

## **The Perspective from Folklore Studies**

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Coming from the field of folklore studies, I understand by oral tradition the oral transmission and communication of knowledge, conceptions, beliefs, and ideas, and especially the formalization and formulation of these into reports, practices, and representations that foreground elements that favor their replication. The formalized verbal products of oral tradition range from lengthy epic poems, songs, chants, and narratives to proverbs, slogans, and idiomatic phrases, coinciding thus with the conventional categories of folklore. Yet, instead of confining the concept to the genres of folklore only, I would prefer seeing oral tradition as a conceptual entrance point into the observation, study, and theorization of the transmission and argumentation of ideas, beliefs, and practices, including the construction of various political mythologies in the organization and symbolic representation of social groups.

As formalized texts, oral tradition calls for the study of poetic patterning, structure, and intertextuality. As performance, oral tradition calls for the study of cognitive conceptualization and modeling, memorization, and variation. As argumentation, oral tradition calls for the study of social function, meaning, identity construction, construction of history and mythology, claims of ownership, and the politics of representation. As tradition, oral tradition calls for the study of transmission, replication and copying, and de- and recontextualization. I find all of these approaches fundamentally important and mutually complementary. If there is a new direction to be taken that would further complement them, I think it should concern the concept of tradition itself, which has tended to be used as an explanation, instead of being that which is explained. Although I understand that interest in oral tradition usually means interest in the specimens of oral tradition, the scholarly study of oral tradition cannot do without analytical

reflection on the theories of tradition and traditionality that are applied in the selection, construction, and representation of such specimens.

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