universally. Caution is necessary when examining legend classification systems, as folk groups socially construct their identities, facilitating mutual sharing and respect. Many contemporary scholars focus on folk costume histories within modern aesthetic theories, often overlooking the social, political, and economic contexts of these folkloric collections. Folklorization is viewed as a transformation of material culture occurring in peripheral territories under a hegemonic core, primarily Western states. Historical parallels between socio-cultural dichotomies like Orientalism and folklorization reveal how Western modernity, while introducing expectations and disappointments, shaped identities in Eastern Europe. The discourses surrounding modernity and humor in the context of civil values highlight the complexities of folklorization, underscoring the myths and expectations surrounding folklore in shaping social narratives [15, 16].

### **Preservation of Folklore**

Folklore preservation work began in Ireland in the early 20th century. Folklore was history—history meant to be shared orally, while history written in books was foreign to the Irish culture. Folklore was shared directly by storytellers at bedtime. It was the local folklore that gained cultural significance. Folklore told about dreams, fears, loves, memories, rich symbols, gods, and everyday life. With a growing interest in society and local affairs, there was also a growing concern for local traditions, and the collecting of folklore began. Educated men were the folklorists of this early stage. The good storytellers were sought out by them and observed quietly. These stories were recorded, translated, and published. The majority of collectors were schoolteachers. Schools were established to educate children attending to their language, and also to foster a growing interest in local folklore. Any member of the community could collect material, and schoolchildren were encouraged in after-school and holiday projects. Data was collected from people of all ages. Boys were trained in the art of isolating cultural data, while girls learned sewing, knitting, and homemaking on machines supplied by the State. This preservation history will be examined as a culling of informative inspiration. As early as 1905, early action towards preserving folklore was made by the Celtic League in Dublin. At this meeting, it was pointed out that as folklore became further effaced, a folk renaissance flourished elsewhere. The want of a folklore society analogous to those in England and Scotland was mentioned. Interest was later expressed in organizing a society of volunteers to gather and preserve materials of Irish metaphysics, philology, stories, games, and other folklore. People recorded some material informally, and there was a great collection of folklore by the Gaelic League before the Commission was established. In 1935, the Irish Folklore Commission was founded [17, 18].

### **Challenges In Folklore Studies**

Folklore's academic significance is often questioned despite its presence in courses, degrees, and professional. This trend mirrors challenges faced by various academic disciplines. While student interest has waned since the late 1970s, folklore studies continue to exist with established methodologies and scholarly fields. Nevertheless, concerns arise within academia due to its perceived relevance and accessibility, causing many professionals to avoid identifying as folklorists. This ambiguity leads to confusion over who qualifies to study folklore. The notion that "everything is folklore" reflects its widespread public interest, which can diminish its scholarly value, viewing it as trivial or focused on cultural oddities. Elements of folklore often appear in popular culture, where folk music is romanticized, impacting the understanding and complexity of cultural expressions. As a result, the rich aspects of folklore risk being overlooked or misrepresented [19, 20].

### **The Future of Folklore**

When folklore studies began in the 1950s, it represented a rich discourse, embodying themes and beliefs that structured human experiences. Many scholars found excitement in the ethnographic investigation of previously overlooked subjects. However, by the late 1960s, folklore faced criticisms of provincialism and ethnocentrism as folklorists struggled to align with contemporary scholarship. Disappointments emerged from former allies questioning the relevance of folkloric studies, criticizing why folklorists sought validation from figures like Matisse, who influenced their field indirectly. Concerns grew about folklore being limited to marginal discussions defined by vague notions like 'social collapse' amidst major historical shifts. Despite engaging with vibrant cultural elements, folklorists grappled with disputed issues, such as effectively replacing old religions with new ones. This struggle highlighted folklore's perceived hopelessness, akin to parents unable to communicate with their children. As innovators potentially faced curses while discarding folk beliefs, questions arose about the preservation of folklore through cross-cultural borrowing. Would folklore as a global brand dilute its essence, leaving it untraceable? Concerns persisted alongside uncertainties, challenging the survival of folklore amid modernism's distractions. The dreams of the past no longer captivate, while the essence of simple,



repetitive folklore from remote contexts raises questions about its lasting emotional impact. Can the most basic folk songs and common sayings retain their freshness and connect with the heart, or are they lost to time and distance [21, 22].

### Case Studies

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival has been providing opportunities for ordinary individuals to share their cultural practices and beliefs since 1967. Throughout its forty years of operation, it has presented performances from over 80 nations and featured participants from across America, 34 states, and 65 cities. Ethnic minorities were among the first groups highlighted. For communities feeling like second-class citizens, the Folklife Festival appeared as an effort to validate and recognize their multicultural culture. Community representatives were anxious because they were invited to bring their culture to Washington. Washington was a place of power, a place of authority, and even a place of humiliation. Each anecdote is unique, with various reasons for concern. Individuals doubted their participation and believed their culture was less holistic than their counterparts. In other words, how African Americans ate, danced, and cooked was considerably influenced by the norms of American culture. That was like humiliating pride. Such anxious hindsight acknowledged the essential nature of the self, as well as an inherent danger to the formation of the collective self. Regardless of denomination, ethnicity, cultural background, or national origin, there lingered an anthropological gaze to frostily pierce the veil of a group's self-consciousness. The dilemma of self-encountering is assuredly profound for any internal organization of a folk group, where ascribed identities were being constructed and contested. A search for what constitutes an urban legend led to defining the term, then broadening the search for urban legends to a wider variety of people, locations, and kinds of occurrences that have not yet been studied to that extent. The research showed the relevance of cultural background in understanding some events that qualify as urban legends. At the same time, those within a particular culture often have a slightly different conception of the same event. Various aspects of a case study verified the presence, development, and forms of urban legends within a single high school in America. It also showed how connected a source is to the perpetuation of the legend. By conducting interviews with students at the high school, three legends were compiled. All three urban legends were new to the students, and participants were initially reluctant to share their own stories. As a trusted student's peer, their sharing helped amplify disclosures of other stories, showing the importance of social factors and knowing a fuller picture of how urban legends exist. It was also found that urban legends adapted into advertisements are more common than anticipated [23, 24].

### CONCLUSION

Folklore remains a vital component of modern culture, providing communities with a rich repository of shared symbols, narratives, and values. Far from being outdated, folklore evolves in form and function, shaping and being shaped by new modes of expression, including digital media, contemporary literature, and urban rituals. It connects generations, fosters a sense of belonging, and allows marginalized voices to assert cultural presence. However, the discipline of folklore studies faces ongoing challenges regarding academic legitimacy, definitional clarity, and the risk of oversimplification in popular representations. Embracing folklore as a dynamic cultural force allows for a deeper understanding of its relevance in negotiating identity, preserving heritage, and inspiring creative expression in today's interconnected world.

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