Beyond Celebration: A Call for the Study of Traditions of Dominance

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BEYOND CELEBRATION:
A CALL FOR THE STUDY OF TRADITIONS OF DOMINANCE

A Thesis
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by
Ann K. Ferrell

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BEYOND CELEBRATION:  
A CALL FOR THE STUDY OF TRADITIONS OF DOMINANCE

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I came to the Folk Studies program at Western Kentucky University knowing very little about the discipline of folklore and even less about what folklorists actually did. For this reason my parents need the first acknowledgment—for never questioning my sanity (at least within my earshot) when I declared that I was moving across the country to get a degree in folklore, for trekking across the country themselves to help me move, and for supporting me throughout.

Although I knew little about the study of folklore, this thesis is about what I had hoped to find. While I discovered that very few folklorists are investigating traditions of dominance, as I have termed them here, without the training that I received in the Folk Studies program this thesis would obviously not have been possible. Therefore I have not only my thesis committee to thank, but also the other faculty members within the program, as well as the students who accompanied me on this two-year journey, particularly my thesis-writing companions Dina Abousamra, Jim Bradley, and Kirsten Anderson.

My thesis committee, Dr. Larry Danielson (chair), Dr. Erika Brady, and Dr. Diane Goldstein, has been incredibly supportive throughout. Not only have they provided me with the necessary guidance in regard to sources and editorial comments, but they have also provided the intellectual and emotional support needed to complete a thesis that calls for a new direction in the field. While not all of my committee might agree wholeheartedly with all that I have to say, they nonetheless gave me the freedom and the
support necessary to complete this work. Thank you to Dr. Danielson for encouraging me to "take risks," to Dr. Brady for continuing to pass along sources of interest (even to the last possible moment!), and to Dr. Goldstein for devoting valuable time, despite the distance and short turn-around, to a student she spoke with in person for a only few short minutes. While the specific suggestions made by the members of my committee are for the most part not noted directly, suffice it to say that my argument would have been significantly weakened without them. In addition, I wish to acknowledge the hard work of the WKU Interlibrary Loan Office, particularly Selina Langford and Debra Day, for finding the many references needed to complete this thesis.

Special thanks must be extended to the two men in my life, Brent Björkman and Bob. Brent championed my cause (to me!) throughout my two years of graduate school and particularly through this thesis process, constantly reminding me that my perspective, though different from his own folklore work, is a needed one. Despite the fact that I began every chapter with long-distance phone calls filled with "I don't think I am gonna be able to do this one . . ." Brent continued to tell me how far I might someday go (and that certainly remains to be seen). Thanks must go to Bob for literally sitting by my side throughout the entirety of this project--whether I was reading on the couch or typing at the computer, he remained next to me, sleeping for the both of us and demanding that I take frequent breaks in order to fill his bowl or toss around his mouse.

These acknowledgments would not be complete without the mention of Gershon Legman who passed away around the time I was critiquing his work in Chapter Two. While I am critical of some of his work in this thesis, his passion to see "unprintable" folklore collected and published makes it possible for folklorists such as myself to fight for other types of "unprintable" folklore studies.
In this thesis I examine why and how the focus on aesthetic expression and the avoidance of making certain types of value judgments have shaped the discipline of folklore. In the first chapter I look briefly at some of the major figures and themes in our history in order to ascertain how we arrived at the perspective from which we now work. In Chapter Two I explore and critically examine the limited examples of North American folklore scholarship that examines "dysfunctional" folklore. In Chapter Three I consider the study of belief as an example of an area of folklore scholarship that has considered the consequences of ideas such as objectivity and neutrality, belief and disbelief, yet suggest that the discourse on approaches to the study of belief must continue because of the existence of belief-related practices which suggest that there may be instances in which value judgments are called for.

In Chapter Four I discuss folklorists' recent acknowledgment in the last two decades that all that we do and have ever done has political implications. Yet, so far, folklorists have for the most part avoided investigation into the role of folklore in the enculturation of ideology, particularly ideologies that may be injurious to certain members of society. In Chapter Five I tie together the many themes that I have developed throughout this thesis and discuss the implications of our current model of folkloristics, a paradigm of celebration. In so doing, following the suggestions of feminist folklorists who have come before me, I present an example of how folklore serves to benefit from feminist theory.

The central purpose of this thesis is to challenge folklorists to begin to move beyond celebration and consider the traditional nature of oppressive ideologies. Folklorists have the training and skills needed to deconstruct the transmission of traditions of dominance; our challenge, therefore, lies in the formulation of appropriate methods for doing so.
INTRODUCTION

The Folklore of Dominance

Despite the inability to agree upon a definition of folklore, and despite the many theoretical and methodological approaches employed throughout the history of the discipline, the over-arching point of convergence in the majority of North American folklore scholarship has been aesthetic expression. The discipline of folklore has seen many theoretical trends come and go, yet folklorists have tended to focus on that which can be viewed as benign, if not pleasing, forms of human expression. Even before Dan Ben-Amos' now famous definition of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups" (1972), folklorists focused almost entirely on genres of expressions that could be defended as art, whether material or verbal. The approach that folklorists have taken has been one of the collection, celebration, and preservation of endangered lore, no matter who, in different time periods, is deemed the folk or what the lore.

In his introductory textbook, *The Dynamics of Folklore*, Barre Toelken begins his last chapter by stating:

I like to encourage my students to pose of everything they study the hypothetical question, "So what?" That is, what is it good for? What does it tell us that we needed to know? What does it open up for us? How does it help us to understand something? "So what?" is not meant to be belligerent or cynical, but to serve as a kind of field test to see if a mental exercise has paid off. (1996:389)
I am not proposing that there are right or wrong answers to the question, "So what?"; as folklorists we all bring different answers, making our field stronger through our diversity. But with Barre Toelken, I wish to stress the importance of asking the question. Here I will offer one answer to this question, one that has rarely been considered by folklorists.

In this thesis I will examine why and how the focus on aesthetic expression and the avoidance of making certain types of value judgments have shaped the discipline. I will begin, in the first chapter, by looking briefly at some of the major figures and themes in our history in order to ascertain how we arrived at the perspective from which we now work. In Chapter Two I will explore and critically examine the limited examples of North American folklore scholarship that examines "dysfunctional" folklore. I will raise questions involved in approaching folklore materials that to some of us suggest the need for judgment and even intervention. In Chapter Three I will consider the study of belief as an example of an area of folklore scholarship that has considered the consequences of ideas such as objectivity and neutrality, belief and disbelief.

As I will discuss in Chapter Four, folklorists have acknowledged in the last two decades that all that we do and have ever done has political implications. In recent years there has been an increase in the discussion among folklorists, as well as those in other fields such as philosophy and feminist theory, of the notion that the absence of a stated political agenda is equally as political as a stated one. While those who voice their intentions to work for change are often viewed as "political," those who work to maintain the status quo and the dominance of those in power, without ever stating so, are in fact equally as political. With the recognition of the "politics and poetics of representation" (Clifford and Marcus 1986:viii) has come the opinion of many folklorists that since we are engaged in political activity anyway, we should allow ourselves to act as activists on behalf of those with whom we study. Yet, so far, folklorists have for the most part avoided investigation into the role of folklore in the enculturation of ideology, particularly ideologies that may be injurious to certain members of society.
In Chapter Five I will attempt to tie together the many themes that I have developed throughout this thesis and discuss the implications of our current model of folkloristics. In so doing I will, following the suggestions of feminist folklorists who have come before me, present an example of how folklore serves to benefit from feminist theory.

Throughout this thesis I will refer to the folklore that I am suggesting we study as *traditions of dominance*. While folklorists have become involved in advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, chiefly through a more thorough understanding of the folklife of such groups, I maintain that until we explore the relationship of folklore to their marginalization, we cannot make such changes. Folklorists are in an ideal position to embark on such work, because of our specialized knowledge of how tradition and creativity work together to create change in both individuals and groups.

Many folklorists will disagree with that which I am suggesting we study. If, as I will discuss, folklore has traditionally been defined as the aesthetic expression of a group, perhaps it is I who should change fields, not folklore which should broaden. Folklorists such as Gregory Hansen would certainly object to the points I make here, as evidenced by his statements in *Folklore Forum* that "The end of folklore as a discipline began when the subject matter of folklore was broadened" (1997:99), and further, "The folklorist's urge to celebrate what is excellent and time-honored in human creative expression is courageous in a cynical, even nihilistic, academic environment" (100).

Yet other folklorists are calling for the expansion of our discipline into terrain similar to what I am proposing. David Whisnant, for instance, has written:

To call something traditional has been to say it is good--worthy of filming, recording, writing a book about, archiving, or putting on a stage or an exhibit. Of course we recognize that there are bad traditions. So when we say *tradition* we implicitly mean good traditions, but even that understood correction is not sufficient. The fact remains that we have hung much of our analysis and
programming on a term that needs far more careful scrutiny than we have yet given it.

We all know, of course, that there are overtly reprehensible traditions: of violence, oppression, racism, sexism, bigotry, jingoism, xenophobia and the like. Part of what is so disturbing about David Duke, Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond and their like is that so much of what they are and do is profoundly traditional, and that the millions of Southerners who vote for them (as well as the tens of thousands of non-Southerners who send them money) recognize it as such. Thus when we contemplate the current regional, national, or international scene, it is essential to remind ourselves of the scale at which "tradition" is implicated. (1992:186-87 emphasis in original)

I quote Whisnant at such great length here because he is, unfortunately, a lonely (though not entirely alone) voice in the field of folklore, one calling for the need to begin to make judgments about those traditions in need of preservation and those in need of elimination.

With him are folklorists such as William Westerman, who has also directly challenged folklorists to begin to deal with political ideology, and to do so from both a belief studies and a holistic, folklife framework (1995). In his view, folklorists have favored the "expressive over the metaphysical," (94) "we have studied roses to the exclusion of bread" (98). Like Whisnant, Westerman calls for the need to examine our ideas of tradition:

Oppression is part of tradition—and yet we are for the most part ill-equipped theoretically and practically to deal with anything but traditional life. What kind of culture do we want to conserve when we talk about the conservation of culture? Obviously not one that perpetuates the subordination of women, people of color, and religious and sexual minorities (464).

In addition, folklorists working from a feminist perspective such as Elaine Lawless (1993, 1999) and Linda Pershing (1996) make their political intentions well known in their work. Yet, for the most part, these folklorists continue to focus on the celebration of cultural expression, rarely examining in detail traditions of dominance.
Folklorists have stayed away from the study of forms of expression that seem to call for value judgment. Yet what are value judgments and are we ever really free of them? Important changes are obviously being made. As I will discuss, folklorists have been making judgments throughout the history of our field; our work inevitably involves decisions about what to collect and preserve and the best means of doing so. "Objectivity" is no longer the goal, scholars in many fields having finally admitted the impossibility of such an endeavor. As Westerman states, "[A]bsolute objectivity is impossible. Therefore we are in fact partisan whether we admit to it or not. Our own folklife influences our interpretations and decisions as it does the people with whom we work. . . . Admitting that, rather than denying it, can allow us to become more open about showing the influences on our interpretation and can help readers and observers to understand the ways in which we may be biased" (101). Sandra Harding, a philosopher of science, argues, "cultural beliefs and behaviors of feminist researchers shape results of their analyses no less than do those of sexist and androcentric researchers. We need to avoid the 'objectivist' stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible while simultaneously skewering the research objects beliefs and practices to the display board" (1987:9).

Along with these scholars I maintain my position and argue that in fact such materials are within the terrain of folklore. The materials that I am suggesting that we study are not "excellent" per se, but are based in "time-honored" tradition, can be found in genres of folklore as we have defined them, and contain knowledge that is learned informally within folk groups including but not limited to families. I will argue that celebration is important but is only one facet of the possible agendas for folklorists. A work of this size cannot possibly address all of the relevant scholarship and issues pertinent to my argument. I have attempted to gather together scholarship that was both accessible to me and stood out as particularly relevant materials in my admittedly limited
search, and was forced to leave out other materials that might easily have been included, were I able to attempt a lengthier discussion.

In his recent State of the Union Address President Clinton stated that immigrants have a "responsibility" to assimilate, to become part of American culture. As long as our nation's leaders continue to make such statements folklorists have a difficult job in front of them. North American culture is in need not only of celebration of the diversity of those who people it, but also a critical understanding of how regressive ideas continue. Unless we begin to examine traditions of dominance, the celebration of those dominated can only continue the state of oppression in which so many of us live.
CHAPTER ONE

The Roots of Folklore Study:
In Search of "The Highest Thunderclaps of Eloquence"

The contributions of early scholars of folklore—those who were working before the term was even coined—have been well documented by modern-day folklorists, particularly in studies published in the last twenty years. These contributions, both admirable and deleterious, have shaped the discipline as we approach it today and in them we can find the roots of our inclination to focus on the celebration and preservation of certain genres of folklore. As I will discuss in this chapter, figures such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, various anthropologists whom our field has since claimed, and most recently, Richard Dorson, all worked with specific agendas and goals, agendas and goals which are now deeply ingrained within the discipline. Along the way there have been those who viewed their work as a means toward progressive social change but, as we shall see, those working with an anti-modernist agenda, yet who would have called themselves apolitical, have most often won out.

Not only the figures but the theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well have, whether or not we still (consciously) utilize them, affected the ways in which we approach those we study—both in the field and on the page. In this chapter I will examine the ideas of cultural relativism and Functionalism and their influence in forming the perspective from which we approach folklore studies.
Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) has been named the father of romantic nationalism, as well as of folklore. That he inspired both a political movement of such great consequences and a field of study should, as Roger Abrahams (1993a) has pointed out, act as a warning about the underlying nature of the history of our discipline. Despite the fact that the romantic nationalism that developed from his ideas was "politically adapted, [and] narrowed" (Bendix 1997:42) from his intentions, the connection between folklore collection and romantic nationalism began with Herder.

In his writings, influenced heavily by Gianbattista Vico, Herder discussed the spirit or soul of a nation, which he believed could be found in folk poetry. Herder's romanticism established not only the types of lore that folklorists would later study, but also the ideological assumptions with which they would study it. Beginning with Herder, European folklore study was "from the beginning intimately associated with emergent romantic nationalistic movements in which zealous scholar-patriots searched the folklore record of the past not just to see how people had lived in by-gone days—the principal interest of the antiquarians—but primarily to discover 'historical' models on which to reshape the present and build the future" (Wilson 1973:819). So from the beginning folklorists approached their studies with the purpose of a return to a glorified past—a political agenda, stated or not, but also an agenda that automatically disallowed the consideration of traditions regarded as undesirable.

The elite of the Germany of Herder's era had adopted the culture of other European nations, particularly the French.² His mission became to foster pride in the German nations, through folk poetry, which, following Vico, Herder held to tell the truth of history as well as the "cultural pattern of the society in which it originated" (Wilson 1973:824-25). Herder was not arguing for the superiority of the German nations, but making a more general argument for the existence in every culture of folk poetry that
reflects the special circumstances of the land from which it arises. For Herder, "The first and most important step in this campaign was to collect and publish the surviving folk poetry" (Wilson 1973:828).

Herder's idea of the folk soul entailed pride in one's nation, one's heritage; those that took up the study of it would have naturally avoided that which they did not consider a source of pride, that which intellectuals might not want to make a conscious effort to preserve. Herder saw in folk poetry, in his words, "the highest thunderclaps of eloquence, the most powerful blows of the art of poetry, and the magic moments of action, . . ." (as quoted in Bendix 1997:37). He helped to facilitate the move among the European elite from the age of enlightened reason to that of romanticism.

According to Jennifer Fox, Herder's influence on the study of folklore can be felt in other, more subtle ways, yet ways which are reflective of the perspective of folklorists since his time. Not surprisingly, Herder's ideas were full of assumptions about the primacy of the male role in education and tradition--two concepts which he equated.

According to Fox:

In Herder's thought the very essence of tradition is masculine. Whereas the maternal province is to provide physical nourishment by the breast, the paternal role is to provide spiritual nourishment by instilling tradition. . . . Tradition springs from the insights of the forefathers, which is encapsulated and passed on in folk expression. From authorship it is a short step to authority: the "sayings of the fathers," in Herder's words, are "always the fountainhead of all wisdom" and a nation's most precious possession. (1993:34)

How has this idea of tradition influenced the study of folklore, at its basis the study of tradition? It is no surprise that such an idea of tradition would not question, for instance, the ways in which "tradition" contributes to the oppression of women, and others with
little power in society. Indirectly, then, Herder did in fact contribute to the propagation of the folk ideas which I will be discussing in this thesis.

The next major generation of folklorists, inspired by Herder, were the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, well-known by folklorists and non-folklorists alike as collectors and publishers of *Märchen*. Unlike other collectors of tales such as Straparola, Basile, and Charles Perrault, and of folk poetry such as James Macpherson and Bishop Thomas Piercy, the Grimms are viewed as the first scholarly collectors of folk narrative. According to Regina Bendix, "What had been literary and social speculation now needed systematic research" (1997:49). Yet they too were working in the spirit of romantic nationalism, and have been criticized heavily by modern-day folklorists, in part because of their sources: members of the elite class who learned the *Märchen* at the knees of their servants, with the probable help of the published collections of those just mentioned. They, particularly Wilhelm, have been criticized as well for their tendency to make changes in the tales that they published in order to appeal to their readers; in no way can the Grimms be said to have been striving for any kind of "authenticity" that folklorists of this century have attempted. For instance, the revisions made by the Grimms in successive editions of their *Kinder- und Häusmärchen* were motivated in part by harsh contemporary criticism of the first edition, which was deemed adult entertainment rather than children's literature (Tatar 1988:142; Zipes [1987]1992:xxv). In other words, they made significant changes to their tales, toning down the gruesome content, in order to make them more suitable for their new audience, the children of middle and upper class Germany. Other types of changes were made in order to please this new audience; for example, Wilhelm began to add Christian exclamations to the dialogue of the tales (Bottigheimer 1987:145), as well as general religious imagery (Bendix 1997:51). In their work we see the presentation of folk narrative in a manner that serves to preserve and idealize the past and offer lessons in keeping with the moral values of their socio-economic class. The Grimms were more concerned that the tales
that they published conformed to a literary aesthetic of their choosing than with retaining the textual qualities, content, and, most of all, the context of the tales as they were told. Yet the Grimms set the standards from which later scholarly collectors, including North American folklorists, would work and their importance should not be underestimated.

Like European folklorists, those who embraced collection in the US were following an anti-modernist agenda (Bronner 1986). The American Folklore Society was formed in 1888 with the purpose, as stated by William Wells Newell, of "the collection of the fast vanishing remains of Folk-Lore in America." Those that were considered the "folk" were at this time limited to Southern Blacks, Native Americans, French Canadians, Mexican Americans, and the survivors of the transplanted European peasant class (Bronner 1986:16). From the official beginning of the North American discipline, then, the agenda of North American folklorists was one of the collection of the lore of the disappearing folk in order to preserve the past.

As the field of folklore began to become an independent academic discipline, the materials studied grew more and more distinct from that which was studied by anthropologists. According to Simon Bronner, "The materials of folklore to the folklorist were aesthetic products with appreciable forms--tales, legends, songs, baskets, proverbs, games, and festivals--rather than social organizations of kinship, economy and polity" (1986:91). It was the focus on the aesthetic expressions of folk culture that set folklorists apart. Yet the field of anthropology dominated the growing discipline of folklore, particularly the American Folklore Society and the Journal of American Folklore, until well into the twentieth century (Bendix 1997:123; Bronner 1986:88; Zumwalt 1988:32). For this reason it is necessary to look at key theoretical discourse in the field of anthropology, particularly as this discourse has affected folklore studies. Among the "Holy Trinity" of AFS founders, alongside Newell and Francis James Child, was the anthropologist Franz Boas, known for his emphasis on fieldwork and his role in the development of the concept of cultural relativism.
From Evolution to Relativism:  
Twentieth Century Anthropological Theory

With Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1873) came a theory that would have lasting impact not only on the field of anthropology but also related fields and, it seems, Western society in general: unilinear cultural evolution. Within this school of thought, scholars, assuming "primitives" and "savages" to be lower on the evolutionary scale from themselves, studied the cultures of others in order to better understand their own pasts. Simon Bronner sums up Tylor's theory as follows:

In his library of works on the subject, he noticed similarities of customs among disparate societies and concluded that differing human beings possess a "psychic unity," a universally shared mental development. . . . The similarity of customs in different societies was therefore proof of a regular, uniform way in which culture progressed. . . . Three stages--savagery at the bottom, then barbarism, and, ultimately, civilization--constitute the cultural ladder that all societies climb. (1986:60-61)

Tylor was interested, in part, in the "survivals" in civilized societies of traditions from earlier stages.

The early twentieth century saw attempts by anthropologists to move away from this line of thinking and the ethnocentrism inherent in it. In differing but intricately connected ways cultural relativism and Functionalism were perspectives that offered alternative ways of thinking. These theories also influenced the thinking on "political" involvement by scholars as well as the individual's relationship with traditional practices and forms of folklore.

The roots of cultural relativism--the idea that a culture can only be understood from within and therefore that beliefs and practices cannot be judged as right or wrong,
better or worse--can be found in the writings of Herder. According to Gerald Broce, "For Herder as for the later anthropologists, culture is to be conceived in the plural, as the possession of all mankind and not the intellectual polish of a European few, and as forming the whole of the socially-transmitted lifeways of the people" (1981:1). As discussed above, Herder was striving to bring to the developing German nations a sense of pride in their common heritage through the collection of folk poetry. "His declaration of cultural equality may be seen as a demand for respect for his own culture raised to general normative principle" (Broce 1981:6).

While it is known that Boas (and his students) read the work of Herder (Broce 1981:9), they infrequently made direct reference to him and his work (10), yet it is only logical that Boas was influenced by Herder's ideas. Franz Boas considered the concept of cultural relativism as a means through which to study cultures with the goal of creating a more just society, one in which people, by more fully understanding each other, could live free of prejudice. Speaking of Franz Boas and his supportive role in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, bell hooks writes, "Ultimately, he worked to make anthropology a discipline that would not serve the interest of white cultural imperialism, seeing it instead as a field that might stand in opposition, trying to correct false proclamations of the superiority of one culture, one way of life, over another" (1990:136). "The general theory of valuation of human activities," wrote Boas in 1911, "as developed by anthropological research, teaches us a higher tolerance than the one we now profess" (as quoted in Broce 1981:9).

In 1906 Boas wrote a letter to Andrew Carnegie, requesting funding to build what he termed an "African Institute," a place where the cultures of Africans might be studied and displayed to the public so that they could, through learning about the heritage of African Americans, rethink their belief in the inferiority of Blacks (Stocking 1974:316-18). In this letter he asserted: "Considering that the future of millions of people is
concerned, I believe that no energy should be spared to make the relations of the two races more wholesome" (as quoted in Stocking 1974:317).

Boas is not alone among early twentieth-century anthropologists who saw their work as connected to social action. The first woman president of the American Folklore Society, Alice Fletcher, also an anthropologist, collected folklore from the Winnebago and Omaha Indians and "lobbied for the passage of federal legislation to give Indians more control over their lands... [She] never drew 'a sharp line between her scientific and humanitarian impulses" (Bronner 1986:47). However, Fletcher's work with land allotment issues was not without controversy among the groups with whom she worked (Mark 1988:317). Her advocacy in favor of the Dawes Act, for instance, led to the further impoverishment of Indians who were forced to sell off the land they had been allotted because of inadequate supplies with which to farm it as well as its unsuitability for farming (Westerman 1995:334).

Although Boas and many of his students conceived of cultural relativism as a means for change, ironically, this concept has instead often kept scholars from "taking sides" on issues of racism and other types of oppression, through attempts to view other cultures, as well as their own, in a more "scientific," "objective" light. As the century wore on, the perspectives of many anthropologists on just exactly what it meant to study cultures through the lens of relativism began to change. Anthropologists as well as folklorists began to view their roles as fact-finders, rather than the creators of social change.3

One debate that took place among anthropologists in the late 1940s provides a clear example of the thinking of the time. This debate centered around the concept of human rights and raised questions about not only cultural but moral relativism as well. The timing of it was of course no accident. The world had just seen a horrific example of the potential for cruelty of one group of people toward another in Nazi Germany.4 The United Nations was in its infancy and was preparing to pass the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights. The idea of basic rights, to be held by all merely by virtue of being human, appears to have been unsettling for anthropologists, dedicated as they were to the idea that each culture lives by its own rules, guided by its history and customs. While the actions of the Nazis stood as an example of the cruelties possible by one group of humans toward another, many anthropologists felt that their studies implied a scientific objectivity that needed to remain free of judgments about "right" or "wrong" cultural practices. Fueling this debate was a "Statement on Human Rights" presented to the UN and published by the journal of the American Anthropological Association, *American Anthropologist* (Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association 1947).

Viewed fifty years after the fact, the statement of the AAA seems an obvious attempt at a conservative statement--a statement that attempts to remain apolitical and one that stresses the importance of a culturally relative stance in the development of such a declaration. Because the authors of this statement were obviously trying to advocate the need for a declaration of human rights, yet were attempting to remain apolitical, it is difficult to decipher what their conclusion really is. This statement includes a discussion of the difficulty of dictating a universal idea of fundamental rights when there are two basic, and at times opposing, problems at hand: the rights of the individual and the deserved "respect for the cultures of differing human groups" (Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association 1947:539). Yet this statement was heavily criticized by members of the Association. The executive board was accused of bringing anthropologists into territory where scientists had no business by even addressing the then current discourse on human rights. To many mid-century anthropologists, it seems, the rights of the individual needed to be deferred to those of the larger society and scientists needed to gather facts, not make moral judgments.

The statement asked: "How can the proposed Declaration be applicable to all human beings, and not be a statement of rights conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America?" (539). The AAA advanced
three postulates for consideration within such a declaration: 1) an individual can only be free if the society in which he or she lives is free of colonization and exploitation by other nations; 2) no means has been found for "quantitatively evaluating cultures"; and 3) it cannot be based on the standards of one culture alone, but must include the values of all (541-43). Despite the seeming conservatism of this statement, the drafters were obviously proclaiming on behalf of the AAA that some kind of universal declaration is and must be possible, in order to ensure "the right of men to live in terms of their own traditions" (543). Herein lay the controversy for many anthropologists of the time.

In the opinion of Julian H. Steward, this statement was one-sided: it suggests the need for respect for the cultural values of others, but implies that the "others" are only those who are the victims of Western exploitation and not the writers of the document. "Loopholes" are left for the cultural values of racism in the US as well as the ideology of Nazi Germany. These things, according to Steward's interpretation of the statement, can and should be judged. He wrote "Either we tolerate everything, and keep hands off, or we fight intolerance and conquest--political and economic as well as military--in all their forms. Where shall the line be drawn?" (1948:351). In his opinion, anthropologists as individuals could and did fight against oppression around the world, as exemplified by the individual work of anthropologists during WWII. However, the involvement at a professional level, and particularly of their "scientific organization," was another matter altogether.

Another anthropologist, H.G. Barnett, took Steward's comments even further in stating, "there is no scientific approach to the study of human rights, . . . Any right, even the 'right' to live, is such only by definition" (1948:352). Like Steward, Barnett believed that the AAA as well as individual anthropologists had no right entering into these questions as scientists. He went on to criticize, as well, the way in which this issue was approached by the authors of the statement, stating that while they were calling for a relativist view of the value systems of other cultures, their assumptions were steeped in
the values of their own (354). In a tone of irate disapproval, Barnett instructed his fellow
scientists to think first of the appearance of their field, making no mention, unlike
Steward, of the work that some anthropologists might have done on behalf of the
oppressed outside of the professional arena.

Melville Herskovits, a student of Franz Boas, also entered into this debate.
Herskovits was an outspoken proponent of cultural relativism and defined it in this way:
"The principle of cultural relativism, briefly stated, is as follows: *Judgments are based
on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation*" (Herskovits [1955]1972:15 emphasis in original). Like Boas, he discussed
cultural relativism in terms of the Euro-American history of colonization and a
propensity toward paternal behavior in relations with nonwhite cultures. Without it we
view the world with an ethnocentric attitude of, in Herskovits' satirical words: "There,
there, what you are doing is all very well, but I really know how to do it better . . . "
([1958]1972c:104). While Herskovits remained throughout his work staunchly in favor
of strict relativism, he also addressed the difficulties of utilizing it as a blanket
perspective.

Finally we come to the question of practical relativism. What are
we to do when a people openly interfere, for whatever end, with
the life of another human group? Redfield has put the matter very
clearly: "It was easy to look with equal benevolence on all sorts of
value systems so long as the values were those of unimportant little
people remote from our own concerns. But the equal benevolence
is harder to maintain when one is asked to anthropologize the

According to Herskovits and Redfield, the idea of cultural relativism is a complicated
one. And as Redfield pointed out, issues of power and hegemony are present in our
views of the cultures of others, those whom we deem deserving of our empathy and
assistance and those we do not. The more drastically different a people is from those
with power (including scholars as well as those with overt political or military power), it seems, the stricter the application of cultural relativism is bound to be. Racism and sexism play a large role in our decisions to deem a practice "cultural" as opposed to a violation of some sort of ultimate right granted by virtue of being human.

Herskovits took the stance in this debate that as scientists, anthropologists do not have to resolve this issue; unless they are working in an applied manner, a manner in which they must make such distinctions, their job is merely to establish the "facts" (1951:46-47). Throughout this debate he retained his position that cultural relativism is a necessity, without utilizing quite the same sermonizing tone of some of his colleagues. He also pointed out that in advocating cultural relativism anthropologists are not assuming or insisting that cultures do not change, nor are they denying that morals and ideas are in a constant state of diffusion, sped up by the changing world of the twentieth century.

Another scholar to enter this debate, from a different perspective from Herskovits (and perhaps a lonely one), was Clyde Kluckhohn. In a review of Herskovits' well-known work of 1948, Man and His Works, Kluckhohn disagreed with the extremes to which Herskovits applied the notion of relativism, and challenged the separation between science and the judgment of values. In keeping with the discourse of his time which had begun to call for universal human rights, Kluckhohn wrote,

Herskovits goes too far--in the reviewer's taste--in the direction of untrammeled cultural relativism. He appears to feel that one must merely understand the values of each different culture in terms of that culture's own premises. The premises, themselves, are apparently to be unquestioned... To understand, however, should not necessarily mean to accept, nor even to remain content with dispassionate description.

The doctrine that science has nothing to do with values is a pernicious heritage from Kant and other thinkers... Some values may well be regarded as within the realm of taste or choice or circumstance. But other values would seem to be appropriate to
all men—given the nature of the human organism and the conditions of life to which all men, regardless of race and culture, must adjust. (1948:12)

In response to this criticism, Herskovits stated that the problem begins when we attempt to move beyond relativism as a method and attempt to utilize it as a philosophy ([1951]1972:41), here making the distinction between cultural and moral relativism. He asked if Kluckhohn was advocating that the role of the anthropologist is to work to change what he or she does not accept in cultures under study and then probed this idea further:

Are anthropologists, working cross-culturally, really to decide what is good and bad in culture and, as social psychiatrists, attempt to cure the bad and promote the good? . . . But where are the cross-cultural guides for the anthropologist? He, like all human beings, has undergone enculturative conditionings to the standards of his proper culture. Can his judgments be so Olympian that they are not influenced by these standards? The inevitable basic questions enter: Whose good? Whose bad? Whose means? Whose ends? ([1951]1972:43)

This debate is far from being resolved. Anthropologists continue to make pronouncements about their appropriate roles in issues considered political. For example, in a recent article in *Anthropology Today*, Anatoly M. Khazanov discusses the current rise in romantic national fervor in countries of the former Soviet Union, and the impact of this on the work of anthropologists, both native and foreign. He begins this article by stating:

The collapse of the Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the emergence of new states there are accompanied by an outburst of ethnic nationalism, territorial disputes, tension in interethnic relations, and, in the worst cases, by direct ethnic conflicts. This brings to the fore the position of anthropologists and other scholars toward these conflicts, their
professional responsibility and moral standing on the issue.
(Khazanov 1996:5)

He goes on to state that he knows of "at least four" cases in which anthropologists were assassinated for being on the wrong side in their own societies and warns Western anthropologists that they must decide "whether they should remain neutral or take a side in the conflict" (5).

Like folklorist Roger Abrahams (1993a), Khazanov reminds us that these issues are made most difficult because there are two sides to all conflicts; yet he states that, "Of course, ethnocide, ethnic cleansings, pogroms and other similar actions are crimes and should be condemned as such irrespective of the reasons for the conflict" (6). Khazanov provides an example of an anthropologist caught up in his own society's racism, making public statements and publishing work filled with what he calls "nationalistic fervor," and others might call "hate." Apparently Victor Kovlov of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, "... lent direct support to an outspoken racist and anti-Semite ..." and "... published an anti-Semitic book ..." (7). As Steward did fifty years ago, we must ask where the line is to be drawn, if one culture's "ethnic cleansing" is another's fight for "freedom"? As I will discuss later in this thesis, there are many issues that fall into the categories that Khazanov might list, while others do not--and we will not all agree on what does and does not, what is "cultural," and what is an abuse of human rights. Yet we can no longer ignore, in our scholarship, the existence of these issues.

I quote from this debate at such length because I think it is an important one for several reasons. While these are anthropologists and not folklorists by training, this debate has surely had an impact on our field, not only because folklorists have been influenced by the theories of anthropology, but because many of the anthropologists involved in this debate are anthropologists who were particularly influential as collectors and scholars of folklore. Yet folklorists themselves have not entered this debate in great
numbers. Perhaps their absence points not to the lack of theorizing that we have been criticized for—from both within and without— but to the basic premise upon which this thesis rests. Few folklorists have dared to study topics that involve the questions asked by anthropologists. By focusing our studies on art, both verbal and material, folklorists have, until very recently, allowed themselves to believe that such questions are not relevant to our studies because the materials that we study are viewed as neutral territory. As our field continues to grow in political directions—the topic of Chapter Four—we will be forced to address such questions.

This debate continues, as well, in the scholarship of the last two decades on ethnography. The works of James Clifford and George E. Marcus (1986), Deborah Gordon (1988), and, most recently, Ruth Behar (1996) are just the tip of the iceberg of recent scholarship which questions not only ethnographic field methods, but also how we then write ethnography once we have returned to our desks. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, folklorists have become heavily involved in this discourse on the "poetics and politics of cultural representation."

**Functionalism: The Interrelation of All Parts to Maintain a Stable Whole**

Like the concept of cultural relativism, the school of thought known as Functionalism also began as both a theory and method that provided an alternative to the kind of thinking involved in unilinear cultural evolutionism. Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown are generally credited as the originators of Functionalism, but each espoused their own distinct type. Functionalism has in common with the concept of cultural relativism the idea that the scholar must study the worldview of those she or he is working with from the inside in order to understand and document their system from their perspective. According to Simon Bronner, "Together these two concerns [cultural
relativism and Functionalism] made the twentieth century, in contrast to the nineteenth, the century of ethnography" (1986:86).

Functional theory has been a topic of debate since 1922 when both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown published their landmark works based on this theory, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and *The Andaman Islanders*, respectively. Like cultural relativism, Functionalism has heavily influenced the thinking of scholars in many disciplines, and continues to do so today. According to Marcus and Fischer, Functionalism "became part of anthropological common sense in the twentieth century" (1986:27-28). Often when it is referred to now, it is quite a different, watered down version from the schools of thought to which Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown belonged.\(^5\) For instance, in Barre Toelken's introductory book for students of folklore, he describes the functional approach as "a leaning toward the explanation of how and why certain kinds of folklore continue to operate in any given instance" (1996:5). The word "function" is often used in this way, for instance in statements such as "The functional importance of this disbelief derives from the fact that it can always be called upon to accommodate anything not handled by other explanations" (Hufford 1982a:52)—not an entirely inappropriate usage, but one that confuses the issues when we attempt to discuss the specific schools of thought.

Although Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown utilized two very different forms of Functionalism, as I will discuss shortly, there are several common assumptions and premises upon which both of their concepts are based. Functionalism grew out of an attempt to move away from evolutionism, diffusionism, and historical particularism because these perspectives privileged speculative theorizing over the discovery of facts. Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown were looking for concrete ways to study and understand cultures in the here and now, unlike those before them who used evidence from the present to hypothesize about how things may have been in the past. This explains the synchronic emphasis for which Functionalism has been criticized: the present is primary because it can be studied in a tangible sense, while the past is
irrelevant because there is no way to fully understand it without speculation. Instead of speculating about the past, Functionalists focused on the culture at hand in the present, assuming that all bits that make up a culture should be studied as an interrelated whole, and that all elements have a purpose: to tie together various elements into a cohesive stable whole. Functionalists were not attempting to find the origins of cultural practices and folklore, because from their perspective this was not possible. They focused instead on the various institutions within a society that worked together to maintain stability.

According to Radcliffe-Brown, however, historical and functional explanations "do not conflict but supplement one another" ([1935]1965:186). Although both types of Functionalism recognize internal social conflict, both assumed that societies remain stable—an important point to which I will return. Lastly, of course, one of the most basic tenets of Functionalism, the one that has perhaps been the most overtly influential, is that fieldwork and participant observation are considered the most important methods of research.

The concepts of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, though similar, are based on fundamentally different premises. Malinowski, said to be the founder of the psychological school of functionalism, stressed the biological needs of individuals. In his model, the individual is primary while society is secondary. "The function of an institution, or an organized system of activity, like the function of an organism, is the role that it plays within the interrelated whole in fulfilling universal human needs" (Bronner 1986:76). In addition, his Functionalism acts as an ethnographic method as well as a theory.

In contrast, Radcliffe-Brown, called the founder of the structural school of Functionalism, worked with a model in which the society takes precedence over the individual. Influenced by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown believed that social phenomena are a separate reality and must be studied in terms of other social phenomena, and not the biological and psychological needs of the individual.
His was more a theory than a method. Structural Functionalism is an organic analogy, based on the idea that living organisms are made up of separate units which are arranged in a structure. Within the structure, each unit has activities it performs and those activities have functions that work to maintain the whole. This process of maintenance, or the functioning of the structure, Radcliffe-Brown maintained, is called life. The individual unit is inconsequential because each unit is replaced as it dies and new ones are born, with the structure remaining the same ([1935]1965:178-79). According to Radcliffe-Brown, social life acts in the same way: units are arranged in a social structure and social life is the functioning of the social structure. The function of a recurring activity is the role it plays in maintaining structural continuity. Further, he used the concept of Functional unity, which meant that all parts of a social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony or internal consistency, i.e. without producing persistent conflicts which can neither be resolved nor regulated (181). He notes, however, that "Opposition, i.e. organised and regulated antagonism, is, of course, an essential feature of every social system" (181 ff).

Although it is the Functionalism of Malinowski that was most championed by North American anthropologists, the Functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown more directly addresses my thesis, ideas about dysfunction, hence my focus on his model. In addition, of course, although Malinowski's brand of Functionalism was more heavily utilized in the US, Radcliffe-Brown was certainly influential in his own right. He views dysfunction within this same organismic analogy, stating, "We distinguish in an organism what we call health and disease," or what the Greeks called eunomia and dysnomia. In organic structures we can objectively define disease/pathology, while in social structures, we can not define dysnomia as a condition that, without intervention, will cause the death of a society, as societies do not die (182). In the opinion of Radcliffe-Brown, societies rarely die, the only exceptions being the destruction of indigenous populations by white conquerors. Other than instances such as these, societies are stable (183). He is, of
course, looking at the dysnomia of society, not individual activities or persons that might be considered dysfunctional. In a footnote, he states,

A savage tribe practising (sic) polygamy, cannibalism, and sorcery can possibly show a higher degree of functional unity or consistency than the United States of 1935. This objective judgment, for such it must be if it is to be scientific, is something very different from any judgment as to which of the two systems is the better, the more to be desired or approved. (ff. 183)

This statement should ring familiar to us, as he is obviously writing from the position of cultural relativism discussed above.

Folklorists have not only utilized Functionalism, but have debated its applicability to the study of folklore, most notably in the writings of William R. Bascom, an anthropologist who worked with folklore and folklorists enough to be considered an insider in both fields (Zumwalt 1988:129-30), and Elliott Oring, who has critiqued Functionalism and its applicability to folklore. Employing an integration of both psychological and structural functionalism (Bronner 1986:83), Bascom published a landmark article in which he discussed his "Four Functions of Folklore" ([1954]1965). After a discussion of the past speculation on the role of folklore as either a mirror of or a contrast with society (284-85), Bascom lists the four Functions as he sees them: the validation of culture, for instance Malinowski's conception of myth acting as a charter for belief; escape from the reality of one's culture, such as folktales that contain magic objects or fantastic occurrences; education, particularly of the young, for instance in tales or proverbs that contain a moral; and the maintenance of conformity to accepted patterns of behavior, for instance in the forms of folk expressions that act as either an internal or external check on behavior (290-96). He then notes that these are not the only Functions that folklore may have, and that ultimately (and herein lies his strict Functionalist statement) all folklore serves to maintain the stability of society, concluding:
Here, indeed, is the basic paradox of folklore, that while it plays a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions which these same institutions have upon him (298).

Here also is the basis for the primary critique offered by Elliott Oring (1976). Oring's central point of contention with Functionalism is that in his opinion it does not meet the requirements of scientific explanation: it is unfalsifiable, untestable, and vague. Further, it is inadequate in the search for the origins of tradition—*and* of course it is, for, as we have seen, it was created as an alternative to that line of inquiry. Oring restates the above assertion by Bascom, but in a tone that makes clear his opinion that this "paradox" of folklore is in fact a circular, untestable notion: folklore can be said to either serve as an escape or act to educate and validate, both unprovable interpretations. The very fact that Functionalism provides merely subjective interpretation and not testable fact makes it seemingly worthless to Oring. He concludes:

> [I]n our attempt to establish a science of folkloristics we must heed the injunction to formulate testable hypotheses in an effort to construct those empirical generalizations which provide the higher levels of understanding that we seek. For while traditional functional analysis may provide a sense of understanding and serve as a treasure house of suggestive hypotheses, the development of theory in folkloristics will be ages in coming if we believe that the task of explanation has already been accomplished. (80)

From the perspective of Elliott Oring, folklorists should be striving for an objective, "scientific" stance. Like the anthropologists discussed above Oring views the role of the folklorist as a fact-finder and not an interpreter.⁷
The model of Functionalism is not one that will aid in the new approach to folklore that I am advocating for reasons beyond the traditional criticisms. From the Functionalist point of view of either type, dysfunction is that which does not contribute to the maintenance of the stability of a society. According to the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, "eufunction [here Function] is a function that tends to preserve the unit as defined and a dysfunction is one that tends to dissolve it" (Levy 1968:25). From the perspective of social change, that which we might call "dysfunction" actually *does* contribute to the maintenance of society. For instance, violence against women, a phenomenon that many of us consider dysfunctional, in fact acts to maintain a system in which men hold power in a patriarchal society. Similarly, folklore which supports and perpetuates racism acts to uphold the power of whites in a white-supremacist society. I include the Functionalist model here because it has acted in such a way as to de-focus scholars from those things that are dysfunctional in the lives of individuals, while focusing instead on entire societies and their appearance of stability and health. As Katheryn Pine Addelson points out in her discussion of the contributions of feminism to a critique of science, "Whether something is deviant or normal in a society is a question of perspective and power within the society" ([1983]1991:25). Neither of the concepts discussed here, cultural relativism and Functionalism, take power differentials within a society into account. If we are to attempt to consider judgment of certain cultural practices, as I am proposing we must, we need to consider the perspective of the individual or group with whom we are working. I will return to this issue in Chapters Three and Five and will simply say here that folklorists, because of our expertise in considering both the folk ideas of individuals and of groups are in a unique position to do this.
Folklore studies in America, though present within other disciplines since the nineteenth-century, became an independent discipline in 1949 with the establishment of the program at Indiana University by Stith Thompson and with the first Ph.D. awarded in folklore to Warren Roberts in 1953 (Zumwalt 1988:7). The field was dominated at this time not by anthropologists but by the Finnish method of folk narrative studies, the historic-geographic method. Richard Dorson acted, from the 1950s until his death in 1981, as the patriarch of folklore studies. Though his degree was in fact in American Civilization and not folklore, he worked throughout his career for the recognition of folklore studies as an independent discipline. His degree in American Studies, however, would shape his perspective and contributions to the field.

According to Jay Mechling, American Studies programs began in the 1930s as a "movement" as opposed to simply a discipline (1989:12). It was a reform movement "offering both a critique of rigid departmentalism and a new praxis--interdisciplinary cooperation among historians, literary critics, and art historians." Richard Dorson was the fifth graduate out of the Harvard Ph.D. program in American Civilization, and those with whom he had worked at Harvard "constituted the audience of peers to whom Dorson addressed his scholarship" (1989:13). The training of the American Civilization program under which Dorson received his Ph.D. was full of, as Mechling describes it, the "myth of America as the Garden of Eden" (14). Mechling also notes that, as a new discipline, the American Studies movement was full of anxiety and feelings of marginality (24)--feelings that Dorson would later re-experience in his chosen field of folklore. Dorson's roots in this movement must be considered in order to understand the perspective with which he approached folklore studies.
Since his death, the scholarship and influence of Richard Dorson have been analyzed as well as openly criticized by younger generations of folklorists, particularly his former students. I outline some of the relevant scholarship both by and about him here in order to highlight those ideas of Dorson's that were particularly influential in shaping what folklorists have chosen to study and how they have done so. More than once Dorson made statements such as "As for my own views, I have always opposed ideology, from the right as well as the left" (1975:237). As Debora Kodish has pointed out, speaking of the lack of attention to gender in folklore scholarship, "apparent absence of gender in texts may instead be read as a present, if implicit, theory of gender" (1987:573). This statement can be stretched to include not only gender but also political ideas in general. While Dorson claimed to feel that political ideology and folklore should not mix, much that he did and wrote expressed very specific political views, views that do not fall far from the tree of romanticism planted by Herder nearly two centuries earlier.

In Richard Dorson's work we can find evidence not only of the "apparent absence" of explicit political ideas but also covert and overt statements about his assessment of the goals of the discipline, as well as the place of folklore in the political issues and debates of his time. In a paper presented to the 1957 joint meeting of the American Folklore Society, the American Anthropological Association, and the American Studies Association (published in the Journal of American Folklore along with the prepared comments of the four discussants and an edited version of the floor discussion which followed) Dorson outlined his "Theory for American Folklore" (Dorson 1959). In this paper, Dorson classifies seven "leading types," or as he later refers to them, the "seven sinful schools" (Dorson 1969:227) of existing folklore study: the comparativists, cultural anthropologists, folksong and folk music specialists, special pleaders (i.e. Frazier, Freud, and Marx), regional collectors, literary historians, and popularizers. He points out the problems, in his opinion, of these approaches and states:
"From some or all of them the American folklorist may gain inspiration and fruitful concepts, but none fits his needs entirely" (1959:203).

He then goes on to outline his "Theory," which is essentially a list of events and themes in American history that distinguish American folklore from that of other nations. The serious study of these themes and events should, according to Dorson, therefore be taken up: exploration and colonization, the westward surge, immigration, aborigines and slaves, regionalism, patriotism and democracy, and mass culture. His "Theory" is that "American civilization is the product of special historical conditions which in turn breed special folklore problems" (203). This statement could easily have been made by Herder, were he a twentieth-century North American and not an eighteenth-century German.

This paper is an excellent example of the ways that Dorson presented a romanticized picture of the North American past, including the violent atrocities of this past. For instance, in the section on colonization, he includes the folklore of the Puritan settlements in the eastern US and describes their legends in the following terms: "Hence Quakers, antinomians, savages, perverts all met with shocking fates, while saints escaped the terrors of the deep and the wilderness through providential deliverances" (205). While the history and the lore of colonialization includes such acts and as a part of our folklore we cannot, as folklorists, ignore them, do we have a responsibility to consider our presentation of them? Is our job as folklorists to continue the romanticization of this era, to continue to view history from the eyes of those in power? Dorson does not suggest that we should feel anything but pride in this past. Further, despite his call for a holistic study of North American folklore and history, he says little about exploring the lore of these same Quakers, savages, and perverts.

The section of his "Theory" on aborigines and slaves is easily the shortest of all seven of his sections, and the mention of women is a rarity throughout. A particular example of his treatment of gender issues provides a telling glimpse into his perspective. In his discussion of a Greek family with whom he did fieldwork he states (almost as an
afterthought): "A distinction could be made between the sexes as well as the generations; the wives of John and George seemed barely to have touched America, spoke halting English, and unhesitatingly admitted their belief in saints' legends and black magic" (208-9). He then leaves the topic, never suggesting that we should ask why immigrant women are often more isolated from society than are men, but instead gives the impression that this is merely a charming example of family members who are mysteriously less acculturated. In fact, immigrant women who are isolated in this way are often done so purposefully. In some cases, they may not be allowed by the males of the family to learn the language of their new homelands, or the cultural information needed to survive independently. Might this topic not be an excellent one for further investigation by folklorists? I am not insisting that Dorson should have been expected to be aware of family dynamics of power and control in 1959, but his refusal to even ask questions such as why this is so and how this might affect these women seems a blatant oversight, and an excellent example of the "apparent absence" of issues about the role of women in immigrant families.

In addition, in this piece Dorson makes it quite clear that the term "folk" describes a limited number of people, not yet having the inclusive definition of "folk" that his students would later adopt. For instance, speaking of the son in this same Greek family, he states: "he had become aware of the existence of other folk traditions, and was on the point of leaving the folk and becoming a folklorist" (219 italics added). It is tempting to view the obvious political implications of such a statement as merely a result of the time in which he spoke, yet one of the prepared commentators, Melville Herskovits, had this to say about Dorson's implicit definition of the folk:

Am I correct, for instance, in concluding that Dorson considers American folklore to be essentially the unwritten lore of the American people, and that by "the people" he means those who are outside the class of intellectuals and "sophisticates"? Who, indeed, are "the folk" in the United States? (1959:218)
If he was so questioned by a contemporary, perhaps we cannot offer the time period in which he wrote as an excuse for his perspective.

Richard Dorson was challenged about many of his opinions and tactics not only posthumously by his former students but during his lifetime as well. One example, and one that seems to have not only riled but also inspired him, was a debate with the "New Left historian" John Alexander Williams. In 1970 Williams sent Dorson a copy of a paper he was preparing to read at an upcoming meeting of the American Historical Society, and invited him to attend and publicly comment upon his paper. Edited versions of both Williams' paper and Dorson's comments were later published in the *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, which was published at Dorson's home-university, Indiana University. In this paper, Williams uses folklore as an example in his study of the process of professionalization which academic fields undergo at some point--and Dorson plays the villain in the tale that he tells.

Williams discusses the political involvement (in the labor and protest movements) of one group of folklorists, those such as Pete Seeger and his Almanac singers, Bess Lomax Hawes, Woody Guthrie. Although many would not call this group folklorists because of their lack of academic training (with the exception of Hawes), their activities were approved of by trained folklorists such as Benjamin Botkin, Charles Seeger, and John and Alan Lomax (J.A. Williams 1975:217). He notes that

Botkin and Lomax were directors of 'People's Songs, Incorporated,' formed in 1946 by Seeger, Guthrie and others "to create, promote, and distribute songs of labor and the American people" in the postwar era. Botkin praised the project...he and other scholars continued to extend the hand of folkloristic respectability to radical performers during the blacklisting and investigations of the McCarthy era. (217-18)
Williams goes on to discuss steps taken by Dorson to separate folklore from the left-wing politics of the time and to achieve the goal (along with Thompson and Leach) of "... remak[ing] this old but traditionally heterogeneous and undisciplined body into a professional organization capable of acting as the [in Leach's words] 'custodian of folklore and folklore studies in the United States'" (1975:224). "The antiradicalism of the professionalizers was thus one aspect of a drive for academic respectability that manifested itself chiefly as a search for money and status" (225). Assuming that we can accept the account presented by Williams, Dorson and his cohorts were certainly not alone in their thinking--academic integrity and political action have traditionally been viewed as in need of separation; the academic endeavor is thought to be more objective if there is no stated agenda. Even more, perhaps, than the anthropologists discussed earlier, folklorists of this time obviously were trying to gain a place of independence in the academy, and felt they would not be taken seriously if they were involved in political movements. And they were probably right. Even today, programs such as Women's Studies are often viewed as biased and not taken seriously, in part because they make no secret of the fact that they are involved in political action, unlike those programs such as the sciences with an unprofessed agenda.

Dorson not only made great attempts to separate the academic discipline of folklore from the politically active folksong revivalists but also attempted to use the anti-Communist propaganda of this same time period to the advantage of the field of folklore, further evidence of his opinion that the association of folklore with leftist politics, not politics, was the problem. According to Jay Mechling:

When Congress eliminated graduate fellowships in folklore from the revised, 1961 version of the National Defense Education Act, in response to the ridicule of folklore research in the press, Dorson wrote a letter to Senator Wayne Morse in an effort to educate the Congress on the matter of folklore scholarship and its relationship to the defense interests of the nation in the Cold War. In contrast with the propaganda and other ideological uses of folklore in
Dorson felt that "The recent critics of folklore studies are through ignorance playing directly into the hands of the Communists" (Dorson 1976:19). Obviously this statement contradicts Dorson's claim of bringing no ideology to the study of folklore.

In Dorson's published defense to the allegations of Williams, he states that "They [the New Left historians, i.e. Williams] approached the folk with an a priori philosophy; the folklorist, I hoped, approached them with an open mind" (1975:236). Certainly Dorson had a point, and a difficult job, in trying to secure folklore as an independent and respectable discipline. I will certainly not attempt to come up with suggestions about how he might have done this better, without attempting to control, so thoroughly, the discipline—even while I criticize the means he chose. Yet these remain issues with which we must deal; the general public may indeed misunderstand folklore as fully as they did in Dorson's day. Surely, however, we have learned that limiting the types of scholarship allowable can not be the best or the only answer to these dilemmas. Funding continues to be a source of concern. How are entire departments and folklife agencies, as well as individual academic and public folklorists to support their work? If folklorists begin to critically examine the folk culture around us, instead of only documenting and conserving the folklore that we think, and our funding sources think, has value, how will we pay for our studies?

As I mentioned above, many former students of Dorson have, since the time of his death, written essays in which they examined the perspective and influence of his work. The amount of scholarship centered upon Dorson would seem to attest to his importance, assuming we can judge the importance of a figure in this way. For example, at the 1987 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society there were three sessions devoted to papers reflecting on Dorson's views and works; seven of the twelve papers were
subsequently published in the *Journal of Folklore Research* (Georges 1989:1). The essays included in this special issue address topics such as Dorson's tendency toward romantic nationalism, his American Studies perspective, and his ethnographic persona.

These essays provide a critique of the agenda with which Dorson approached the study of folklore and the control he attempted to exert over the entire field. Jay Mechling discusses Dorson's persona as a writer, in his early as well as his last writings, concluding,

> The Dorson textual persona of 1981 was no more reflexive about the poetics and politics of cultural representation than was that of 1952. He was that naive-but-enthusiastic "professor fellow" through both texts. And that Dorson writing in 1981 was still writing a romance, though no longer a purely pastoral allegory. He never abandoned the twin assumptions of the microcosm and of an American pluralism assimilating somehow to a core, shared culture. (1989:26)

Mechling discusses Dorson's "Theory" of a shared American culture, undivided by race or ethnicity, and states that "Dorson used a rhetoric of realism to create a romantic, pastoral allegory of America" (17). According to Mechling there was a very real agenda in the work of Dorson: the desire to promote the best that he felt America had to offer, real or imagined.

William A. Wilson takes this a step further in his essay "Richard M. Dorson as Romantic Nationalist" (1989). Because Dorson once stated to him that *America in Legend* was to be his "most important work," Wilson focuses in part on this book, stating that ". . . in the work he considered important, Dorson, in much the same manner as European romantic-nationalistic folklorists, set himself the patriotic task of discovering and making known the genius of his country's national spirit" (35). His presentation of historical American figures in this book is described by Wilson in the following way:
Dorson presents a gallery of lusty, roaring, fighting, swaggering heroes whose daring exploits, rugged self-reliance, and independent spirit appeal to American pride and who, in spite of their coarseness, or perhaps because of it, stir patriotic sentiments. . . . Clearly, just as European romantic-nationalists had turned to the folklore record of the past to find heroic models for present action, so Dorson, in similar fashion identifies a ragged body of American heroes he hoped his countrymen could identify with, take pride in, and perhaps even emulate.(41)

This statement is echoed by Ellen Stekert, in her essay "Autobiography of a Woman Folklorist" published in the 1987 special issue of the Journal of American Folklore dedicated to folklore and feminist studies, in which she discusses her experiences of misogyny, not in the field, but in her interactions with fellow folklorists. She makes no apologies for directly criticizing Dorson for what she perceived as his sexism and general tyranny. In summing up his importance, she states:

And because Dorson was one of us, and since for a crucial period he was the most powerful person in the world of folklore, we must also understand him, for in part he embodied what we must change both in our culture and in ourselves. Not only was he blatantly sexist, he also believed that anyone who objected to the way culture (or the power and authority of politics) said it should be must be obliterated. . . . He hated the political "left," and he did so, in my opinion, because he loved macho America first. (1987:585 emphasis added)

Melville Herskovits, too, seemed to have detected danger in Dorson's approach. In his published response to the 1959 "A Theory for American Folklore," Herskovits noted that he heard the echoes of romantic nationalism in Dorson's "Theory" and warned of the regressive purposes to which folklore has been put, mentioning Ireland and Argentina as current examples (Herskovits 1959:219).
Although it has been stated that Dorson's call for an American Studies-centered approach to folklore went unheeded by his students (Wilson 1989:42), I beg to differ. Although those he named the "Young Turks" significantly changed the field, bringing in new perspectives with their focus on context and performance, for the most part folklorists continue to approach folklore as the celebration of artistic expression, as I am arguing. While there were those, even before Dorson's time, who saw the study of folklore as a vehicle for social change, Dorson seems to have effectively squashed the spread of this type of approach until after his death. With a few exceptions which will be discussed in the next chapter, folklorists have continually avoided the study of topics that show anything less than the best that America has to offer.

In Conclusion

Because of the influences of major players in the fields of anthropology and folklore, despite the attempts by those with goals of making change in society, members of both fields have primarily viewed themselves as objective observers of culture. Perhaps the tendency of folklorists more than anthropologists to avoid pointing out the "ugly" has been determined not only by the history outlined here but because of our chosen subjects as well. Anthropologists traditionally go to faraway places and study members of cultures very different from their own. Folklorists, on the other hand, particularly since the creation of a separate discipline in the last half of this century, have tended to focus on members of subcultures within North American society. It may be that it is more difficult not only to study and publish about dysfunction in one's own society, but that it is more difficult to even see the problems that may exist. As I will discuss later in this thesis, folklorists have avoided the folklore of those in power, in deference to marginalized groups. In so doing, despite the best intentions, we have been
able to avoid some of the questions asked by anthropologists about the role of students of culture in engaging in questions of morals and values. There have been some folklorists, however, that have attempted to study--purposefully or not--folklore that contains within it the tools for the perpetuation of oppression, traditions of dominance.

Notes

1 For reasons I will discuss, I have chosen to designate, with the use of a capitol "F," the Functionalism of Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown throughout this discussion in order to differentiate it from the more common current usage of the word "function."

2 It must be noted that "Germany" in Herder's day did not mean a nation as we now understand it to be, but a region made up of many small principalities. The German Reich was founded in 1871 (Eidson 1991:121-22).

3 Many debates have been carried out regarding cultural relativism. I have focused here on only a small corner of one of these debates. Other pieces of this debate have more to do with the nature of humans as a species and questions about universal vs. cultural norms, etc., then about my questions regarding making judgments about oppression, pain, and abuse. See for instance Bidney (1953), Brown (1984), and Norris (1996).

4 Ironically (or not), of course, the Nazis used the folklore of the German people, the collection of which was inspired by Herder, to further the cause of the supposed superiority of the Aryan race.

5 It should be noted here that Radcliffe-Brown denied both the existence of and his membership/leadership in a "school of thought" called Functionalism ([1940]1965:188.)

6 Although the limits of this thesis prevent an adequate discussion of the range of folklorists who have utilized Functionalism, Simon Bronner cites the following examples: Frank Hoffman (1973); Evon Vogt (1958) [Vogt's work was also critiqued by Oring (1976), discussed below]; Alan Dundes and Roger Abrahams (1969) [this work will be discussed in Chapter Two]; Patrick B. Mullen (1969); and Henry Glassie (1975) (Bronner 1986:83-84). In his section on Functionalism in The Study of Folklore (1965), Alan Dundes includes Bascom ([1954]1965 discussed below) as well as the following examples of the study of folklore from a Functionalist approach: John C. Messenger, Jr. (1959); Betty Wang (1935); Herbert Passin and John W. Bennett (1943); and Paul V. Gump and Brian Sutton-Smith (1955).

7 According to Ruth Behar, although anthropology "has always stood uneasily on the border between the humanities and the sciences . . . in recent years there are more anthropologists--and interested outsiders--who want to place the discipline squarely within the territory of science" (1996:164). Within folklore scholarship, see Walle
(1977) for a challenge to Oring's opinion that Functionalism is not "scientific," as well as Oring's rebuttal (1977). See also McCauley (1984) for a discussion of the continued usefulness of Functionalism in the area of religious studies, in which he discusses the use of Functionalism by evolutionary biologists.

8I am in no way suggesting here that immigrant women experience abuse of this kind in larger proportions than American-born women, but merely pointing to a common experience of those who do.
CHAPTER TWO
Approaches to the "Ugly":
Folklore and the Transmission of Dominant Values

Folklorists have primarily focused their studies on texts and objects that can be considered aesthetically pleasing; not only the definitions but the descriptive terms used reflect this proclivity. While folklorists allude often to the fact that folklore contains the "values" of the folk group at hand, it is the rare folklorist who examines just what these values are. In this chapter I will consider primary folkloristic scholarship that considers folklore that is not aesthetically pleasing, beginning with the discourse about "obscene" folklore. While exploration into this type of folklore is not the focus of this thesis, the debates that have surrounded it—as well as the terms used, as I will discuss—tell us much about folklore as it has been defined, as well as the difficulties of moving away from this definition. I will then critique a few prominent examples of folklore scholarship that consider the folklore of dominance.

The folklorists trained by Richard Dorson in the 1960s initiated a shift in the movement toward context over content. But how has this change affected our examination of content? Bill Westerman has recently suggested that the content considered by folklorists is far too narrow, excluding the political and social reality of those we study (1995). While I would agree with Westerman, I would add that we need to also begin to examine the content of folklore more carefully, looking particularly at
the values contained in and transmitted by folklore.

The anthropologist Ruth Benedict, a student of Boas, provides an early example of a scholar who examined "ugly" folklore and did so within a Functional framework ([1935]1968). In the introduction to her classic work, Zuni Mythology, she provides examples of myths that do not reflect the values and practices of the society in which they are told. Among the motifs she discusses are polygamy and the abandonment of children, both practices, according to Benedict, that are nonexistent in Zuni life. Her purpose in discussing these types of myths is to argue that folklore does not always act as a mirror of culture, as Boas and others of the time believed. While she states that in some cases such folklore is the result of "cultural lag," meaning that folklore may describe the social life of the past, she argues that these examples are different. She states that practices such as polygamy and child abandonment never occurred in Zuni society and offers a different, Functional/psychoanalytical explanation (107-10). These myths are instead, Benedict asserts, expressions of fantasy, "Marriage with many wives is a Zuni fantasy of the same order as raising the dead or traveling with seven-league boots in other bodies of folklore" (108). The narratives concerning the abandonment of children, also fantastic, express the resentments of parents toward their children (110). While Benedict's conclusions may not be totally satisfactory, based as they are on Function, her inclusion and consideration of these myths provide an important beginning for the investigation of ugly folklore.

Much of the work that has critiqued the values expressed in folklore materials has not been done by folklorists but by scholars trained in other fields, particularly in the case of women's studies scholars who have focused on the Märchen, and the messages within them for girls and boys about appropriate gender roles. The general messages about gender roles in the Märchen have been examined by scholars such as Ruth Bottigheimer (1986, 1987), Marina Warner ([1994]1996), and Maria Tatar (1988) as well as feminist authors, including Simone DeBeauvoir [1952]1989 and Andrea Dworkin (1974).
Although folklorists have looked critically at the magic tale, they are outnumbered by non-folklorists. Feminist folkloristic readings of magic tales include Kay Stone (1985; 1993; 1997) and Susan Gordon (1993). Folklorists have done important work in the gathering and indexing of these materials and, in recent decades, have worked to understand the various types of context in which folktales are told. Yet we have in large part left to non-folklorists the task of examining the role of these tales in the enculturation of the children who are now the audiences for these tales.

Folksong has also been examined by non-folklorists. For example, C. Kirk Hutson, in the *Journal of Women's History*, examines violence against women in Southern folksong collections from the nineteenth century (Hutson 1996). While it is clear that Hutson is working without the benefit of training in folklore, she does turn to some of the sources that would be utilized by a folklorist looking at both folksong and Southern violence, citing Lynwood Montell's *Killings: Folk Justice in the Upper South*, the *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, G. Malcolm Laws' *Native American Balladry*, and several folklore journals. She argues that the current research on the effects of violence in the media on the behaviors of viewers can be applied to the lives of those who listen to and perform, on a regular basis, folksongs containing violence against women. She states, "Lyrics are of value to historians because they are artifacts of a community and culture," and through them we can learn about the concerns and values of those who sing them or who sang them in the past (115). She discusses social learning theorists' views that "male violence . . . is a learned behavior; therefore music can be seen as a vital element in the learning process" (115). This article suggests important territory for folklorists, who have both the skills and resources to undertake a more complete examination of the role of folksong in the enculturation of ideology and behavior.

Before delving into folklore scholarship that dares to tackle oppressive ideology, it is important to look briefly at the struggles of those who have attempted to study and publish "ugly" folklore, the folklore of the "obscene."
"Unprintable" Folklore: 
Defining Erotic Folklore

There are many issues involved in the censoring of the collection and publishing of "obscene" folklore—more, apparently, than merely the influence of American society's sexually repressive attitudes. Perhaps this censorship is yet another consequence of the equation of folklore with "art"—how can "bawdy" be celebrated as art? Examination of the discourse about this area of folklore raises some important issues relevant to my argument.

Gershon Legman is perhaps the best-known champion of the cause of legitimizing the study of "erotic" folklore. Legman held no college degrees, having dropped out in his first semester in the 1940s, after which he pursued his interest in erotic lore on his own, became a traveling lecturer on birth control; he published his first book himself when it was refused by publishers. This book, *A Study in Censorship: Love and Death*, questioned the attitude of Americans toward protection of children from sex but not violence (Scott 1999). Legman left the US for France in order to publish his materials (Legman 1990:284), settling in 1953 in the Riviera after the US Postal Service stopped delivering his mail due to the content of his book, which he distributed himself through the mail (Scott 1999). We may never know the full details of the fascinating life led by Gershon Legman, as apparently his autobiography remained unfinished at the time of his recent death (Scott 1999).

Legman became an outspoken defender of the folklore collector Vance Randolph, whose collections included both erotic and nonerotic folklore, and who, according to Legman, was an outcast from the discipline of folklore for multiple reasons (Legman 1990, 1992). Legman not only published "bawdy" lore but also critiqued the field of
folklore and the censorship of "unprintable" folklore that has occurred within it. He wrote:

Sex and its folklore are far more interesting, more valuable, and more important in every social and historical sense than, for instance, the balladry of murder, cruelty, torture, treachery, baby-killing, and so forth, which are the principal contents, to give only one familiar example, of the Child Ballads--of which the almost total moral depravity, on all counts except that of sex, and fantastic unfitness for retailing [sic] to impressionable minds, has seldom been observed, . . . (1990:265).

Legman also observed that not only has "bawdy" folklore been avoided and unprinted, but that which has been collected and archived is not even safe. Legman provided two examples of collections that have disappeared either in part or full: John Lomax's "bawdy" cowboy songs, formerly housed at the Texas Historical Society Library, University of Texas, and a collection of pictorial "erotic" xeroxlore that could once be found in full at the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research (1992:18).

Though it was a struggle, the Journal of American Folklore published a special issue in 1962 on folklore and obscenity. Deborah Blincoe and John Forrest note Kenneth Goldstein's oral account of the history of the printing of this issue:

According to Goldstein, the customary printer of the journal refused to handle the material. Another printer was eventually found, with great difficulty, and this man agreed to take on the job provided that the texts were expurgated as described and that the work be done by his male typesetters only. Despite controversy within the American Folklore Society over whether such a solution was acceptable, the issue ultimately went to press in expurgated form. (1993:13)
The issue includes articles which directly discuss the problems involved in attempting to collect and publish such materials, as well as others that examine obscene lore, such as Roger Abrahams examination of "playing the dozens."

Frank A. Hoffman introduces the issue, naming some of the reasons that this topic is such a difficult one: "the reticence of most publishers to print it, the vigilant eye of postal authorities in keeping it out of the mail" and so on. He then questions whether or not there might be reasons "more readily traceable to us," such as the difficulty of defining and collecting it (1962:189). While the first three papers more or less state that "bawdy" folklore exists and should therefore be collected, and its publication dictated by the audience aimed for, the more interesting question is not dealt with sufficiently: What exactly defines "obscene"? While everyone may have their own answer to this question, it is important to examine the definitions in general use.

Both Herbert Halpert and Horace P. Beck delve into this question but never answer it. Halpert turns first to his dictionary, which in turn leads him to assert the "difficulty . . . in defining what is unchaste, impure, or lewd" (1962:190) and to ask "What makes something offensive to modesty or decency?" (191). Unfortunately, while he does point to the relativism of the answers to these questions based on perspectives of time, place, culture, and "private taboos or inhibitions," he not only refrains from offering an answer but states that the more important problem is the "practical one of deciding whether or not to publish it" (191, 192). How can we discuss whether or not to publish something to which we have given no definition?

Similarly, Beck points to the relativity of obscenity, asking questions such as "When a Pennsylvania German defecates in a sock and hangs it on his enemy's doorknob, is he being obscene or is he being insulting? Is one being obscene by pouring baby urine in the ear to cure a earache? . . . Is it erotic to perform coitus by any other method than . . . 'the missionary method'?" (1962:196). While Beck says that the answers to these
questions, in his opinion, are mostly no and then goes on to say that the obscene is not merely about "bodily functions and genitalia" (199), he never answers his own question.

So what is "obscene"? How do Legman and others define "erotic" and do they differentiate it from other types of "bawdy" lore? While it is important to keep in mind that these articles were written close to forty years ago, it is interesting to examine the choice of words of those engaged in this discussion in order to attempt to understand their meanings. Legman, for instance uses "erotic" to describe the "castration jokes" that he was researching at the time (1962:205)—an equation in terms that would today make many uncomfortable, utilizing the definition of the term "erotic" which denotes sexual "desire" as opposed to sexual violence. According to Gloria Steinem, "[Erotica] comes from the Greek root eros (sexual desire or passionate love, named for Eros, the son of Aphrodite), and so contains the idea of love, positive choice . . ." ([1977]1992:439).

While it is certainly probable that the connotations of such words have changed since 1962—although Steinem was only writing fifteen years later—it is obvious that many words were being used interchangeably without an examination of the deeper meanings implicit within the unstated definitions of "obscene." Legman continued to use words such as "obscene" and "erotic" interchangeably, as evidenced by his more recent articles cited above.

Interestingly, however, a glance through Randolph's Roll Me in Your Arms: "Unprintable" Ozark Folksongs and Folklore, Volume I: Folksongs and Music, published post-humously and edited by Legman, reveals that the "erotic" lore that Legman worked so hard to see published is not merely sexlore, but includes, as well, what perhaps could be called "rape-lore." These materials include both "erotica" and "pornography." As Gloria Steinem states in her classic essay on this topic: "they [images of sex and of rape] are lumped together as 'pornography' or obscenity,' as 'erotica' or 'explicit sex,' because sex and violence are so dangerously intertwined and confused" ([1977]1992:437). The two articles in the 1962 special issue of the Journal of American
Folklore which serve as examples of studies of the obscene provide further clues to the definitions being used.

I will focus only on the article by Roger Abrahams here, as Alan Dundes will be treated at greater length later in this chapter. Roger Abrahams is well known for his important and ground-breaking work with African-American folklore. However, his approach to Black folklife in the article in this volume on "playing the dozens" is telling of his times. He utilizes psychoanalytic theory to explain the phenomenon of "playing the dozens" among Black males, evoking the stereotypical notions of the Black matriarch that must be rejected by young Black males in order to attain separation from the "matriarchal system" in which they live.

He [the young Black male] therefore creates a playground which enables him to attack some other person's mother, in full knowledge that that person must come back and insult his own. Thus someone else is doing the job for him, and between them they are castigating all that is feminine, frail, unmanly. . . . To say "I f---d your mother" is not only to say that womanly weakness is ridiculous, but that the teller's virility has been exercised (1962:214-15).

Compared with life in a "white man's world," Abrahams tells us, life in this "matriarchy" "is his greatest burden" (213), a questionable statement to say the least, yet a classic argument of the 1960s. Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins discusses the stereotypes of the black matriarch that surfaced in the 1960s, and the way in which this stereotype served to remove the blame for the success or failure of black children from the racism of society and place it squarely on the shoulders of the black woman, as well as the general criticisms of the black family structure, as deviant from white norms ([1990]1991). "From an elite white male standpoint, the matriarch is essentially a failed mammy [the stereotype typifying the Black mother in white homes], a negative stigma applied to those African-American women who dared to violate the image of the
submissive, hard-working servant" (73-74). John Roberts includes Abrahams 1970 work, Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore From the Streets of Philadelphia in his criticism of the treatment of African-American folklore "as a sign of pathology rather than of vital creative energy" (1993:160). So while Abrahams' early work with African-American folklore is important in terms of its early focus on African-American folklore, the faults within it must be clearly recognized.

Judging from Abrahams' article, the obscene might be viewed in part as verbal lore which contains "four letter words" and "sexual" boasting. I acknowledge that one article is not enough to make an accurate judgment of the definition of "obscene" to folklorists of the 1960s, yet this seems to be a fairly accurate one. As pointed out by Legman, folklorists, like other Americans, deem sexual language and content to be more offensive than violence and murder--although Legman does not point out that the ballads he uses as examples are particularly full, not only of violence and murder, but of violence against and the murder of women. For the most part, that which is being called "erotica" is far from erotic.

My purpose in raising these issues is threefold. First, by examining briefly this discourse, it becomes clear that folklorists who have advocated the study of the "ugly" have primarily focused on one particular area, and that area has not been the ideology contained within folklore, but merely the surface content. Second, through the work of Legman and others we can see that folklorists do not have total freedom in what they choose to study; they have been and may yet be, in many overt and covert ways, "censored" by both the society in which they are working as well as by their peers. Lastly, it becomes obvious that the subject matter chosen by folklorists, as well as the perspectives from which they examine these materials, are dictated by their individual ideologies. No scholarship is immune from personal bias, which can be seen even more clearly as I turn to the work of folklorists who have examined folklore that expresses oppressive ideology.
Two recent examples, those experienced by folklore journals attempting to publish folklore of gay and lesbian communities, provide proof of the continuation of this problem in our discipline. In 1993 *New York Folklore* printed a special issue called "Prejudice and Pride: Lesbian and Gay Traditions in America." In the editorial essay that begins this special issue Deborah Blincoe and John Forrest allude to the fact that it was not an easy issue to publish—in fact in the inside cover of the issue, where the Board of Directors are listed, there is a note that board member "Peter Voorheis considers certain material in this issue to be obscene and has requested that his objections to the publication of this material be recorded herein." Blincoe and Forrest state that the "outrage and anxiety communicated by advance critics of this special issue have been entirely focused upon the sexual aspects of the proposed (or imagined) contents. Of course, oppositional reactions to the concept of the special issue are situated within the very cultural matrix which has created that which is feared" (5). The editors make the obvious connection between attempts at censorship of studies of gay and lesbian folklife with the struggles to publish the 1962 special issue of the *Journal of American Folklore*—in American society lesbian and gay lives are viewed as obscene. As the editors point out, "folklore of all groups contains copious sexual material" (6), and lesbian and gay lives are not solely about sex.

In 1994 *Southern Folklore* published a special issue on family folklore, guest edited by Larry Danielson. This issue contained an article by Joseph Goodwin about the structure and lore of the groups that form within gay communities that act as, and therefore should be considered, families (Goodwin 1994). According to *Southern Folklore* editor Erika Brady, one of the graduate assistants working with the journal as an editorial assistant refused to work on this particular article (Brady 1999). The assistant's reasons for refusal revolved around the sexually explicit joke material included in the article; the assistant, with little experience with members of the gay community, did not think that these jokes appropriately represented the gay community. While according to
Brady this assistant came to understand their function in the community by the time the issue went to press, here is another example of the resistance within folklore circles to many types of materials. This example, however, also provides an illustration of an incident in which an article published in a folklore journal may have made a change in at least one person's attitude about "appropriate" folklore scholarship.

*Approaches to the Folklore of Dominance*

Though few in number, there have been folklorists who have examined topics related to what I am suggesting—folklore that advocates racism, anti-semitism, sexism, and so on. But how have they done so? For the remainder of this chapter I will discuss and critique examples of such work.

Alan Dundes is perhaps the first person to come to mind, with his frequent works on dysfunctional forms of narrative, particularly his "casebooks" on various joke cycles, legends, and Märchen. Dundes, although he has done other important work within the discipline, frequently brings a psychoanalytic perspective to the study of folklore, a perspective that has very limited appeal to folklorists. Dundes is considered somewhat of an outcast in the folklore community, purportedly because of the resistance among folklorists to not only psychoanalysis but also to psychological investigations as a whole. Gary Alan Fine discusses the positions of both Dundes and psychoanalytic theory more generally in the field of folklore (1992). Dealing first with psychoanalytic theory, Fine quotes Richard Dorson's 1972 dismissal that it is "the school of interpretation most abhorrent to orthodox folklorists" (46), but notes that folklorists are more apt to ignore than attempt to disprove psychoanalytic interpretations. Regarding Dundes, Fine states that "Despite Dundes's position as a senior scholar, one must admit that many of his interpretations have been received by his folkloristic brethren with a certain coolness"
51

(48). Fine's explanation for Dundes' status within the discipline includes not only the general ambiguity about psychoanalytic theory, but his opinion that the problem lies in large part in his presentation style which Fine characterizes as "more like an entertainer than a scholar" (48).

While Fine's reasoning is surely sound, I argue that it is not only the perspective with which he approaches his studies but also the material he chooses to discuss: Dundes often chooses to focus on topics that folklorists do not necessarily want to consider "art," topics that do not reflect the aesthetic values that they are working to preserve. Folklorists, having focused for so long on "art," are resistant to dealing with the kinds of lore that Dundes chooses to study. Further, as Fine points out, "Throughout his distinguished career, Alan Dundes has attempted to persuade fellow folklorists of his claim that one must do more than simply describe folklore; one must also analyze the meaning that it has for the audience" (46-47). So while I may not agree with much of Dundes' work, I must commend him for daring to not only study the ugly, but for attempting to understand it as well.

An early example of Dundes' work is an article he co-authored with Roger Abrahams regarding the cycle of elephant jokes that circulated in the 1960s (and continued into the 1970s). Dundes and Abrahams set out to "discern the effect of time and place on the creation and dissemination of jokes and other witicisms," using this cycle of riddles as an example ([1969]1987:41). In order to do so they utilize psychoanalytic theory to discuss aggression and its relation to wit: "the joke becomes a harmless aggression--an aggression that hurts no one, but that provides a transitory gain for the joker's ego" (43, emphasis in original). They attempt to relate the immense size of elephants to the phallus as indicative of the latent sexual content of these jokes, and the feminizing of the elephants in the jokes (i.e., the addition of painted toenails) to fears of castration.
Finally they discuss, briefly, what this article is most famous for: the latent racist content of the cycle of elephant jokes. By comparing the structure and content of these jokes with jokes that are blatantly racist, as well as pointing out that the time in which this joke cycle circulated was one of racial tension and apprehension on the part of whites, they suggest that "the elephant may be seen as a reflection of the American black as the whites see him" (51). In conclusion, Dundes and Abrahams state that both the psychological and social-historical contexts must be examined in order to attempt to understand the relevance of time and space to the transmission of humor.

The most serious problem in their reading of this cycle of jokes is the assumption that humor is harmless aggression. Even if we put aside the elephant jokes for lack of evidence and consider only the examples given by Dundes and Abrahams of jokes with blatant white-supremacist content, it is difficult to call the aggression expressed in them "harmless." These jokes express stereotypical images of African Americans as ignorant, even when educated, and dangerous (53). It is this perspective that is inherent within not only psychoanalytic theory but folkloristic approaches to other types of "ugly" lore that is central to the problem at hand. Despite the fact that folklorists often talk about the "values" expressed in folklore, there is no examination of these values and the very fact that folklore not only contains but transmits them. Like Benedict in her Functional analysis of Zuni myth forty years earlier, Dundes and Abrahams, by assuming harmlessness, bring us no closer to understanding the transmission of harmful folklore.

Elsewhere Abrahams has stated, "folklore' seems to mean the wisdom or knowledge of a small, tradition-oriented group" (1971:17) and that folklore often serves to "entertain the adults in the group by rehearsing the values . . . of group life" (28). Why, then, are these values not taken seriously enough to be examined more closely? Dundes, in his work on "folk ideas" and worldview has made important statements about the ability of folklore to be expressive in this way (1971). Yet despite his work with types of folklore that others have avoided, he has not applied the idea of worldview or
folk ideas to the racist jokes, sexist ballads (1996), or anti-Semitic jokes (1987) and legends (1991) that he has studied. He has applied only the ideas of Freud to these topics, instead of attempting to understand how these types of lore contribute to the continuation of oppression, even while he states his goals clearly. In the Introduction to *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, he states: "The intent of this casebook is to hold an evil legend up to the light of reason with the hope of nullifying its pernicious influence" (1991:viii). This work may be more useful than others by Dundes. He has assembled a collection of articles, primarily from historical sources, but also including two psychoanalytic treatments (including his own), on the proliferation and possible origins of this legend motif.

Other essays by Dundes are not as persuasive, generally due to their lack of substantial documentation. The "wide-mouth frog" jokes which circulated in the 1970s (presumably alongside the elephant joke cycles), according to Dundes, were also a reflection of white bigotry--this time however, based on the recognition by whites, through increased integration, of the difference between African-American and white speech patterns (Dundes [1977] 1987). In these jokes, a wide-mouth frog is forced to change the way it talks, becoming a pursed-lipped frog in order to avoid being eaten by an alligator or some other animal that professes to feed wide-mouth frogs to its babies. In Dundes' analysis this joke signifies the desire on the part of whites to force African Americans to "talk white" and these jokes were used to do so because "the civil rights movement of the 1960s made it more socially unacceptable to express blatant racism directly" (60). While this seems a logical argument, one might wonder how he and Roger Abrahams were able to collect the blatantly racist jokes included in their article discussed above, collected during this same period of time (the 1970s) (Oring 1992:18-19).

Dundes examination of the xeroxlore "why cucumbers are better than men" (one of the few [only?] joke cycles that Dundes examines which he describes as being shared among a gender-specific group, women) is an example of an analysis, though not
Freudian, that clearly expresses personal views and biases (1987). We all bring our personal agendas to our studies, stated or not, no matter what our topic. To this essay Dundes brings an antifeminist perspective, even though he attempts to establish himself as sympathetic to the plight of women by pointing out the sexist approach to the study of jokes by scholars such as Gershom Legman, who assumed that jokes with sexual content were told only by men (82).

Dundes argues that these jokes "reflect the influence of feminist ideology. It is certainly anti-male, in contrast to the anti-female bias in so much of conventional American jokelore" (83). He goes on to note that while this Xeroxlore, like many other forms of folklore, has anonymous origins, it was almost certainly created by women as it reflects a female perspective. He then states: "This goes against the stereotype that feminists have no sense of humor. Remember the lightbulb text? How many feminists does it take to change a light bulb? That's not funny" (83 bold in original). With such statements he has made it clear that he views all women as maintaining a feminist perspective and perceives feminism embrace an "anti-male" stance. It is obvious that Dundes does not have a clear concept of feminism. Following the logic of his approach to jokes and the relevance of the time in which they circulate, he says, "Formerly passive and subservient females are becoming increasingly active and articulate in protesting male behavior they find objectionable" (94). Are we to believe that women never before shared jokes among themselves about the men in their lives? Were they so passive and subservient that they were unable to do so?

A further problem with the work of Dundes, as many folklorists would agree, is his emphasis not on individuals but on our society as a whole. What are the uses of these jokes in the lives of the people who tell them? Who tells them and to whom? In order to attempt to understand how these jokes transmit specific ideologies and values we need to ask such questions. But these are difficult questions, and difficult to carry out in
fieldwork. An article by Thomas A. Burns about the joke cycle "Doing the Wash" exemplifies the problems in this approach as well (1984).

Burns attempts to examine the psychological and social contexts of joke-telling in order to understand what makes individuals tell the jokes that they do. Unlike the studies of jokes by folklorists such as Dundes, Burns looks closely at the lives of the joke tellers with whom he worked, including "fairly full background data on each teller with respect to key aspects of personality development, the individual's version of the joke, his social use of the joke, his comments on what made the joke humorous, his commentary on the characters' behavior and the symbols in the joke, and a sampling of other favored jokes in his repertoire." This information was gathered through life history interviewing as well as "checks on reliability" through interviews with close friends of the tellers (51). His focus is not the "total personality of the tellers . . . [but] the domain of psychosexual development since it is this broad area of personality that is germane to our study" (52 emphasis added). We can assume that he picked this area because the joke's humor lies in the euphemism "doing the wash" for sexual intercourse. What he investigates, primarily, is the teller's relationship with his parents (one in which the emotional connection between father and son is hampered by a "protective-Mom complex"), his success at the "roughest" sports, his comfort level with his masculinity, and his opinion that female genitalia are unclean (53-59). Burns makes statements such as: "While Tim has tended to adopt a dominant male attitude in these relationships, his conduct and sexual progress in them seems to have been largely normal. . . . The fact that Tim is successful in asserting himself and in manufacturing for himself the male image he desires means to us that Tim is coping well with his self-doubts" (56).

Are these statements that folklorists are qualified to make? And even if they are, is this our role? Not only is Burns attempting amateur psychology in the name of folklore, but he is doing so from a traditional male model of psychology, a model in which the male who is in control and who is aggressive is the ideal. Are there other ways
to approach this material that are more appropriate for folklorists, that challenge instead of accept unquestioningly the male-model of psychology that Burns has followed?

There are other important questions to be addressed. For instance what social values do people gain or have reinforced when they are told such jokes? Should the area of interest for folklorists be in the individual psyche or is our realm more about the values expressed within folklore materials that speak for the larger culture, even while we may focus on one tradition bearer? While we may each have different, and interesting, reasons for telling the same joke, and we may each find different meanings in the same joke, is the role of the folklorist to micro-analyze individual tellers or to consider the role of folklore within groups? Answers to these questions will, of course, differ among folklorists depending on their purposes. However, the examination of traditions of dominance that I am suggesting requires a broader analyses than the work of folklorists such has Burns offers.

A 1970 article by Henry Glassie offers another example of the examination of the repertoire of one person. This article, entitled "'Take That Night Train to Selma': An Excursion to the Outskirts of Scholarship," traces the evolution of one folksong over a period of two years. Glassie made repeated visits to upstate New York to visit musicians such as songwriter Dorrance Weir and published an article in some ways typical of folksong scholarship of the time: he compares words and stanzas added, substituted, and removed each time Weir performed the song. This article was written at a time when folklorists were beginning to broaden their studies—they were moving away from merely gathering texts and their variants into exploring the contexts in which they were performed. Therefore Glassie's article also contains a biography of Weir, the social context of his performances, examples of his repertoire and the sources of the songs within it, and the external causes of the changes that the song went through. While he includes details about Weir's life, he does not attempt to psychoanalyze him as does Burns his joke-teller.
What is atypical about this song and therefore this article, however, is the textual content. The song, "Take That Night Train to Selma," advocates violence toward Blacks and Italians and eventually celebrates the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Glassie's article is a mixture of treating this song as though it were any other creative expression, and discussing the disturbing content. While Glassie may not devote enough of this article to the discussion of the racist content of this song, in the context of the lack of scholarship that dares to go even as far as he did--either in the time in which it was written or since that time--this is a very important article.

In his discussion of Weir and the song "Take That Night Train to Selma" Henry Glassie pays special interest to the racism of Weir as well as the role of the various audiences for whom he played this song. Glassie places Weir's personal racism within the context of his life experiences--being surrounded with racist attitudes and struggles with poverty and competition for jobs with nonwhites--almost to the point of defending him. As for those who frequently heard and even requested the song, he notes that the song "was acceptable to his audiences, too, because they had a hand in its composition" (29). Audience reaction played a large role in the retention of new stanzas, and subject matter was often incorporated into the song by specific suggestions from audience members. Glassie states:

As it grew Dorrance regarded it more and more as a comment on race relations and its content became increasingly anti-Negro. . . . His audience, further, maintained a broad control over its content which acted to prevent it from becoming a totally personal statement and to keep it acceptable; specifically, his audience rejected the most stereotypic and directly offensive of the stanzas . . . because, on the whole, his audience was less prejudiced, less violent, than he. (30)

While I do not agree with Glassie's judgment of the particular stanzas referred to above as "less offensive," nevertheless his discussion remains an important one and provides
insight into the dynamics of racism in a social setting. He points out that many of Weir's friends/audiences were those with more education and less race prejudice than Weir himself, yet these people were able to find this song humorous when in a group of others who accepted it. "To those who agreed with his prejudices, the song was acceptable as a statement of shared attitudes--an expression of culture. To those who did not hold his prejudices, its acceptability lay in the fact that in all contexts the good humor of its presentation outweighed its specific message" (29). My guess is that the folklore of dominance is often transmitted under similar conditions.

Carl Wilhelm von Sydow's concept of active and passive tradition bearers ([1945]1965:231) can be applied not only to the "texts" of folklore but to the content of folklore, the values that underlie this content. While many might share the racist assumptions of Weir, not all would create or perform such a song, but would encourage others to do so. In addition, many of us have been in situations in which we were uncomfortable with views expressed (whether they be racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, heterosexist, and so on), but not comfortable taking issue with them within a particular social context. Such silence may assume agreement. Glassie's study of "Take That Night Train to Selma" provides important first steps toward an understanding of how dominant ideology is expressed in both active and passive forms.

Glassie ends this article with comments on "the failure of the folklorist [as well as those in other disciplines] in studying only the parts of culture he wants to study," pointing out that "some of these areas are hard to travel, some are staggeringly repulsive, but until they are studied our generalizations about both America and culture and the programs based on those generalizations can be correct and workable only by accident" (53-54). It is especially disappointing to note, then, that Henry Glassie later regretted publishing this important article.

At the beginning of his 1982 book Passing the Time in Balleymenone, a lengthy study of an Irish community, Glassie states, in reference to this article, "As a young
professional I had published a paper that conformed to academic norms and dutifully cleared a patch of intellectual new ground, but it offended the man I wrote about and lost me a friend. Friends are worth more than books," (1982:11). With this passage Glassie acknowledges a major problem for folklorists who wish to study the folklore of dominance that I am suggesting we must. What folklorists bring to the study of these materials that is different from other scholars are the specialized tools and abilities to gather information in the field and examine them with the understanding of the multiple contexts and issues involved. At the same time, as I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Four, folklorists are acknowledging their responsibilities to their "informants" more and more. How then do we work with groups from whom we can gather folklore of dominance and feel comfortable analyzing it, criticizing it, and publishing our results and opinions?

The same year that Glassie's *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* was published, Richard Dorson wrote the following words which express this dilemma, after discussing the difficulties experienced by Gershon Legman and Vance Randolph in publishing their "obscene" folklore.

In view of these attitudes in scholarly circles, one can perceive how gingerly the folklore consultant [i.e. public folklorist] must tread in counseling the local communities. Furthermore, an element of boosterism must be recognized in these local-folklore-and-oral-history undertakings. The towns, the counties, the ethnic organizations wish to construct a proud heritage and to display it before their constituents and visitors. When the federal government sponsored folklore collecting through the Federal Writers Project during the Depression years, the collectors uncovered interethnic slurs, insults, and demeaning tales which the authorities concealed since publishing such folklore would scarcely contribute to the image of a happy pluralistic society in America. (1982:101)

Though his remarks are directed at the work of public folklorists, the value of which he remained critical throughout his career, they can be read as a warning to all folklorists
who may collect, purposefully or not, folklore that shows a person or group of people in a less than favorable light.

Other folklorists have faced similar dilemmas. Elaine Lawless is the most recent and documented example of a folklorist whose experience with an informant's reaction to her published work caused regrets. In her case, however, this experience led her to experiment with a new ethnographic technique, one she calls "reciprocal ethnography," a topic to which I will return in Chapter Three. Lawless's interpretation of the life of one of her primary informants was markedly different from the woman's own conception of her life. This informant is a woman minister with whom she worked and subsequently wrote about in her book Handmaidens of the Lord (1988). In this work Lawless presents her own interpretations of Pentecostal women preachers and their "call to preach" as coming from their own desires to gain power in an acceptable manner in communities in which women are allowed to have little power. Lawless writes in retrospect, "She says God does it. She says He gives her the strength. She says it is all the joy of her life, not work, because He makes it so. But I tend to ignore what she is saying to me. From my viewpoint, she is her own strength. Self-denial seems appropriate to the picture" (1992:304 emphasis in original). In addition to interpreting these women's lives from a perspective and worldview vastly different from theirs, Lawless ends Handmaidens of the Lord with intensely personal information about Sister Anna: her decision to take her husband back in order to retain her ministry (1992:307). Lawless includes excerpts from letters written to her by Sister Anna in an article published in the Journal of American Folklore about this experience. Sister Anna wrote about her discomfort with Lawless' presentation of her, which she saw as a picture painted of a "Superwoman" who was in charge of her family when in fact, according to Sister Anna, her husband "was certainly the head of our home in every way, and I was the submissive wife as the Bible commands . . . I really have never neglected my family or my home" (Lawless 1992:308).
Elaine Lawless' work is an important example because while her work does not directly tackle those in positions of power in our society, she is looking at the effects of sexism on women ministers and their means of coping with it. In order to attempt the type of folklore studies I am suggesting we will have to determine how to begin to do so, while finding some type of resolution with the fact that our "informants" will most often not agree with our conclusions. How do we investigate the transmission of oppressive ideologies, gaining the trust of informants only to critique their values and beliefs? Is there a way for folklorists to bring their expertise to these topics, without resorting to impersonal, quantitative research methods? Or like Elaine Lawless and Henry Glassie, will we lose our "friends"? Are they our friends to begin with and should they be?

The Urban Legend

In addition to the magic tale, joke, and folksong, there is one final narrative genre of folklore that is important to mention, if only briefly: that of urban or contemporary legend, defined by Jan Harold Brunvand as "stories in a contemporary setting (not necessarily a big city) that are reported as true individual experiences but that have traditional variants that indicate their legendary character" ([1968]1986:165). This genre is an interesting one for discussion because urban legends tend to contain disturbing content. For the most part, however, while they have been gleaned for hidden information about the anxieties of our society, analyses have tended to be—with a few notable exceptions—safe and non-"political." Brunvand is perhaps the most well-known of urban legend scholars, both inside and outside the discipline of folklore, although his work is more important in its cataloguing of variants and attempts to identify traditional motifs and possible origins than for extended analysis. Brunvand does tell us that "modern anxieties often lie behind popular urban legends" ([1968]1986:167), but he
tends to find only safe anxieties in these legends, for instance those related to lack of information about modern technology such as microwaves and tanning beds (1989:26-36). Perusing through one of his works, for example *Curses! Broiled Again!* (1989), one finds a friendly recounting of the serendipitous means through which he gathers his variants, sent to him from all over the world by those who know his work or who read his syndicated column.

Occasionally Brunvand does tackle more difficult issues, such as the cycle of legends known as "AIDS Mary," in which a woman purposefully transmits AIDS to a man she picks up in a bar (1989:195-205). His interpretation of this legend is limited to the most obvious level: fears about the spread of AIDS. He cites several cases of arrest for deliberate transmission, all of which contain a male protagonist; his only comment about this major difference between the legends and "actual cases," is that as the population at risk for AIDS spreads, these legends represent "AIDS for the rest of us" (197). He goes on to list a lengthy collection of variants sent to him and finally quotes from personal communication with Gary Alan Fine, in which Fine made the suggestion that women who tell it may be expressing "revenge against men [for rape]" while men who tell it are expressing paranoia about women's refusal to be controlled (201-202; see also Fine 1987). Neither scholar states what appears the most obvious message of this legend: the dangers of licentious women in particular and of female sexuality in general. While Fine attempts an analysis somewhat deeper than Brunvand's (and to be fair, my comments are based only on Brunvand's report of a personal communication) it is still neglectful of important issues about the transmission of values in our society. He focuses on the meaning for the teller without considering messages meaningful for a larger audience of Americans. This legend and other contemporary legends may contain multiple meanings and messages in need of discussion by folklorists.3

Other folklorists have looked at urban legends, including those similar to "AIDS Mary," and found the expression of other types of anxieties. For instance, Diane
Goldstein has worked with contemporary legends related to the deliberate transmission of HIV, using newspaper reports, court documents, and fieldwork to investigate vernacular understandings of the causes of infection and the relationship of these beliefs to cases in which arrests are made for deliberate transmission (1998). She points out that the criminalization of purposeful infection has focused on heterosexual "victims," those assumed by our society to be less deserving of HIV infection than gays and lesbians. Research such as this takes the interpretation of legends and vernacular belief in new and important directions.

Danusha Goska is another folklorist who looks more deeply at the messages underlying certain cycles of urban legends (1997). Goska discusses "organ theft" legends, within a context that acknowledges that while organ theft may in fact occur, "often under conditions of extreme state or economic coercion," particularly in Third World nations (197), there are other factors involved when these legends are told in the US by young white men. The reading that Goska offers to this cycle of legends is one which considers the "backlash" against advancements that women have made in recent decades, one manifestation of this backlash is men voicing feelings of "victimization."

The evidence supplied by Goska comes in part from men who have told the legend and who were asked for interpretations. Goska received comments such as: "It's about rape. It's about fear of intense violation. Theft of the most intimate thing you have" (198). Although Goska relied on relatively few interviews, made up mostly of students with whom she was acquainted, her methods seem more valuable—or at least valuable in a very different way—than those used by Burns in his investigation of joke tellers. Instead of delving deeply into the life stories of her informants and applying psychological interpretations, Goska asks for the interpretations of the legend by the tellers, and then places them within the context of the larger culture and issues that play a role in American popular culture during the time in which the legends are told. Again,
such as approach may prove more successful in understanding traditions of dominance, although folklorists with other purposes may find psychological interpretations useful.

Another scholar to consider issues within American popular culture is Donna Wyckoff. She looks not at contemporary legend but at what she calls "social narratives" about child sexual abuse, which in her opinion have many of the same characteristics as contemporary legends (1996). The premise of her article is that the social narratives regarding sexual abuse are not really about sexual abuse at all, but about, instead, the fears of dominant members of society in resulting from the perceived success of marginalized groups in gaining socioeconomic power. While she points out throughout this article that she is not saying that sexual abuse does not occur, her language and tone, perhaps unintentionally, imply something very different. She suggests a "continuum of responses to the social and personal dissonance created by worldview disruption," a continuum that ranges from the "religious fundamentalist" version to the "feminist version," and describes what she sees as the uses of these narratives by these groups (370). She also outlines what she calls a "circular process of co-creation" in which the experts learn about sexual abuse from survivors spouting socially constructed narratives, followed by a lack of critical investigation into allegations of abuse for fear of charges of victim-blaming, and finally followed by more narratives which both echo and appear to confirm the earlier narratives, but, in fact, are "based on collected narratives in the first place" (375).

While I would agree with her that the topic of sexual abuse has been used to put forth specific agendas, I do not find validity in her entire argument, or even most of it. There are many other approaches she might have taken to this topic, approaches that would have served to validate the existence of this serious problem in our society, rather than question, while claiming not to question, whether it really is "a sexual abuse 'crisis'" (364). In fact, once sexual abuse began to be talked about (a major achievement for survivors, which Wyckoff invalidates with her reductionist approach), attention in
American culture zeroed in on the cases of abuse that occurred in places other than the home, such as daycare centers. This attention served to defocus the "social narrative" away from the fact that many American families have serious problems behind their doors, and simultaneously supplied an additional source of guilt for women working double time in order to maintain careers while also being responsible for the care of their families.

Wyckoff's perspective is quite different; she states,

> Both those persons whose situations have been fully substantiated, and those whose tales are more questionably grounded in commonly-accepted versions of verifiable reality, employ the same narrative processes when talking about their experiences. In addition, the conceptual frameworks, language, plots, themes, motifs, and evaluative interpretations in both cases often come from the same publicly-available and pre-validated socio-cultural models (365).

If indeed there is a formula in these narratives (and she provides us with no actual narratives), why not apply David Hufford's experience-centered approach to belief to these narratives (1982b)? Following Hufford's logic, perhaps these narratives are similar in structure (if in fact they are) because the model offered in our culture for telling these stories has become the culturally appropriate way to do so; such a model has therefore become the safest option, emotionally, for survivors.

According to Wyckoff, American society has acknowledged that sexual abuse has reached crisis levels and makes it sound as though the circular process of co-creation mentioned above is so pervasive that any one who cries "sexual abuse!" is believed. Yet in my experience working with agencies who are in a position to do something about individual cases of child sexual abuse, this is hardly the case. It continues to be difficult to prove allegations, and even more difficult to see a perpetrator make it to trial.
In Conclusion

In addition to the published work discussed here, there is yet another important area for consideration: the many unpublished papers presented at folklore conferences. Although there may be other factors involved, these may in fact be more reflective of the interests of folklorists than those which actually make it into publication. If we assume (and I think we can) that examples such as the work of Vance Randolph and Gershon Legman, and the special issues of the Journal of American Folklore, New York Folklore, and Southern Folklore are not isolated incidents of difficulties in publishing "ugly" materials, the topics of unpublished papers become even more important for examination.

While I have been unable to conduct a thorough investigation of unpublished papers, and have only at my disposal random years of the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting Program and Abstracts booklet, which of course means I can only go by the titles and abstracts offered, a glance through them provides some examples. For instance: "The Rock and Disco Wars: Race Conflict at Boy's Home (Horan 1987), "The Abandoning Impulse in Human Parents" (Hoyme 1987), and, particularly interesting to this thesis, "Applied Folklore and Applied Anthropology," a paper that apparently contrasts the social change goals of applied anthropology with the goals of applied folklore (Utsugi 1988). In addition

I have not considered here the anthologies that have been published by feminist folklorists in attempts to rectify the lack of attention to women's folklore throughout the history of the discipline (e.g., Greenhill and Tye 1997; Hollis, Pershing, and Young 1993; Jordan and Kalcik 1985; Radner 1993). I will consider them more closely in Chapter Five, primarily because although they are an important contribution to the study of
folklore they strive to celebrate women's folk culture more than they serve to study traditions of dominance as I am suggesting. One exception is Elaine K. Miller's "Politics and Gender: Geraldine Ferraro in the Editorial Cartoons," in which Miller examines the themes that appeared in cartoons about Geraldine Ferraro during the 1984 presidential elections (1993).

While folklorists have done some work in looking at folklore in ways other than the aesthetic-based paradigm traditionally followed within the discipline, there is more work to be done. For the most part, the studies of narrative genres containing ideologies of hegemony and dominance do not directly address what is actually being relayed in the folklore being performed. Folklorists who have looked at this type of folklore have often removed it so far from the performative context (i.e. Dundes and Abrahams) that we can learn little about the role of such narratives in the lives of the performers and audiences. The work discussed in this chapter is only a representative sampling of what has been done and is not meant to be all-encompassing; I do not pretend to have reported on all such works.

In the next chapter I will return to the ideas of cultural relativism, "objectivity," and judgment that I discussed in the first chapter, but I will consider these concepts within the framework of the current and past discourse within folklore circles about approaches to folk belief. I hope to challenge folklorists with examples of belief systems and practices that may force us out of the theories which discourage making judgments about the beliefs of others.

Notes

1 In an alternate reading of this joke, Elliott Oring critiques the assumption that jokes are about aggression at all, much less "harmless" (1992:18). He offers instead his opinion that like other types of jokes, elephant jokes are based on "appropriate incongruity"—they are humorous because of the "perception of conceptually distant ideas that are
'appropriately' linked" (19). His interpretation of why these jokes appeared when they did is quite different from that of Dundes and Abrahams as well; according to Oring, in keeping with his analysis of the basis of their humor, these jokes may reflect the spirit of the "rejection of traditional conventions" that was beginning in the early 1960s, at the same time that these jokes appeared (26-27).

2Although Glassie does not specify the work to which he is referring, it is generally known among folklorists that he is speaking of his work with Dorrance Weir.

3Gary Alan Fine offers a sociological analysis of contemporary legend, a framework that I do not have space to devote to here. See Fine 1987, 1992.

4Goldstein's paper was a part of a panel presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society Meeting in Portland, Oregon, October 28-November 1, 1998. This panel, entitled "Folklore and the Contemptible," also included: Charles Briggs, "Bad Mothers' and the Threat to Civil Society: Narrating Sex, Race, and Class in an Infanticide Trial"; Kenneth George, "Somewhere in a Contemptible State"; and Elaine J. Lawless, "The Failure of Language to Represent the Unspeakable: Women's Narratives of Pain and Violence." This panel presents a clear indication that folklorists are moving away from the aesthetic-based approach that has dominated the discipline.

5My acknowledgments to Larry Danielson for pointing out this important possibility to me.
CHAPTER THREE

Folkloristic Approaches to Sacred Beliefs:
Are Objectivity and Acceptance Our Only Options?

In this thesis I am addressing issues of value judgments: Under what circumstances have folklorists and those in related fields deemed it appropriate to make them? In considering the relationship of objectivity and cultural relativism to the study of folklore, I at first assumed that the study of religious and spiritual belief represented an area which demands acceptance without question. Religious belief systems should be approached for what they are, I thought: sacred. In continuing to think about this issue, however, I found exceptions to this original position emerging—beliefs and belief-related practices which challenged my assumptions of the inviolability of sacred belief. In this chapter I will briefly review examples of recent scholarship concerning approaches to belief and then suggest examples of belief-related practices that necessitate a continued dialogue on appropriate approaches to belief and belief-related practices, as well as our roles as folklorists.

The Study of Belief: Recent Discourse

Edith Turner points out that traditional scholars have not concerned themselves with the true or false nature of the beliefs of those that they study, but merely "study the manifestations that the people they are studying feel to be spiritual in their cultural
aspect, how they originated from these peoples' experiences of living on this earth" (1992:3 emphasis in original). In her book *Experiencing Ritual*, Turner provides an alternative perspective to the study of belief—she describes her own experience with the Ihamba ritual of the Ndembu, an experience different from those of other anthropologists because of her approach (1992). Her approach differs not only from other anthropological work, but from her experience in the 1950s studying this same ritual of the Ndembu with her late husband, Victor Turner. According to Turner: "In this treatment of Ihamba I am taking the statements of the protagonists as truth, and now that I have become accustomed to it, it looks strange when anthropologists do differently" (72). Perhaps because of her approach, she is able to experience the Ihamba as those she studies do--she too is able to see the emergence of the spirit from the afflicted patient.

David Hufford has called for the study of the scholarly approach to belief that Turner criticizes, naming the traditional approach "traditions of disbelief" (1982a). While he is writing specifically about reported experiences with the supernatural, his approach can be applied more widely to the study of religious belief as well. He describes this approach as "a standard skeptical view of supernatural belief—a view that has existed for centuries, probably millennia—namely, that supernatural beliefs arise from and are supported by various kinds of obvious error" or "What I know I know, what you know you only believe" (47 emphasis in original). He details the standard explanations given for the supernatural beliefs of others such as hallucination and illusion and suggests that a more useful approach to the study of belief may sometimes be a "radical objectivity" (48).

In his book *The Terror That Comes in the Night*, he offers a more fully developed treatment of this idea of traditions of disbelief as applied to a specific supernatural experience. In it he suggests an alternative approach to the study of belief that he calls the "experiential source hypothesis" which "holds that the Old Hag tradition contains elements of experience that are independent of culture" (1982b:15). According to
Hufford, such a phenomenological approach takes into account the belief systems of the tellers of belief narratives such as those he looked at, narratives about experiences of the Old Hag.

Gillian Bennett takes up Hufford's call for a study of traditions of disbelief by outlining the arguments of the late nineteenth century between folklorists Andrew Lang and Edward Clodd, calling it an "almost perfect illustration" of the two sides of this debate (1987:35). She relates Hufford's article and this debate to her own fieldwork with the supernatural experiences of elderly women, whose narratives, she says, often contain arguments from the traditions of both belief and disbelief.

Jacqueline Simpson challenges the work of Hufford and Bennett (1988). She first questions whether Hufford's argument that the scholar should suspend both belief and disbelief when approaching the beliefs of others is even possible. She compares work with belief to work with the urban legend and states:

> The acid test, after all, is action. If we really believed that the local Chinese take-away served dog-meat, we would call in the health inspectors and the RSPCA. If we believed the various rumours about muggers and robbers, we would help to spread the panic. But we never do; we just get out our notebooks, and this proves that at heart we are skeptics, though in courtesy we try not to let the informants see it. (13)

Simpson seems to have confused Hufford's point here, acknowledging no difference between suspending belief and believing. Suspended belief does not equal active belief. As Hufford himself points out in a response, it means to neither believe nor disbelieve, to make no judgment regarding "truth," but to simply study the belief as it is presented (1990:22).

Simpson's next point, however, is an important one: "... there are times when our professional skepticism should not remain silent. In my view, folklorists have a
moral duty to use their reasoned disbeliefs in a socially responsible way, to combat the false beliefs, the racist and sexist stereotypes . . . " (13-14). She quotes from a 1959 Presidential Address to the Folklore Society (of Great Britain) in which Dr. Sona Rosa Burstein called for social awareness on the part of folklorists in instances of "dangerous" folklore and briefly cites recent examples of such dangerous lore from studies by other folklorists as well as examples she has observed first hand. Her examples include a riot in Orleans caused by rumors about Jewish trafficking in white slaves and the effects on nearby residents of rumors about Satan worshipping in a specific wooded area. She maintains, "In all such cases, a sceptical [sic] folklorist could do a lot of good if -- a big if-- he or she can gain the public ear" (14). The job of folklorists, she concludes, is to approach our studies with a rational skepticism; we should attempt to understand why people believe what they believe "and respect them more, not less, in consequence" (16). Although the basis of her argument may be lacking a complete understanding of Hufford's discussion, her point remains an important one.¹

In responding to Simpson, Diane Goldstein recognizes the import of Simpson's critique of Hufford. However, she argues that Hufford calls "for the separation of criticisms of belief into two classes, those about agents and those about processes" and maintains that "our focus as folklorists is on the belief and not, at least initially, on the phenomenon itself" (1987:65). In regard to Simpson's statement that if we truly approached beliefs with the skepticism that Hufford suggests we would be moved to action, Goldstein argues that disbelief could be said to call for the same degree of need for action as belief. Perhaps most importantly, Goldstein points out that folklorists may be able to do the most good by attempting to understand how belief works, remembering that our worldview is not necessarily the best one, and therefore by acting as mediators between belief systems (65-66). She concludes "We cannot solve conflict by setting ourselves up as authorities on objective reality. . . . We need not be neutral about agents but we must be neutral about processes if we are to understand why people believe what
they believe" (66). This point is one that has been an important thread throughout this thesis and a point to which I will return in regard to belief later in this chapter.

David Hufford responds to the critique of Jacqueline Simpson as well. He states that although she presents an argument that claims to challenge his, he is in fact in agreement with her. The point at which the "apparent paradox" lies is in the "implicit meanings of Simpson's terms" which Hufford views as reflecting the very same scholarly approach that he critiques in his article, specifically the meanings of terms such as "rational" and "skepticism" (1990:20-22). Hufford also makes a distinction between judgment of belief in the supernatural and oppressive beliefs such as racism. He states that because we know, and can prove, that racist assumptions are untrue we can and should speak out against them. However, if we speak out against ghosts without the same degree of rational proof informing our statements we are not only speaking without adequate supporting evidence but abusing our credibility in speaking out against racism as well. Hufford concludes that it is the job of the folklorist to know his or her place in the "division of labour," studying the beliefs themselves, while "psychiatrists and psychologists study the hallucinations to which some of those beliefs may refer, and parapsychologists study ghosts themselves" (28).

Other folklorists have contributed to the discourse on appropriate approaches to the study of belief. Leonard Norman Primiano argues that we must recognize not only the differences between belief systems, but the differences among believers within the same tradition of belief as well. He suggests a recognition that we each have our own unique "uniculture," which he defines as "the personal discourse which we all carry on with ourselves as self-aware beings" (1995:49). Primiano is addressing the dichotomy that has been used in viewing religion (folk vs. official) to the detriment of the valuation of folk religion; he is also suggesting that the term "vernacular" religion be applied to all forms of lived religion. His idea of uniculture provides an important point of departure
for the study of beliefs that may require value judgments, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

In Chapter Two I referred to Elaine Lawless' work with women ministers and the repercussions she experienced after critiquing the lives of Pentecostal women ministers. In *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries Through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography*, Lawless (1993) explores, utilizing what she terms "reciprocal ethnography," the lives of women ministers in mainstream denominations. She presents a different kind of ethnography, one that "seeks to humanize the ethnographic endeavor. It seeks true discourse, both among the participants and between the participants and the ethnographer" (59). Lawless is not setting out to study belief *per se*. Rather she is attempting to look at the lives of women ministers and the struggles they face as women in a patriarchal religious system. She is, therefore, making a judgment about the belief system in which these women work and live.

In many ways Elaine Lawless pushes beyond the generalizations of past scholars through her approach of reciprocal ethnography, as she presents the voices of the women ministers more clearly than a traditional ethnographic study would have allowed. Because her approach provides the reader with the knowledge of the process she used in the production of this book--one in which the women were involved *nearly* throughout--we might read her book with confidence that we are reading something very close to "the truth." After all, not only are we presented with the life stories of these women in their own words, but we can also read what appears to be a transcription of the ongoing group discussions about the presentation of their lives and ideas. Yet whose truth are we reading? Lawless is quick to admit that no matter how much input the women had, it is still she who has written the book.

While this approach offers much to the study of belief, it by no means answers many of the questions being asked here. Had Lawless chosen to experiment with reciprocal ethnography with the Pentecostal women ministers whom she was working
with prior to *Holy Women, Wholly Women*, she would have had a very different book on her hands—if she would have been able to come up with a book at all. The women ministers that she worked with in *Holy Women, Wholly Women* were mainstream ministers with ideological worldviews similar to her own. Her approach was possible for this reason, and I can only guess that it was no accident that she chose these women for this very reason. Reciprocal ethnography seems to be useful in limited fieldwork situations: those in which the researcher and the researched are close enough in worldview to make such collaboration possible. The situations I will discuss below would not be cases in which it would be useful.

The most recent addition to this discourse on approaches to belief is Barre Toelken's article in the *Journal of American Folklore* in which he describes his reasons for the destruction of the Yellowman tapes—recordings of one man, Yellowman, performing traditional Navajo narrative and song over a thirty-year period (1998). Toelken carries this discussion beyond a call for objectivity or suspension of belief into a powerful call for a consideration of the native point of view as primary. From his experiences and those of the Yellowman family, Toelken concludes "that folklorists stand to learn more and do better work when scholarly decisions are guided by the culture we study, even when taking this course causes disruption in our academic assumptions" (1998:381). In this statement Toelken is advocating for the assumption by folklorists that the beliefs of those we study are to be not only respected but also accepted and treated as truth.

In the circumstances in which Barre Toelken found himself I find it relatively easy to concur with his argument. The tapes posed serious dilemmas for Toelken. For instance now that Yellowman has died, Toelken says, "my tapes now contained the voice of a dead man, and many Navajos—though certainly not all—avoid any interaction with the dead" (383). In addition, many of the narratives are to be told only at certain times of year; Toelken wonders what will become of this restriction once he too is dead and
unable to control the use of these tapes. The Yellowman family believes that the recording of these myths has had serious consequences in their lives. Because of these factors, Toelken made the decision to destroy the tapes in order to avert future catastrophes. He states, "The objective scholarly stance is, presumably, that we are not obliged to share in the worldview of those we study; indeed, we should resist their influences in order to maintain our objectivity. . . . But objectivity is seldom possible, even in the best of circumstances" (384). But what if it is not the consequences of the scholars' involvement with belief that causes harm, but the belief itself? Are there times at which folklorists must approach belief from the opposite end of the spectrum and, as Simpson suggests, attempt to educate against a belief that the researcher has concluded is false or dangerous?

The role of belief in justifying or transmitting practices that are injurious to certain groups is a difficult one for folklorists to approach, for many reasons. I will now turn to a discussion of one example of a practice that poses a dilemma for folklorists, based as it is in a system of beliefs, female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is only one of many issues that require folklorists to continue to examine assumptions about the study of belief. Many approaches have been taken toward this topic; not all of these approaches have fully considered the complications of this practice and the fact that the beliefs that support it must be addressed and not the practice alone.

Female Genital Mutilation: A Dilemma for Folklorists

An example of an issue that challenges the way that we approach belief is the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), both a religious and cultural practice. I hesitated in using female genital mutilation as my primary example here because of fears
of the implication that only non-Westerners, those who were considered by past scholars to be "primitives," have beliefs and practices that require careful thought. In a critique of Alice Walker's novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), about a woman who has undergone FGM, Emmanuel Babatunde points to the way in which Walker has portrayed African life as barbaric, while in civilized American life healing can be found (1998:18-19). While I do not agree with all of Babatunde's critique--some of which is closer to personal attack--I certainly agree that this issue must be approached with care. It cannot be presented as though Western theorists have the answers and need to give them to the Africans and Middle Easterners who participate in this practice, or any other. Our culture, too, has belief-related practices that need careful examination and we must keep this fact in mind whenever we look at the cultures of others.

I have chosen it as my primary example because it has been such a controversial issue in recent years, has been presented by some as a simple issue that requires judgment and immediate action, and because it is a practice recently outlawed in Western countries, including the US. The most extreme forms have been outlawed in African countries such as the Sudan and Egypt as well (Gordon 1991:6). Before speaking specifically to the beliefs that underlie this practice and the relevance of it to folklorists, it is important to define my terms and provide some brief background information about this practice.

Genital mutilation is referred to by several different terms, some of which describe the type of FGM that is being referred to. The primary types of FGM include: 1) *circumcision* or *mild sunna*—removal of the prepuce of the clitoris; 2) *modified sunna*—removal of the clitoris, in whole or in part; 3) *clitoridectomy excision*—the removal of the clitoris as well as the labia minor, in whole or in part; 4) *infibulation pharaonic circumcision*—the removal of the clitoris, labia minora and the labia majora, in whole or in part, as well as the stitching together of the remaining skin, leaving a hole the size of the straw or sliver of wood inserted to inhibit total closure of
the wound. Infibulation may also include the binding together of the legs for the period of time needed for healing. Other variations occur within specific cultural groups. In its least severe forms, however, FGM "is anatomically equivalent to amputation of the penis" (Toubia 1994:712).

Other terms used by outsiders to describe FGM may in fact denote the ethical stance of the user of the term. Just as it is difficult to "objectively" approach the topic of FGM, there is currently no blanket term for the various practices that would satisfy those who insist on an "objective" term. Both female circumcision and clitoridectomy, for instance, are often used to refer to any or all of these practices. Obviously the term clitoridectomy used in this way can be reductive, in that it does not acknowledge the even more drastic damage that can be done (as if removal of the clitoris is not drastic enough). The term female circumcision equates this practice with that of male circumcision as practiced in the Western world, a practice that is not nearly as severe and does not carry the same health risks. Female circumcision implies a hygienic procedure, carried out under sterile circumstances; FGM is not always carried out in this manner, although it is now more than it once was, particularly in urban areas. The same is true for the term female genital surgery (as used by Babatunde 1998 and others); most often when we think of surgery we think of these same sterile conditions (Babatunde 1998:13). Further, the term surgery "distances the reader from the painful trauma involved in the traditional process of physical alteration" (Babatunde 1998:13). Female genital mutilation, used as an umbrella term for the types listed above, calls the practice what it is, a practice that leaves women mutilated for life, assuming they survive. Opponents of this term feel that it "prejudices the issue by introducing the notion of a deliberate and premeditated intent to do harm" (Babatunde 13). In using this term, therefore, I am putting into practice the ideas behind this paper. Faced with a choice between female circumcision female genital surgery and female genital mutilation, neither term "objective," I can only choose female genital mutilation.
The practice of FGM in varying types continues throughout parts of Africa: from Egypt south as far as parts of Tanzania, east throughout nations bordering the Red Sea and down through Somalia, and west to parts of nearly all the western Africa nations such as Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria (Lightfoot-Klein 1989:32). It is practiced as well in parts of the Middle East, in countries such as Yemen and several Gulf states (Saadawi 1980[1982]:33). While it is prominent in Muslim countries, it is thought to predate the Islamic faith and is not mentioned in the Qur'an (Lightfoot-Klein 1989:27; Bullough 1976:219) and in fact does not occur in 80% of the Islamic world (Gordon 1991:8). It also occurs among non-Muslims, including areas that have been able to retain native belief systems and those converted to Christianity.

According to medical anthropologist Daniel Gordon, "Once the data on medical complications and side effects of female circumcision are laid out, it becomes impossible to ignore the challenge these pose to . . . cultural relativism." Gordon goes on to note that while anthropologists have failed to report the often severe risks to women's health caused by FGM, medical writers have not addressed the cultural meanings of the practice and the accompanying beliefs, and finally that FGM "can be seen as a compelling test-case in cross-cultural ethics [in] medical anthropology" (1991:4, 13). In response to Gordon's views, other anthropologists state a clearly more conservative opinion on the role of the anthropologist. According to other sources, anthropologists should only "provide cultural perspectives on it, offer a sophisticated analysis, and describe the forces for change in various cultural contexts" (Gruenbaum 1996:456).

Female genital mutilation and the ethical questions the practice raises seem at first to apply much more directly to anthropologists than folklorists; after all, American folklorists primarily study those closer to home than the areas listed above, although this alone is of course not the sole distinction between our two fields. However, instances of FGM in this country are growing, despite the fact that the US made the practice a felony
in 1996, and at that same time allocated federal funds toward education of immigrant
groups about the dangers of the practice (Kassindja 1998:520). In addition, in 1996 the
Bureau of Immigrant Affairs granted political asylum for the first time to a woman,
Fauziya Kassindja, fleeing her home country of Togo in fear of FGM (Kassindja 1998).

As folklorists continue to work with immigrant populations, the relevance of this
issue becomes strong indeed. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates
that 168,000 girls and women in the US had either undergone FGM or were at risk for it
in 1990 (as cited in Hollander 1997:246). Folklorists will increasingly come into contact
with practitioners of female genital mutilation, if they have not already. Therefore
thought must be given to how to handle it. Are we to simply ignore it when we come
across it? To treat it as a "cultural" practice, one with which we should not interfere?
Should we attempt to educate populations with whom we work about the dangers of the
practice and our opinion of the fallacy of the underlying beliefs? Should we go so far as
to report them to authorities for violating American law?

It is difficult to generalize about the specific ways in which FGM relates to
particular religious belief systems because different groups have differing religious
beliefs, origin myths, and rationalizations about this practice and why it is necessary.
These reasons include beliefs about dangers of the clitoris to men and to children during
birth, that women with intact genitals have insatiable sexual appetites, and that genitals
not properly mutilated will grow to enormous size (Lightfoot-Klein 1989:38-41;
Kassindja 1998). In Muslim societies, many authors have noted, supporters of the
practice cite religious teachings as the source of the practice. Yet, these same authors
note, the Qur'an provides no direct reference to the practice (Gordon 1991:8, Lightfoot-
Klein 1989:42). In addition, Nawal el Saadawi, the former Egyptian Director of Public
Health, notes that the Prophet Mahomet spoke out against the practice, saying, "If you
circumcise, take only a small part and refrain from cutting most of the clitoris off . . . The
woman will have a bright and happy face, and is more welcome to her husband, if her
pleasure is complete" (1980:39). I have as yet found no further investigation by researchers into this seeming contradiction, and think it would be an appropriate area for folklore research.

The relevance in terms of this thesis, however, is that the practice is based in rational systems of belief, whether we deem it right or wrong, and is deemed necessary by those who practice it. So how are we to judge it and who are we to take on the role, as Goldstein points out, of "authorities on objective reality"? I believe that there are ways that we can do so. But I must first reiterate that this is not as simple an issue for folklorists as it may be for others. Feminist activists such as Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar ([1993] 1996) approach this issue in a simplistic manner, as a practice that violates the human rights of thousands, if not millions, of women and therefore a practice that must be stopped through education and legislation. While in some ways it is just that clear, for many folklorists—in part because of our fears of imposing our Western ideas on others and therefore appearing imperialistic—it must be examined more carefully. Emmanuel Babatunde argues that while "any cultural practice, and circumcision is an example, that impairs the natural ability of any sex to realize its potential fully—whether intellectual, physical, or emotional—ought to be abolished" (1998:21) the way to do so is not, as has been done, to "politicize" the issue (12). This is an arguable point for, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, folklorists have acknowledged that many issues are inherently political. Female genital mutilation is such an issue. I believe that there are several possible ways to approach this issue, not all of them adequate.

Stanley Tambiah maintains that, in addressing the commensurability of cultural belief systems, there can be no clear-cut relativist or anti-relativist standpoint. Rather, he believes, when cultures are compared, and degrees of "rationality" are considered, there can be one of three outcomes:
comparison is possible—even in a partial way—and a judgment of true/false, or superior/inferior is possible; comparison is possible but the phenomena compared are truly relative or alternatives of the same standing; thirdly, no meaningful comparison is feasible in our present state of knowledge, because the two phenomena in question have such narrow bases of agreement or shared space that they are better treated as distinctive configurations ([1990]1995:130).

Tambiah provides examples in which this approach plays out quite logically, but practices such as FGM are not so simply categorized. Depending on which justification is examined, and which cultural group is being considered, the appropriate category may change. Even when we put all questions of "morality" and human rights aside, it can be easily shown, for instance, that many of the beliefs about women's bodies pertaining to FGM are untrue; a few of the most obvious examples include: the clitoris will harm a baby during delivery, the clitoris interferes with menstruation, impregnation, and the birth of a child, it can cause impotency or even death for men who come in contact with it. Even the belief that women's sexual desire is fully destroyed by this practice has been disproved by studies that show that not all women report devastating affects of FGM on their sexual response and ability to achieve orgasm (Lightfoot-Klein 40-41; Toubia 1994:714).

In addition, the health risks inherent in the practice, which vary dependent on the type of procedure carried out, challenge the belief in the importance of the practice. Several authors point out that the problems that are a direct result of FGM—such as fatal hemorrhaging and fatal shock at the time of the procedure, chronic urinary and menstrual blood retention (particularly, but not only, in cases in which infibulation has been performed), chronic urinary tract infections which if left untreated can lead to death, vulvar abscesses and cysts, and so on (Gordon 1991:6-7)—are not believed, by the women themselves, to be related to it, because the procedure is believed to be harmless (Gordon 1991:6) or even that it will improve the health of girls once it is performed (Lightfoot-
Klein 1989:39). Therefore, evidence from women both within these societies and in other parts of the world who are not genitally mutilated prove that these are beliefs that are biologically and medically untrue, thereby placing FGM in category one of Tambiah’s possible outcomes.

Yet, the Dogan and Bambara of Mali, for example, maintain that in order to differentiate between the souls of boys and girls circumcision must be performed on both genders.

When human beings first arrive in the world, they are both male and female and possess twin souls. The boy’s "female soul" is in the prepuce, the female element of the genitals, and the girl’s "male soul" is in the clitoris, the male element. From the moment of birth, the Bambara child is inhabited by the Wanzo, an evil power which is in his blood and skin, and a force of disorder within the individual. The Wanzo prevents fecundity. The prepuce and the clitoris, seats of the Wanzo, must be severed to destroy the malefic power. (Epelboin and Epelboin 1979:28, as quoted in Lightfoot-Klein 1989:38)

While the specific aspects of this belief related to fecundity can be disproved, the general idea of twin souls and the existence of the Wanzo cannot. These are unverifiable, unfalsifiable beliefs. The mythical justifications for genital mutilation among the Dogon and the Bambara could therefore be placed in the second category, that of relativity to beliefs in other systems about the soul and the existence of evil. Doubtless, the justifications of other peoples offer similarly complex issues of categorization. Therefore Tambiah’s approach to commensurability is not a helpful tool for examining female genital mutilation, because of the complication of multiple justifications for this practice.

William Westerman approaches the issue of cultural relativism with the opinion that we cannot "question cultural relativism when most of the destructive forces of the world don’t accept it yet" and proposes a three-part solution that he readily admits is "not absolute" (1995:318). Addressing North American folklorists, he first reminds us that
while we are professional observers we remain participants in American society: "Yes, we can be cultural relativists, but that does not mean abandoning our pursuit to shape our own culture around our own morals and ethics" (319 emphasis in original). Secondly, he says that while "we may not want to impose our values on groups or individuals with less clout in our society than we have . . . we don't want to clamp down on any group or their beliefs. But we can certainly 'clamp up,' treat powerful institutions with moral scrutiny . . ." (319).

His third point is less clear. He states that we should adopt a position of "antisubordination, if not as a cultural universal, then as a goal for our own society" (320). We are to accept, out of a respect for cultural difference, that cultures other than our own may contain "some forms of subordination" that we can have no part in addressing. "After all [he states parenthetically], sadly, if we abandon empathetic fieldwork altogether we risk losing a great deal of insight it can bring against certain groups we need to know very much about" (320). It is not clear in Westerman's statements exactly what types of subordination he would include as those we must simply ignore, and therefore it is not possible to infer how his suggestions, as he intends them, directly address female genital mutilation.

Taken together these three points offer little in the way of a solution for how to go about studying topics such as female genital mutilation. In his discussion of working from a standpoint of human rights, he points out that anthropologists who have stood up for the rights of those with whom they work have focused on "saving the lives of individuals persecuted by their governments for their beliefs, or on the cultural preservation of endangered peoples" (322). He asks what would occur if scholars were to also stand up for the economic rights of others. The social justice model with which he works, including his three-point "solution" to moral relativism issues, leaves out many issues, such as gender. And while he ambiguously implies an exception in cases of "violence," he makes no allowance for the various interpretations of what constitutes an
act of violence. Westerman seems to be stating that the only way to avoid anti-relativism and judgment is to examine oppression as it exists in the socioeconomic and ethnic group to which an individual folklorist belongs. This model insinuates that there can be no universal concept of human rights—or specifically that folklorists in the West have no right to try and create one. While I do not necessarily think that this is what Westerman intends to imply, his discussion nevertheless suggests such a conclusion.

Leonard Primiano's idea of uniculture suggests yet another approach to cultural relativism. Just as each of us have our own system of beliefs and none of us lives our religion in terms of "official" religion, those within cultures that practice female genital mutilation cannot be assumed to each approach the beliefs and the practice in the same manner. The idea of cultural relativism does not take into account the variations in belief and practice implicit in lived religion. We know, for example, that women and men within such cultures are beginning to speak out against this practice, as well as the beliefs that underlie it, while more and more parents are refusing to mutilate their girl children (Kassindja 1998, Lightfoot-Klein 1989, Walker 1996). So not only is this practice being questioned from an etic viewpoint but from an emic one as well.

With this in mind, is it possible to adopt a position of cultural relativism in regard to this issue? All other issues aside, we cannot dismiss a practice as "cultural" with the knowledge that not all members of a society have the same perspective on it. The beliefs that support female genital mutilation are being challenged by members of such societies and, despite Emmanuel Babatunde's argument, the issue is being addressed as a political one. In addition, as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, when we apply Primiano's concept of uniculture to the idea of cultural relativism, we must also take power differentials into consideration. Those in different positions of power in a given society approach different beliefs and practices from perspectives that correlate with their positions. Examining a practice such as female genital mutilation within Primiano's framework, therefore, suggests that we can in fact make judgments about this practice.
In Conclusion

There are many other such examples which suggest that neutrality and acceptance of belief cannot be the only options for folklorists. If these are the only options, not only are folklorists keeping themselves back from important work that they might do, as pointed out above by Jacqueline Simpson, but many of us may also end up being forced to reject areas of study simply because we cannot approach them with either of these frameworks. Is this a desirable state of the discipline?

Turning briefly to American culture, the recent growth of the Christian "men's movement" brings up many questions for me as a folklorist. Fieldwork in this area would provide an important counterpart to the research of folklorists such as Elaine Lawless (although of course not a direct counterpart unless the men in the communities that she worked with were studied). While she has looked at the lives of women ministers within a patriarchal religion and the ways in which such women negotiate the complexity of their lives and jobs, fieldwork which examined the men in conservative Christian groups would provide insight into the other half, the dominant half, of this belief system. Yet, if I follow the advice of folklorists such as Barre Toelken, can I even look at this issue? If I cannot adopt a perspective of acceptance am I to refrain from such fieldwork?

For example, the recent events sponsored by the Promise Keepers provide an excellent ethnographic opportunity for folklorists interested in contemporary forms of the expression of Christian belief. This group was started in 1990 by the former University of Colorado football coach, Bill McCartney, and has been sponsoring events, mainly at football stadiums, across the country since 1991. Attendance at these events seems to have peaked in 1996, when over a million men paid the sixty dollar admission fee to attend the events in various parts of the country; since then the numbers have slowly
begun to dwindle (Doerr 1998:30). The goal of these male-only events is to inspire men to become better fathers and husbands at a time when the American family is perceived to be in crisis (Gilbreath 1995). According to author-turned-Promise Keeper, Ken Abraham, the "basic premise" of the Promise Keepers can be found in the Old Testament:

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (Numbers 23:19 NIV). Simply put, God keeps his word. (1997:33)

With only this information, I might easily attempt to approach an ethnographic study of a Promise Keepers' gathering without concerns of objectivity and judgment. However, the Promise Keepers are a major spiritual movement that explicitly excludes women, except, as Abraham points out, when they are needed as volunteers; their gatherings are for men only (1997:100). While a major goal of the Promise Keepers is to encourage men to turn for spiritual guidance to their home-church ministers, apparently they are to turn only to male clergy, as evidenced by the exclusion of women from the Promise Keepers' conference for ministers in Atlanta in 1996, attended by 39,000 ministers (Doerr 1998:30).

In addition, McCartney has been quoted as referring to homosexuals as "an abomination," a viewpoint that cannot be assumed to be absent from Promise Keepers events (Doerr 1998:30). On the other hand, the Promise Keepers have attempted to reach out to men of color. Yet the organization is viewed by other religious leaders as doing so "without a commitment to overcoming institutionalized racism" (Doerr 1998:32; see also Promise Keepers and Race 1996). Furthermore, at the 1997 gathering on the mall in Washington D.C., ninety percent of the 500,000 men were white, according to The Washington Post (as noted in Doerr 1998:30).
How can I approach an ethnographic study of such an event, though expressive of the spiritual belief of a group of people, neutrally, much less from a perspective of acceptance (not to mention the fact that as a woman I would not be allowed in to the event to carry out the ethnography to begin with)? Abraham goes on to discuss the feminist critique of the Promise Keepers' attitudes about women, quoting from some of the literature published by the Promise Keepers themselves, in which husbands are told to take their power back in their homes: "Don't misunderstand what I am saying here. I'm not suggesting that you ask for your role back, I'm urging you to take it back" (106 emphasis in original). This same publication, written by Promise Keeper speaker Tony Evans, describes American society as "a nation of 'sissified' men who abdicate their role as spiritually pure leaders, thus forcing women to fill the vacuum" (107).

These are the kinds of ideas spoken about at Promise Keepers' events. At a Promise Keepers' event in Oakland, California, speaker Ed Cole, president of the Christian Men's Network in Dallas, is quoted as saying, in part: "Act more like a man! Why? Because when a man acts like a child it forces his wife to act like his mother. And when a man forces his wife to act like his mother, she does two things for him. She makes decisions for him and she corrects him. Now there's a problem with that!" (Spalding 1996:261-62). The fact that tens of thousands of men are filling stadiums all over the country, described by one writer as "a combination Monday Night Football and old-time tent revival meeting" (Spalding 1996:260), is a fascinating topic for me as a folklorist, yet, again, should I feel obliged to study these events from either an objective perspective or one that accepts their ideology?

The area of belief is a complicated one, focusing as it does on the most sacred and personal aspects of people's lives. Consequently folklorists have adopted a respectful approach, attempting to refrain from judgment. The scholarship in this area, with the exception of scholars such as Elaine Lawless, suggests that folklorists may have been
forced to stick to safe topics, those that do not call for decisions about moral judgment. In so doing are folklorists compromising their studies and their own beliefs?

In recent decades folklorists have become more actively "political," primarily by acting as advocates for those with whom they study. In the next chapter I will discuss how they have come to acknowledge that their work is in fact political and the changes that have come about as a result.

Notes

1Related to Simpson's argument, is Phillips Stevens, Jr.'s editorial essay "Satanism: Where are the Folklorists?" in which he argues that folklorists must become actively involved in educating people about the fallacy of the "Satanic conspiracy" legends, because of their resemblance to legend cycles which, historically, led to violence, such as the witch-hunts (1989).

2Sunna is an Arabic word for "tradition" (Lightfoot-Klein 1989:33) or "duty" (Gordon 1991:4). This term therefore identifies types of FGM practiced in Muslim countries. The types of FGM as described here are adapted from Babatunde 1998:13-14; Lightfoot-Klein 1989:33, but are consistent in the other readings I have done regarding the types of FGM.

3According to Daniel Gordon, pharaonic circumcision is "attributed in folk legend to the time of the ancient Pharaohs (hence the name)" and is the oldest of the types of FGM (1991:5).

4There has been considerable debate in recent years about the necessity of male circumcision in Western societies. It would be interesting to compare the religious basis of male circumcision with that of FGM, both of which are viewed as issues of health and hygiene, even though they originated in religious belief. For instance, according to one writer, "There is no public health purpose of circumcision. Circumcision is a religious ritual, which has overflowed onto millions of innocent victims. The so-called 'medical reasons' (in actuality, excuses) that have been advanced are, from a public health point of view, ridiculous" (Denniston 1997:90).

5In fact Donna Minkowitz wrote an article for Ms. based on her attendance at a Promise Keepers' event dressed as a man, the only way that she could experience it first hand (1995). Because of the accepted ethical standards of folklorists, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, this would not be a possibility and therefore such an ethnography would not be possible for a woman folklorist.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Politics of Culture:

The Emergence of a New Discourse on the Role of the Folklorist

In recent decades many scholars have recognized that the study of folklore can never be considered a neutral undertaking. This recognition has been followed by an increasing awareness of the possible implications of our work through the discourse around the "politics and poetics of cultural representation" (Clifford and Marcus 1986:viii). Greater attention has been paid to the impossibility of neutral observation, documentation, and preservation, and folklorists have begun to actively work as advocates on behalf of those with whom they work. Thus far this thesis has focused primarily on the work of folklorists in academia. However, issues related to the politics of culture and to the exploration of traditions of dominance apply to both folklorists working in academia and in the public sphere.

The 1993 three-issue volume of *Western Folklore* entitled *Theorizing Folklore: Toward New Perspectives on the Politics of Culture* is reflective of the growing discourse on the politics of culture now current in folklore studies. Published in honor of the anniversary of the landmark work of performance theory, *Towards New Perspectives in Folklore* (Paredes and Bauman 1972), this volume addresses where the field has been and where it is going, as perceived by various folklorists. The guest editors describe the contents in the following manner: "The essays in this volume trace the ways in which folklorists have reshaped the discipline in the last two decades by contesting the
boundaries between traditional and contemporary, oral and written, authentic and
touristic, and, especially, the category of 'folk' itself" (Shuman and Briggs 1993:109).
According to Roger Abrahams, a contributor to both New Perspectives and this special
volume of Western Folklore,

Carrying out fieldwork among marginalized and often disempowered groups made us aware that we were in the position to work within the system to better represent our informants in dramatizing the historical and social inequalities of their situation. If there was something new in New Perspectives, it was the address of so many of the participants to the way in which the power structure of the West might be problematized by revealing the integrity, vigor, and beauty of the cultural practices of those among whom we were working. (1993:380)

Clearly, the past twenty-five years have been a time for examining the politics of cultural representation.

In this chapter I will focus on two primary themes that have emerged within the field of folklore regarding the inherent political nature of the field: the scholarly discourse around issues of the ways in which our work, both in the academic and public spheres, is intrinsically political, and the role of the folklorist as advocate. In addition I will briefly discuss some of the debates that have taken place around these issues.

Folklorists offer a range of opinions about the directions the field should take, from calls for explicit political action to demands to limit the scope of the discipline to the more traditional aspects of our studies. While the many voices of folklorists may not be in agreement, it is clear that the path has been paved for the examination of traditions of dominance.

First, however, there is an important question to address: What exactly does it mean to be "political"? While there are obviously varying ideas within the field, defining "political" seems to be absent from the scholarship that I have investigated. The Random
House College Dictionary defines "political" strictly in relationship to a political party (1982), a definition obviously far too limiting to be useful here. In general terms, William Westerman uses "political" to mean placing folklife studies into a context of real life, thereby including topics such as violence and poverty. In his call to "study politics and political belief as we study other forms of belief" (1995:47) he defines political belief most basically as "belief about the allocation and negotiation of power differentials" (92). Along with Westerman, in this chapter I will use "political" to refer to the implicit or explicit expression of beliefs about the way that the world is and/or should be, in terms of power relationships. As feminists have made clear, the personal is political as well, acknowledging that relationships in the private sphere as well as the public involve issues of power. In this chapter, I will be dealing with the work of folklorists that expressly offers an examination of folklife and folklore genres that not only take into consideration the existence of power differentials, but speak or act in a way that makes a call either for change or the maintenance of the status quo.

The Political Nature of Folklore Studies: A Discourse of Varying Perspectives

As discussed throughout this thesis, from the time of Herder folklorists have made judgments about who and what to observe, document, and preserve—acknowledged or not. Works such as David Whisnant's All That Is Native and Fine have demonstrated the effects of such judgments, and the fact that our work is always political in nature (1983). While folklorists have been involved in political work in the implicit manner discussed by Whisnant, the positions of folklorists such as Richard Dorson, Benjamin Botkin, and others, discussed in Chapter One, show that political motivations have also been more explicit. Archie Green is perhaps the most obvious of folklorists to view his work as
political while such an explicit agenda was still frowned upon by many in the discipline, particularly Richard Dorson. His extensive support and lobbying efforts on behalf of the creation of the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress are well-known. In his opinion the passage of the American Folklife Preservation Act which, in part, created the Folklife Center, meant that "Congress asserted value in American diversity and in the decentralizing of federal cultural efforts" (1989:26).

According to Amy Shuman and Charles Briggs, "Revealing one's place in the political fray was often seen as antithetical to contributing to the scientific study of folklore and as leading other practitioners to question one's scholarly authority. Thus while cultural politics has played an active role in the discipline since its inception, critically examining the relationship between the cultural production of folklorists and its cultural politics is a pressing need . . ." (1993:126). One form that the discourse on the politics of folklore scholarship has taken has been the examination of the political implications of the work of folklorists, both past and present. In addition, folklorists and other ethnographers have, with the acknowledgment that there can be no neutral observer, begun to approach their work reflexively, often stating clearly that their intentions are directly political in nature.

Opinions on the topic of folklore and politics range from the conservative position of Gregory Hansen to those such as David Whisnant and William Westerman, with most folklorists possibly falling somewhere in between. As I mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, Hansen clearly believes that folklorists should not be involved in any sort of cultural critique, but should instead remain the last bastion of celebration in what he views as a sea of academic fatalism. He states, "I like knowing that there are experts on Irish folklife. . . . nineteenth-century ballads. . . . boat building in the Ohio River Valley. . . . " (1997:100). Continuing the legacy of Herder and Dorson, Hansen seems to want to continue what Philip Nusbaum calls the folklorist's "search for 'warm and fuzzy' communal settings" (1998:93). I think that the folklorists who have made the
decision to investigate the politics of culture would agree that the types of studies championed by Hansen are important, but are not the only areas of interest to modern folklorists. Hansen does not seem to agree with the growing number of folklorists who believe that all that we do is political; we can no longer hide behind a wall of seeming neutrality even if we choose to gather ballads and other folklife materials.

In *The Ribbon Around the Pentagon*, Linda Pershing combines reflexive ethnographic writing and a desire to work toward change through her scholarship in her examination of a nationwide grassroots movement, primarily of women, to create a Ribbon of fabric panels with which they encircled the Pentagon in a form of nonviolent protest against the nuclear arms race. She clearly states her reasoning for choosing this grassroots movement for her study, and discloses her personal bias: she is deeply concerned about the same issues that the participants of the Ribbon campaign were (1996:7). Her book includes a chapter devoted entirely to the history of the development of nuclear power and weapons, her purpose for which is seemingly twofold. While it serves as an important backdrop to understanding the context within which the Ribbon campaign was born, it also is clearly her means of getting across what she views as the urgency of this issue.

Similarly, Elaine Lawless, in *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries Through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography*, states that there is "at least one political mission in this work--the goal of making the reader cognizant of what I continue to recognize as blatant discrimination against women in religious institutions in this country and elsewhere" (1993:5). Throughout the book she focuses on the difficulties these women encountered in becoming ministers, both individually and collectively, based on the fact that they are women in a traditionally male-dominated field and patriarchal religion.

In the work of folklorists such as Pershing and Lawless, we can see folklorists seeking out projects that will allow them to present their own ideological views within
the context of folklore studies; through their scholarship, such folklorists are acting as activists for political causes. In a further example, William Westerman describes his discovery of the code of ethics of both the Canadian and National (American) Association of Social Workers—a discovery that led to the orientation of his dissertation (1995:5-8). In these codes of ethics, the commitment to social change is explicitly stated, prompting Westerman to ask:

What happens when we set aside our residual paradigm of folklore as "a historical science," now that objectivity is suspect and science perhaps not our only goal--or not an attainable one? . . . What is our paradigm for the twenty-first century . . . ? What happens when we instead think of folklore, if only temporarily, only hypothetically, as a "spiritual attitude" (Navarro del Aquila 1952:325), or as a method of informed action in the world? What happens when we consider the meaning of the words "the worth, dignity, and uniqueness of all persons as well as their rights and opportunities" [per the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics, 1988] for folklorists, and what happens when we start our intellectual investigations from that point of departure? (8)

Although Westerman does not do so, it is interesting to compare the codes of ethics he discusses with the American Folklore Society's "Statement on Ethics: Principles of Professional Responsibility," approved, after lengthy discussions, in 1987 and published in The American Folklore Society Newsletter in 1988. This short statement is primarily made up of five types of "responsibilities": to those studied, the public, the discipline, students, and sponsors. Reflecting the concerns current in the discipline about the politics of representation, it states that "In research, folklorists' primary responsibility is to those they study. When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Folklorists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare of their informants and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied" (Executive Board of the AFS 1988:8).
Nowhere is it stated that folklorists have any type of responsibility for social change of any kind, and in fact, to "protect" our informants carries with it the implication of the maintenance of the status quo. The primary responsibility to informants, while necessary in the current approach to folklore studies, makes investigation of traditions of dominance a difficult task. This responsibility is indeed the reasoning behind Henry Glassie's regrets concerning his article ""Take That Night Train to Selma': An Excursion to the Outskirts of Scholarship" (1970). Westerman suggests that it may be time for a new approach to folklore, one that acknowledges "The fact that large numbers of the American population are currently sleeping on the streets . . . the fact that violent racist attacks are a common occurrence for Southeast Asian immigrants in this country or that indigenous peasant leaders in Guatemala are often arrested and tortured--these are not examples of 'expressive' behavior, but are examples of the political folklife of our day " (95). We must also look, however, not only at the lives of those with these experiences, but also at the conditions which foster such experiences. Yet as I stated in Chapter Two, the responsibility of the folklorist to her or his informant may be the greatest obstacle to the study of traditions of dominance. If our "primary responsibility is to those we study" how can we, if we follow this code of ethics, gather and critique traditions of dominance? In such cases our analysis of these traditions will certainly run counter to our informants' perspectives on their own folklife and will therefore not represent them in the light in which they may wish to be seen. This statement, therefore, implicitly defines the role of the folklorist as one of celebration; I will return to critiques of the AFS Statement of Ethics that are very different from my own later in this chapter.

Folklorists who specialize in material culture studies have also begun to acknowledge that neutrality is not possible. One issue that has been addressed is the aestheticization and de-politicization of the material culture of groups with whom folklorists work. Because folklorists have traditionally worked from a perspective of aesthetics, the concept of folk art has dominated material culture studies. Yet how are
we to judge the material culture of others and decide what is and is not "art"? Are there instances in which labeling objects as "folk art" can be reductionist? In his examination of Hmong textile art, for instance, Dwight Conquergood examines the ways in which the presentation of the *pa ndau*, or story cloths, in the West has de-politicized the nature of this textile tradition. He states, "Instead of a radical artistic medium that confronts and challenges Western categories of art—to say nothing of our complicity in imperialism and domination—the story cloths are tamed within the 'folk art' category, rendered more innocent, less threatening" (1992:236). These story cloths depict the violence and terror of the lives of Hmong refugees in detention camps; to view them as merely art, describe them as "charming" (237), and ignore the context in which they are created offers a serious act of injustice to the makers of the *pa ndau* and their experiences.¹

Similarly, Suzi Jones describes her experience working with traditional artists native to Alaska ([1986]1992). Among the issues she raises about the difficulties of collection and representation of material culture across cultures is the common inclusion of the sacred or ceremonial objects of others in "folk art" exhibits, her primary example being the clan hats of the Tlingit Indians (253-261). Calling such objects "art," Jones states, "may have the effect of neutralizing the original purpose of the object... inhibit[ing] belief in a community" (261).

Aestheticization is by no means an issue that folk art scholars alone must address, as is obvious by the attention to this issue in the special volume of *Western Folklore*, though the authors are not in total agreement on the relationship between aesthetics and politics (see Kodish 1993 and Brenneis 1993). The concept of folklore as "verbal art" has perhaps been used by folklorists in recent years to a point approaching the aestheticizing and depoliticizing of narratives, particularly those of personal experience with pain and trauma. For instance, when we focus on personal experience narratives as performance or when we attempt to transcribe them in an ethnopoetic fashion, are we listening to what is being said or merely looking at narrative structure? Folklorists must not only question
when to "politicize" folklore studies but when to make efforts not to de-politicize, through aestheticization, their subjects and objects of study as well.

Connected to issues of de-politicizing and aestheticizing is the more general issue of representation, mentioned above in reference to the American Folklore Society's Statement on Ethics. The idea of representation has been earnestly explored by folklorists in various contexts, including festival production, museum displays, and other public programming areas, as well as in academic contexts. No matter how hard we listen to and attempt to speak for groups with whom we work, that which we put forth will always be our voice and our words. Susan Ritchie's 1993 article "Ventriloquist Folklore: Who Speaks For Representation?" raises issues of representation that may make some folklorists uncomfortable, issues that are nevertheless important to the work of both academic and public folklorists. She defines the ventriloquism of the folklorist as "that which assumes it is really possible to give the folk their own voice within the pages of our own articles, books, and films" (1993:367).

The attempts to give voice to the voiceless remains the primary goal of folklorists involved in the politics of representation. Unlike Ritchie, most folklorists are not questioning whether or not we should be making attempts to speak for marginalized groups, but rather how to do so. For instance, according to William Westerman, "In studying situations of conflict and power . . . we need to establish a methodology for hearing and understanding the points of view that are not dominant, the 'voice of the voiceless" (93). Ritchie is in fact going beyond even the critique of the "neutral observer" and questioning one of folklore's most cherished ideas—that we can speak for the voiceless, those with little or no power. I will return to her argument in more detail in Chapter Five.

Also related to representation issues is the viewing of groups as homogenous entities, as pointed out by John Roberts in regard to studies of the folklife of African Americans, in which he states that the discipline of folklore has "historically made it
extremely difficult to recognize intra-group diversity" (1993:158). Specifically, Roberts addresses the approach to the Black community that fails to take into account that there are always differences dependent, for instance, on class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Folklorists are making attempts to avoid generalized statements and to view members of groups as individuals with their own distinguishing qualities and outlooks. Elaine Lawless addresses the difficulty in this task: "As the thesis for this book has slowly and dramatically emerged, I am increasingly disinclined to offer any kind of summary [of common patterns in the lives of women ministers] and have to be continually on guard against drawing generalizations" (1993:127). Michael Ann Williams makes a similar statement in her study of the use of space in the vernacular architecture of southwestern North Carolina: "The most difficult task in analyzing the experiences of those I interviewed was to characterize their shared experience without discounting the unique aspects of each individual's life" (1991:12). She points to an important distinction, as well, between the experiences of men and of women and their methods and abilities to describe the use of space in their homes.

Folklorists of the 1990s are asking hard questions of the work that we do. The idea that our work can have drastic implications in the lives of the people with whom we work, that we are dealing with issues of power and control, is one that must continue to be addressed by folklorists. In all that we do, we must consider these issues, while at the same time not allow ourselves to become paralyzed by them, for we have the abilities and skills to do important work. Perhaps one of the most important areas that folklorists are moving into, but also possibly one of the most dangerous because of issues of representation, is the area of advocacy.
The Folklorist as Advocate

The realization of the political nature of our presence in people's lives has also brought with it a desire on the part of folklorists in both academic and public spheres to act as advocates for the groups with whom they work. Advocacy brings with it the dangers of other types of representation because the folklorist is attempting to take the concerns of the "folk" to a larger audience in order to create a change of some sort; advocates typically attempt to speak for those without a voice in the power structure of society.

While early folklorists focused on preserving traditions—looking for the "spirit" of the folk, attempting to save and get back to earlier and "better" ideas and moralities—in recent years folklorists and others in related fields such as historic preservation, anthropology, and environmental conservation, have adopted a new term that better reflects the work that they intend to accomplish: cultural conservation. Implicit in this term is the dynamic nature of tradition; the goal of the cultural worker is not to attempt to halt time, to force tradition-bearers to resist the natural changes of time. The term cultural conservation came about in the early 1980s, with a report presented to Congress by the Department of the Interior and the American Folklife Center regarding "intangible cultural resources" (Loomis 1983; Hufford 1994:3). This movement attempts to incorporate ethnographic methods into attempts at the conservation of intangible cultural resources (Hufford 1994:3). Important questions about the politics of such work have been raised by folklorists involved in conserving culture.

For instance, Miriam Camitta examines the role of folklorists as advocates involved in attempting to conserve the intangible elements of culture, in her discussion of the neighborhood with which she worked in Philadelphia (1988). The Franklin Bridge North neighborhood has been physically and socially transformed several times in order to make room for three separate highway construction projects. Camitta discusses the
dilemmas of cultural specialists attempting to work within historic preservation legislation—such as environmental resource impact statements required by the national Environmental Policy Act of 1969—which does not adequately take into account intangible resources (207). While Camitta discusses the role that a folklorist might have played in improving the review process for the community involved, she also argues that there are ethical issues at stake in folklorists' involvement in such projects. If a folklorist is involved in an environmental review process, and the only alternative acceptable to the community involved is a "no-build alternative," what is the role of the folklorist in terms of mitigation? Camitta states, "Current preservation legislation equates mitigation with salvage or documentation that allows objects to be rescued from the steamroller or preserved in an archive on film, tape, or in drawings. This sort of preservation clearly has greater value to society at large than to an endangered community" (215). If "the ultimate aim is to eradicate the place," she asks, should a folklorist remain involved? If a community is destroyed through such building projects, are we to remain involved for the sake of the "value to society at large" of documenting community folklife before it is gone?

The work of Steve Zeitlin and the organization Citylore: The New York Center for Urban Folk Culture is similar in that the purpose of one of their recent projects was to actively attempt to conserve "endangered spaces" in New York City, as identified by members of communities with whom this group works (Zeitlin 1994). According to Zeitlin, "endangered spaces" are "local establishments and neighborhood institutions with a demonstrable significance in community life" (216). The work of this project has included not only the documentation and exhibition familiar to folklorists but also such direct activism as mediating with landlords, attracting media attention, and testifying in court, in order to save community businesses, local landmarks, and ethnic social clubs.

Ethnic social clubs are in fact one of the primary examples given by Zeitlin in regard to Citylore's work with endangered spaces. Social clubs serve as important
sources of support for immigrants in urban communities, but are often operated illegally due to a lack of resources needed to meet city building codes. After a devastating fire in a Latino social club in New York City resulting in the death of eighty-seven people, the city ordered that these clubs--some four hundred--be shut down. Representatives from Citylore served as advocates for these clubs by testifying to a commission set up by the mayor about the social and historical contexts of the clubs. They argued that the city should, instead of shutting them down, be helping these clubs to meet the building and fire codes.

The work of conservationists such as Mary Hufford, Miriam Camitta, and Steve Zeitlin is clearly political. Shuman and Briggs note, "many folklorists have implicitly understood themselves to be 'champions of the folk' whether promotion involved documentation or advocacy" (1993:129). So while the examples given above are not completely new territory for folklorists, they are distinctively different in that direct and acknowledged advocacy is being carried out. By "championing the folk," folklorists are clearly making judgments, taking sides on issues that may involve many perspectives. In addition, the work of cultural conservationists is clearly political in the types of programs they may help to develop. Countries such as Korea and Japan offer examples that cultural conservationist and folklorists in the U.S. must be careful not to emulate, such as the lifetime designation of "Living National Treasures" (see Yang 1988, Williams 1990). Both similar to and different from our "National Heritage Award" program, the "Living National Treasure" designation, which is a lifetime designation with restrictions placed on the recipient, has been seen to severely control the traditions of the designees, and of Japanese and Korean societies in general by, in effect, dictating appropriate cultural expression. For this reason cultural conservationists, as well as other folklorists, walk a thin line between encouraging and institutionalizing traditional expression.

In fact folklorists have become involved in speaking out against the attempts by others to institutionalize folklife. One example is the repeated attempts by square dance
associations to see a bill passed designating the square dance as the national folk dance. The American Folklore Society has consistently and successfully lobbied in opposition to such a bill, including testified to Congress against it. The following is excerpted from the 1988 Resolution adopted by the Executive Board of the AFS:

The designation of an "American" or "national" folk dance serves neither those Americans for whom square dancing is a traditional form of entertainment and social activity, nor those whose cultural background and upbringing have nurtured a preference for other types of traditional dance. America's cultural diversity may be directly related to the ability of our communities to practice in a spirit of freedom and mutual celebration those customs and arts which are uniquely their own. The identification of one dance as the "American folk dance" undermines the true meaning of the word "folk" and the degree to which all Americans may equally and proudly use the word to draw attention to the traditional aspects of their own lives and communities (Camp 1988:4).

This example shows a willingness of many folklorists to become involved in political issues when the valuing of one tradition over another is a stake.

David Whisnant points out that the entire concept of tradition involves assumptions in need of examination, and the existence of "good" and "bad" traditions calls for the entering of folklorists into social criticism and activism. In his view this need is an immediate one:

[I]f our emerging cultural analysis and agenda are not fused to and integrated with a larger progressive agenda for social, economic, and political transformation, they will not be worth spending time on. Why? Because the relentless movement of the reactionary juggernaut in the years ahead will make transformation such a preeminent structural necessity that any oppositional cultural agenda not centered on transformation will be self-marginalizing (1992:186).
In response to questions similar to those raised in this thesis regarding ethical relativism and the judgment of traditions, Whisnant offers a two-step test. Traditions must be tested, he says, for their "serviceability within the cultural group itself, and the test of generalizeability beyond it" (188). In other words, does the tradition under consideration benefit the community in which it exists or the larger human community? As his example, Whisnant cites the traditional Southern emphasis on private property rights as it affects environmental destruction. In his opinion the traditional attitude that allows landowners to alter the environment in ways detrimental to others is neither beneficial to the community or the larger society, and is therefore open to judgment (188). While this point is certainly a controversial one, and one full of complicated issues, Whisnant's opinion is clear: Traditions are to be judged from both within and without the culture in which they are practiced.

Many other folklorists are now working as advocates in diverse fields. Marjorie Bard, for instance, began a non-profit organization to work with homeless persons, in order to use her folklore training for social change (1994). According to Bard, not only can the relating of personal experience narratives help the teller emotionally, but such narratives, unlike the purely quantitative research that has been conducted, can affect the listener as well. Through the relating of personal experience narratives about homelessness, decisions about relevant programming and services can be directly influenced.

Another area of advocacy being explored by folklorists was highlighted in a recent issue of *Southern Folklore*, the education of medical students about cultural diversity issues related to traditional beliefs about health and healing (True 1997). In this special publication, the authors describe the issues being addressed by a course in diversity and medical education currently offered at the University of Pennsylvania (Hufford 1997). This form of advocacy represents a new direction for folklorists as "cultural liaisons" for marginalized groups with little power in determining the quality of
the medical care that they receive. Significantly, this program makes a point, while providing education about issues specific to ethnic groups, to clearly state that generalizations cannot be made about the belief system of the person seeking medical care, based solely on his or her inclusion in a particular group (Hufford 1997b:120). The work being done by David Hufford as well as Bonnie O'Connor, Erika Brady, and Diane Goldstein may become a model for folklorists working as advocates not only in the medical field but also in other areas in which a liaison is needed between marginalized groups and those in positions of power. The fields of social work, law, and mental health services, as well as additional fields suggested by Westerman—public policy, economic development, and human rights (1995:382)—are among the many areas that might benefit from the unique perspectives of folklorists.

**Varying Viewpoints:**

*Disagreements Among Folklorists in Regard to Political Action*

Not all folklorists agree that the work done by folklorists should be considered "political." The American Folklore Society's Statement on Ethics is one issue that has been a source of debate, focusing in part on the question of whether the Society should make statements on behalf of the field as a whole. Although this debate is reminiscent of the one among mid-century anthropologists, the issues and the voices of descent are quite different in nature.

The Statement on Ethics of the American Folklore Society was, in fact, adapted from a similar statement by the American Anthropological Association, approved in 1971 (Santino 1986:8). In a letter to the editor of *The American Folklore Society Newsletter*, Elliott Oring argues against such a statement on several points. In his view the very fact that the statement was borrowed "line for line" from the AAA implies the unwillingness
of Society members to "confront issues directly" (1987:3). According to O ring a statement on ethics will have no power to influence the behaviors of individual folklorists and may instead create divisions among members of the Society. If there is to be such a statement, in O ring's opinion, it needs to be "brief, general, broad, and philosophical," but more importantly, he writes (in the spirit of folkloristic research), that "Our ethics should be primarily a performance, not a text" (1987:4). It would be of interest to hear what "general, broad, and philosophical" points O ring thinks that folklorists could all agree on. However he provides no examples of what such a statement would look like.

Despite my above discussion, many folklorists, of course, do not view themselves as advocates. David S. Cohen of the New Jersey Historical Society, for instance, took offense to the quotation from the AFS Statement of Ethics discussed above in regard to folklorists' primary responsibilities (1988:3). In his view, by stating that the folklorist's primary responsibility is to her or his informant, the American Folklore Society is requiring the folklorist to act as an advocate. In response, the editor of The American Folklore Society Newsletter, Timothy Lloyd, denied this intention, yet further reinforced the point that I raised above by stating, "[I]n cases of conflicts of interest between folklorists' desires . . . and informants' desires . . . the desires of informants must come first" (Lloyd 1988:3).

Another debate that has continued over nearly a decade in several forums, including The American Folklore Society Newsletter (McCarl 1984, Jones 1985) and Western Folklore (Jones 1991, McCarl 1992), has been between two particular folklorists: Michael Owen Jones and Robert McCarl. This debate has centered around these scholars' differing approaches to occupational folklore and has at its center questions about not only the role of folklorists but about the perceived traditional loyalties of folklorists to certain members of society as well. McCarl has worked with
occupational folklore from the perspective of the workers, while Jones has concentrated on "organizational" folklore from the perspective of managers.

McCarl reminds Society members that,

From the early days of the discipline, folklorists with such varied backgrounds as Dobie and Lomax, through Botkin, Korson, Boatright, Hand, and Green were fieldworkers who went to the workplace and negotiated with workers face-to-face . . . Although not necessarily pro-union, these fieldworkers approached work from the bottom up—the shop floor, the mine shaft, the oil derrick—not from the corporation down. (1984:2)

McCarl states that many folklorists continue with this approach, while others such as Jones are working in direct opposition to it. His argument stems from an AFS publication, *Folklore/Folklife* which includes a section on occupational folklore written by Jones. In McCarl's opinion, because this was an AFS publication, the members of the American Folklore Society are being represented as in agreement with Jones' approach to occupational folklore. According to McCarl, there is a difference between the goals of the workers and those of the managers and folklorists must be aware of whom they are attempting to serve. He interprets the work of Jones as "getting corporate support to study work culture in order to further control the working lives of those on the shop floor" (1884:5).

Michael Owen Jones, on the other hand, argues that, in fact, their approaches are not nearly as far apart as McCarl would have us believe. McCarl's work, he maintains, has similar goals in that he is directing his work at the upper-level administration in order to allow them to better understand the needs of the firefighters with whom he worked (1985). Nevertheless, Jones remains critical of McCarl's perspective:

That McCarl in his Letter to the Editor is willing to freely admit that folklorists "should be mindful of who we are attempting to serve" ("the worker") is chilling, for this commits the discipline to
identifying with one group over another. Folklorists do not and should not serve the interests of one person or group but rather the broader aims of understanding how and why individuals make use of expressive forms in organizational life. (1985:5)

This controversy provides a clear example of the differing perspectives and goals of various folklorists. The issue of whom to work with and who should benefit from our work is clearly political.

In addition, like other fields, folklorists have been forced to address their role in the larger political issues of American culture, and have had to make decisions about whether or not the field as a whole should take sides in political debates. Folklorists such as Elliott Oring strongly oppose steps taken by the Executive Board of the American Folklore Society to represent folklorists on issues of political controversy, such as the initiatives by state and national legislators to make English the official language of individual states and/or the nation (Oring 1991). Other folklorists have different opinions on such topics.

The various views of folklorists on the role of AFS in national politics is exemplified in the late 1970s debate about holding American Folklore Society annual meetings in states which had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. The first meeting around which the controversy surfaced was the 1978 meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah. Interestingly, the 1978 issues of *The American Folklore Society Newsletter*, in updates on the upcoming meeting, make no mention of the debate. It is not until the Summer 1979 issue that it is stated that an unspecified number of folklorists refused to attend the Salt Lake City meeting because of this issue. In 1979 AFS members were polled and voted 301 to 189 not to hold meetings in states that had not ratified the ERA (AFS Affairs 1979:1).

The *Newsletter* includes a summary of the comments written on the ballots of those who voted. Many of those who voted in support of the boycott "rejected the notion
that learned or academic groups (or individuals) could or should be separated from political stands, ethical issues, or 'real life'" (AFS Affairs 1979:1). Those who voted against the boycott, addressed the same issue with opposite results: "Over half (56 [of 99 who made comments]) said in one way or another that they did not want to involve a scholarly group in what they saw as a political issue." Others reasons for not supporting the boycott included that cost and accessibility of the location was of greater concern, an AFS boycott could make little impact on legislators, a boycott would "constitute an infringement on the rights of individual members," and that the ballot itself was a waste of members' money (AFS Affairs 1979:2).

Others are doing work equally as political by attempting to maintain the status quo in both folklore studies and the larger society. Folklorists such as Gregory Hansen are working with an agenda, whether they see it as a political one or not. Another example is Charles Wukasch, who wrote an opinion piece for the *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* in which he complained that definitions of sexual harassment have gone too far, in their inclusion of the telling of sexist jokes. He states that racist jokes are a different matter altogether and should not be told because of the ways that they portray Blacks. He states that "Folklore and political correctness have met, and--I'm afraid--folklore has come out the loser" (1997:128).

**In Conclusion**

Folklorists have become political in many other ways not discussed here. Those discussed in previous chapters are also doing work that is political, such as the editors, contributors, and supporters of the *New York Folklore* special issue on lesbian and gay folklore (Blincoe and Forrest 1993), the special issue of *Southern Folklore* on family folklore (Danielson 1994), as well as the special issue of *Southern Folklore* devoted to
exploration of sex, sexuality, and gender issues in fieldwork (Collins 1990). Folklorists who are working with cultural diversity issues, exploring women's folklore, and working for a more thorough exploration of lesbian and gay folklore studies, are all doing political work in attempting to change both the field of folklore and through it our society.

In a variety of ways, then, folklorists have, in recent decades, addressed the role of the discipline in "political" issues. Inevitably, some folklorists must also confront our potential roles in the cessation, rather than the perpetuation, of traditions of dominance. In order to make change in the communities with which we work, we cannot continue to focus only on groups in marginalized positions in North American society. Our role can move beyond acting as advocates, attempting to speak for the "voiceless," into attempting to understand and halt the traditions which perpetuate their marginalization. As I will discuss in the final chapter, there are many issues, however, which will have to be considered in order to begin this task.

Notes

1In like manner, the arpilleras made by women in Chile as a form of resistance against the military dictatorship under which they live, depicting scenes of violence as well as honoring those that have "disappeared," cannot be viewed as depoliticized "folk art" (See Agosin [1987]1989).
CHAPTER FIVE

"Beyond Celebration": Folklore as Cultural Critique

The work of folklorists has focused primarily on celebrating unique folk cultures by bringing them to the attention of others within academia, through scholarly papers and publications, as well as in the public sector, through folklife festivals, educational programming, advocacy, and so on. In this chapter I will tie together the argument that I have presented, and suggest that it is time for folklorists to move beyond celebration and begin to look at the possible ways that a paradigm of celebration may in fact conflict with the goals of those folklorists who are attempting to make change, and the benefits of investigating traditions of domination as they exist within our society.

In 1988 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett published an article entitled "Mistaken Dichotomies" which looks at the relationship between academic and public folklore. Although this article was a controversial one (see Abrahams 1993b:393-94), she makes a relevant point rarely made by folklorists, expressed, however, within a problematic argument about the roles of public and academic folklorists. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states that folklorists have lost sight of "the larger enterprise--the emancipatory potential of folklore as praxis, that is, how what we do as folklorists can be of socially redeeming value in ways that go beyond celebration. . . [to] address the root cause of the marginalization of particular groups and cultural practices" (142). Although she is using this point as a criticism of public folklorists and what she views as their control by--
through their dependence on—government funding, and goes on to state that academic folklorists alone might fill this need, her point could better be taken by folklorists working in both the public and academic spheres. It is unfortunate that this point, as far as I can tell, has been buried in the controversy over this article.

Folklorists such as Joan Radner (1993), Susan Hollis, Linda Pershing, and M. Jane Young (1993), and Margaret Mills (1993) have written works in which they call for the application of feminist theory to the study of folklore. Reflecting on F.A. DeCaro's 1983 bibliography, *Women and Folklore: A Bibliographic Survey*, as the first move toward feminist folklore scholarship, at a time when folklorists were concentrating on the folk group, Mills states:

[T]he implications of the move to create a scholarship of gender did constitute a radical departure in theory, finding difference and contest not across communal boundaries but at the center of the smallest human groups, in the liminalities of the heterosexual dyad and a procreative nuclear family, a sort of discovery of subatomic forces and particles in units whose atomistic coherency as a cultural unit had previously been assumed. (1993:175 emphasis in original)

The experiences of women, according to Mills, introduce important insights into the concept of group membership and dynamics. Such a perspective offers understanding of the dynamics of folk groups not only as applied directly to women, but an understanding that can be applied to all the groups that we study. While the call of feminist folklorists has been heeded primarily by folklorists interested in studying women's folklife, I wish to argue (with these feminist folklorists) that concepts within feminist scholarship can be applied more generally to our discipline.

The work of feminist philosopher of science Sandra Harding provides one example of issues raised by feminist theorists that are relevant to the study of folklore (1987, 1991). Concepts suggested by Sandra Harding such as "studying down/up" and
"traitorous" research are helpful in evaluating the type of work being carried out by folklorists and in thinking about the kinds of directions I am suggesting folklorists might begin to move.

Harding's discussion of the integration of race, class, and gender into scholarly research and the need for a reconceptualization of race and racism, apply as equally to folklorists as to those working in science and technology, the field critiqued by Harding. She argues that "race must be reconceptualized as a relationship rather than a 'thing' or inherent property of people" (1991:214). Similarly, bell hooks writes,

Anyone witnessing the current cultural and academic focus on race has to notice the new way race is being talked about, as though it were in no way linked to cultural practices that reinforce and perpetuate racism, creating a gap between attitudes and actions. . . . Words like Other and difference are taking the place of commonly known words deemed uncool or too simplistic, words like oppression, exploitation, and domination (1990:51).

Folklorists' work with marginalized groups, while important, does not address race, or other categories upon which oppression is based, as a relationship. In the ways that they have worked to celebrate the folklife of African Americans, immigrant populations, women, and others, folklorists have conspicuously left out the reality of relationship, focusing instead on the celebration of difference. If the relationships that create and maintain racism are not addressed, "cultural diversity" discourse will remain as superficial as it all too often is. Instead of focusing on relationship, the cultures of others have often been presented in isolation and exoticized rather than adequately represented in a context reflecting the reality of those whose folklife is being celebrated.

By reconceptualizing racism, Harding states, we "can avoid the tendency to suggest that women and men of European descent are colorless and recognize instead that women and men of European descent also bear race. [We] can avoid the tendency to
'study down' by focusing only on women of color when race is the issue" (1991:215). Likewise, hooks notes that the discourse on race infrequently includes discussion of whites as having a racial identity, and that a "critique of whiteness" is needed in order to eradicate racism (1990:52). The concept of studying down, meaning that we look to marginalized groups to understand their marginalization, instead of looking at traditions of dominance that perpetuate their marginalization, is an important point for folklorists, and is also relevant in terms of class membership. William Westerman points out, "class is conspicuously absent from much contemporary folklore scholarship, as if 'poor' were the last taboo word that could not be written in our academic journals" (1995:21-22). By researching primarily marginalized peoples, while also ignoring much of the reality of their lives, do we inadvertently contribute to the structure of marginalization? Does celebration, in fact, create a subliminal message of "see, they are not that oppressed"? I am not suggesting that we abandon all research projects and public sector programming for and about marginalized groups--these are important endeavors, when done in a manner that reflects the growing concerns around the politics of representation. Harding states: "Of course it would certainly be an improvement if people of European descent knew more about people of third world descent... and if we appreciated more extensively the costs of racism and imperialism in their lives in which we are often so complicitous... But 'studying down' is certainly not the only way for people of European descent to learn these things" (215-16).

By making marginalized groups--whether people of color, the rural "folk" who have preserved traditions from long ago, recent immigrants attempting to balance assimilation and retention of their traditions, or women of various races, classes, and sexual orientations--the primary focus of our studies, to the exclusion of those who play central roles of power in our society, are we not merely reinforcing their marginal status? By excluding the folklore of those with power over others from our studies we contribute
to the maintenance of their power. We must begin to "study up," to study those with power and attempt to learn how privilege is learned.

In Chapter Two I discussed Henry Glassie's examination of the evolution over a two-year period of the song "Take That Night Train to Selma"—a song full of racist and white-supremacist sentiments. Along with other aspects of this song and its creator, Glassie discusses the role of the audience in helping to shape the song, controlling the magnitude of racism and violence retained in new stanzas. He points out, for instance, that certain members of his audiences, in other contexts, would not have encouraged the expression of overt racism; seemingly their belief systems were less actively racist than Weir's.

This type of scholarship was not emulated, neither by Glassie nor those who came after him. Though far from an ideal study, his examination of this song and the many contexts involved in its performance and ongoing creation, is an example of the kind of work that folklorists might do in attempts to begin "studying up." While the work of folklorists examining the folklife of African Americans is important, if we study it in isolation, without also studying the racism within which this folklife exists—as well as, as John Roberts points out, the varied nature of individual lives within the "Black community"—how can we expect to make change or even to fully understand African-American folklife (folklives)?

Another such area of research that folklorists might explore is the tradition of violence against women in our society and others. I find it telling that it is women who are the most readily accessible "informants" about the violence against them. An obvious point with obvious causes, this fact nonetheless says a lot about the "studying down" that so often occurs. Those that have less power are simply more accessible to researchers, because they have less power. Study after study on battering focuses on the survivors, providing little concrete information about how the control of women is learned and therefore how real steps can be taken to stop this tradition. Although
women's voices about the violence they experience is of immediate importance, by focusing on them as objects of study we are continuing to place the responsibility for change on their shoulders.  

Violence against women by male partners—including not only physical but emotional and psychological violence—has its roots not in mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, or anger control problems, but in tradition. The term "folk ideas," defined by Alan Dundes as "unstated premises which underlie the thought and action of a given group of people" (1971:96), can be applied to many of the beliefs that support battering. We live in a society in which value is placed on having power over others; combined with this folk idea is our history of treatment of women and children, socially and legally, as the property of the male head of household. Though simplified, these basic facts create a climate in which male violence, both physical and emotional, has become a traditional form of behavior for maintaining control in the family, as well as outside of it. It is also important to note that battering is not limited to heterosexual couples, and that women may also be abusive to male partners. It is estimated, however, that the perpetrator in ninety-five percent of domestic violence incidents is male and the victim female (Department of Justice 1973-77).  

In addition, women who are battered live not only within families, but within many other folk groups with distinct folk ideas. I do not mention these differences here in order to reinforce the misinformed idea that battering happens only, or more frequently, to members of certain ethnic or religious backgrounds—none of us is immune—but to point out that every battered woman's experience is unique, complicated by the many folk groups to which she may belong. The tradition of racism in our society creates a double burden for African-American women who find themselves in relationships with violent men. Black women as well as Latina women may be discouraged from bringing outsiders into family problems and are therefore often unable to seek help from police, courts, and support services for battered women. An African-
American woman might face betrayal of her community by bringing the white law into the family, as well as fear that her partner will be beaten while in police custody.

Speaking out about violence in the black family may gain her only the label of "traitor" (White [1985]1994:xiii).

Religious belief (both church doctrine and vernacular belief) offers another set of ideas that complicate a battered woman's decision-making process. Not only her abusive partner, but her minister, priest, or rabbi may quote religious scripture traditionally interpreted to sanction male violence against wives and insist upon the importance of keeping the family together. For many battered women, leaving an abusive partner also means leaving behind her religious community, because the folk ideas about gender roles may strongly reinforce a man's right to control his wife.

We all participate in violence against women through our tolerance of the traditions that support it, just as we all contribute to white supremacy by not questioning and challenging the traditions of dominance that surround us. While the tradition of violence against women needs to be studied in a holistic and not a genre-centered manner, there are traditional folklore genres to which we can turn in order to elucidate the depth of this tradition and the accompanying beliefs and values in our society. One of the most obvious folklore genres that might be investigated is the proverbial phrase. In an interview I conducted with battered women's support group facilitator Christine Lipson, she pointed out that, early on, a woman may speak to many people about the abuse that she is experiencing, but that the reactions that she receives, many of which express traditional folk ideas about family, may force her to stop such attempts to reach out for help. She said,

They tell friends, family, and they are told 'Marriage takes work' or 'You gotta stay for the long haul' . . . They try to tell and are told 'That's how men are.' Then they get pregnant: 'You've got a family, you've gotta think about this' . . . (Lipson 1998)
We are all familiar with proverbial expressions such as those mentioned by Lipson, although we may not think carefully about the values that they express. Expressions such as "boys will be boys," staying together "for better or for worse," keeping a wife "barefoot and pregnant," and reminders of "who wears the pants in the family" serve to maintain traditional folk ideas. These expressions reinforce, for both the batterer and the battered woman, that his behaviors are accepted by our culture, that she is expected to remain in the relationship, and that the family is more important than the individuals that create the whole.2

We must find ways to "study up" in order to make real change in regard to traditions of domination—but we need to do so within a feminist framework. There have, of course, been studies of violent men, but the approaches that these studies have taken have been primarily psychological in nature. Attempting an analysis of individual men in order to find out what causes violence against women brings us no further to solutions. Because, as I pointed out in Chapter One, the control of women through violence and intimidation is a "Functional"3 part of our social structure, it needs to be understood at a social level, reached through the thorough investigation of the lives of individual men. We must understand the precise sources of messages of privilege in order to reverse them; folklorists have the necessary skills to understand such traditions of dominance.

One important area that has been explored by feminist folklorists is the coding strategies utilized by women in many different situations. In their introductory essay to Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture, Joan Newlon Radner and Susan S. Lanser discuss the ways in which women use coded communication as a means through which to express subversive ideas about the society, community, or family in which they live (1993). They focus on those forms of coding which are "implicit," meaning that the very act of coding must be concealed, making the fact that coding is occurring arguable, and list six types of implicit coding that women may engage in:
appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, trivialization, and incompetence. Similar work has been done with ethnic groups living within a context of domination.

Such strategies of resistance are important areas of study, highlighting the strength of marginalized groups despite the oppression that they live under. Yet, without thorough examination of the conditions that call for such strategies, such a study is incomplete. Perhaps it is assumed, in the case of misogyny, that feminist scholars in other fields have done the important background work and folklorists should, once again, focus only on the celebration of expressive behavior. This is simply not the case. Folklorists must give themselves a great deal more credit for the perspective that they have to offer. William Westerman states, "What about the way patterns of domination and oppression are embedded in the way we live? Not that there is anything wrong with studying resistance, but we are much more ethically comfortable when we can point to resistance than when we have to acknowledge oppressive patterns with which we are all too familiar (e.g., how many studies of domestic abuse have we seen lately, from the perspective of the abused, let alone the abuser?)" (90-91).

As I discussed in the last chapter, many folklorists are currently working toward what they view as the betterment of society. Cultural diversity programming is perhaps one of the largest growing areas for folklorists in both the private and public sectors. The celebration of marginalized groups within the diversity of American society can be viewed both as an important job for folklorists and a problematic one.

Folklorists have done important work with people of various ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, those who are marginalized in our society. Many folklorists, however, are well-acquainted with an equally important area of study, yet one they do not often choose to contemplate, at least not in their scholarly endeavors, the folklife of those with power and privilege in our society. Folklorists who hold race, gender, and/or class privilege could do important work in the investigation of their own cultures and the folklore of dominance that can be found there. As far back as Boas there have been
folklore scholars whose goals included the creation of change through a discourse of cultural diversity. By educating others about the folk culture of particular groups, many folklorists hope to create change through understanding, celebration, and preservation. But are we not in positions (those of us with at least one form of privilege) in which, in addition, we should be attempting to understand and dismantle our own folk culture of supremacy? We have developed fieldwork techniques for studying others and in recent years have examined the political issues involved in this pursuit. We need, however, to begin to look not only at the folklife of marginalized peoples but also at the very folklore that places and keeps them in marginalized positions to begin with. The discourse around the politics of representation, while significant, may be hindering the possibility of important work to be done in the study of traditions of dominance.

Susan Ritchie argues, "folklore's commitment to the disenfranchised has meant a corresponding commitment to what I call ventriloquist strategies of representation, where folklore presumes to speak on behalf of some voiceless group or individual" (366). In her view the approach to diversity is a Western notion in and of itself, and can therefore offer little in terms of change of the dominant paradigm; within such a paradigm representation is a non-issue (370). She borrows from the pro-life movement and their use of the fetus as the "ideal subject for representative want-to-bes," the ultimate symbol of lack of agency: "Whoever claims to speak for the fetus, then, achieves a kind of absolute power" (370-71). Speaking for the politically and economically powerless achieves power not for the powerless but for those who are doing the speaking. As folklorists participate in the discourse about representation, they are not examining their place in the power relationships that they participate in. The representation discourse, according to Ritchie, symbolizes a larger metanarrative that serves to reinforce those in power through "erasing potentially disruptive political difference" (376).

Similarly, bell hooks writes, "We [those on the margins] fear those who speak about us, who do not speak to us and with us" (1990:152). The recent discourse on
difference has meant not only that those with power are attempting to speak for and about those on the margins but also, according to hooks and to Ritchie, by attempting to speak for them and not to them scholars are merely reinforcing their own power.

Sandra Harding argues that we need to discuss "overadvantage," not just "underadvantage" and "underprivilege." She argues that the "social justice" model of making change will not work for this reason: "It does not lead us to think about how some people probably get 'too much justice'--that is, are unfairly favored by social institutions" (1991:216). Well-intentioned folklorists who are currently working for social change within a social justice model are doing just this, attempting to "get more" for those who have less, but failing to question those who have too much. Roger Abrahams' perspective, quoted in Chapter Four from the 1993 special volume of Western Folklore, reflects the norm of the field. He speaks of "work[ing] within the system to better represent our informants in dramatizing the historical and social inequalities of their situation...the power structure of the West might be problematized by revealing the integrity, vigor, and beauty of the cultural practices of those among whom we were working" (1993:380). If our focus remains only on those who are marginalized, if we look at their lives in isolation without looking at how we at the same time perpetuate this marginalization, then we are merely looking at the lack of "justice" in their lives and not considering those who have "too much justice."

Sandra Harding discusses another means of looking at these issues which she calls "traitorous" readings of the society around us (1991:289). This concept is connected to Patricia Hill Collins' notion of the "outsider within," while it may in fact act in the opposite yet similar fashion ([1986]1991). According to Collins, bringing marginalized groups "into the center of analysis may reveal aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox approaches" (36). Outsiders have a unique perspective to offer because of their outsider status. In a similar manner, insiders can act as outsider-traitors by critically examining the traditions of dominance which surrounds them. Folklorists might make
the ideal outsider-traitors, with our specialized skills in fieldwork and our understanding of the dynamics of tradition.

There are many reasons for the reluctance to move beyond celebration within the discipline of folklore. The founders of the field were working with a specific agenda of nostalgia in the hopes of a return to what they perceived as the simple and better days of agricultural life. As the discipline formed in North America, this agenda continued, as folklorists gathered the lore of groups who were perceived as being less "civilized" than the members of the elite white, largely male, class of the collectors. Though unacknowledged, these early collectors were working with a discernible political, anti-modernist agenda. Not only was "ugly" lore avoided, but any type of judgment about traditions of dominance was as well.

In my critique of the work of folklorists and my suggestions that we need to follow new paths of study, I have addressed issues of ethical relativism and how we are to approach making judgments when the need for cultural relativism has been so thoroughly ingrained within our field. Practices such as female genital mutilation and beliefs such as those expressed by the Christian men's movement are but two issues that are relevant to the work of folklorists and yet are difficult to study without "judgment." As Harding states, "it cannot be value-free to describe such social events as poverty, misery, torture, or cruelty in a value-free way. The use of objective language to describe such events results in a kind of pornography; the reader, the observer, consumes for her or his own intellectual satisfaction someone's else's pain and misfortune" (1991:89). To claim objectivity is to take a stand in support of such beliefs and actions. Likewise, William Westerman states,
[T]rying to remain 'neutral' or 'non-partisan' may mean we will merely end up supporting the status quo, closing off avenues and entrees into research areas we want to understand (even if just for sympathetic reasons) and de facto siding against the very people with whom we want to be allied. I would like to suggest--though I'm doubtful I can prove this--that like the social workers whose code of ethics inspired me on this route, there is something we can gain from being openly partisan (1995:102).

Sandra Harding points out that it is when we are viewing the cultures of those who are in a subordinate position that a perspective of cultural relativism is primarily utilized (1991:152-53). When speaking about our peers or others we view as existing on a relatively equal level of power to us, or certainly about those we consider to be above us, we rarely approach them from a position of cultural relativism. As I am suggesting in this thesis, it is time for folklorists to begin to look critically at traditions of dominance within our society, to begin "studying up." I do not mean to suggest that we cannot look at traditions of dominance within non-dominant groups; as I have discussed, traditions such as female genital mutilation are in need of consideration by folklorists. Such examinations, however, must be made with care and with a recognition of the history of the utilization of unilinear cultural evolution and other such theories in the reinforcement of racist stereotypes.

According to Sandra Harding, the approach of relativism that early anthropologists insisted upon was "convenient" for their time as well as their place in the social structure of Western society, as those that they were studying were not vying for any kind of equal treatment in the societies that the ethnographers called home. They were safely far away (1991:155). She quotes economist Samir Amin and his critique of relativism: "It is necessary to pursue debate and not to avoid it on the grounds that the views that anyone forms about others are and always will be false: that the French will never understand the Chinese (and vice versa), that men will never understand women, etc.; or, in other words, that there is no human species, but only 'people'" (as quoted in
In some ways cultural relativism can be viewed as directly related to the paternalistic, colonizing mentality of the era. While on the surface it is seemingly about the avoidance of ethnocentrism, it can also be viewed as a condescending "savages will be savages" stance, particularly when we take into account the varying positions of power of members of societies under study: cultural relativism fails to consider the question "relative to whom?"

The debate between mid-century anthropologists such as Melville Herskovits and Clyde Kluckhohn also suggests the need for a further critique of the idea of cultural relativism. When has this perspective been applied and when should it be applied in the future? Taking into account Leonard Primiano's idea of uniculture, as I suggested in Chapter Three, complicates this question significantly. Were the United States to be studied by a non-Western ethnographer attempting to utilize cultural relativism (and perhaps Functionalism) what dominant ideologies would she or he document? Racism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism—all of these ideologies are dominant in our society. Would this ethnographer assume that because these dominant ideologies are merely the way of life in our country they should therefore be viewed without judgment? Were she or he a well-trained ethnographer, of course, her or his documentation would reflect the multivocality of North American society. Such an analogy forces us to question our assumptions that the oppressive ideologies of other cultures are simply "cultural" and further, that other cultures are somehow made up of many people with a singular point of view. In addition, we—meaning our society in general as well as folklorists—tend to judge the cultures of others when we find that persecution occurs on the basis of ethnic or religious oppression. When such persecution occurs on the basis of gender or sexual orientation we are much more likely to turn our heads, feeling that we cannot judge the practices of others.

Cultural relativism viewed in this way is thoroughly tied to the romanticism that began with Herder and continues into our own era. For many ethnographers, perhaps,
there is a certain romanticism in the study of foreign cultures and their strange ways—whether "foreign" means in another part of the world or simply a subculture within our own. In William Westerman's view, however, the romanticism that has been so criticized has a useful purpose in the study of political folklife as he envisions it: "Anti-romantic analysis throws out the baby with the proverbial bathwater, for in dismissing this attitude, folklorists are also dispensing with the critical potential of the field to envision a better way of life... If folklife studies can be faulted for placing rural survivals at the top of its agenda, the solution is not to abandon the field in search of greener pastures elsewhere" (1994:26).

Yet if we agree with Westerman, we must tread carefully. In any critique and possible use of romanticism we must keep in mind the dangers of romanticism, including discussions by folklorists such as Jennifer Fox (1993). Although I have not attempted to carry out a discussion of the uses and meanings of the word "tradition" within our discipline, it is an important concept to continue to investigate, as Dan Ben-Amos' call to rid our definitions of folklife of the term has certainly not been carried out, and perhaps should not be. As Fox points out, Herder's conception of tradition as the domain of the patriarch continues to influence the perspective of folklorists, as it does the rest of our male-dominated society. Another concept that might be useful to such a discussion is Sherry Ortner's argument of a universal equation of woman with nature and man with culture, and "since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if women are considered part of nature, then culture would find it 'natural' to subordinate, not to say oppress, them" (Ortner 1974:72). In Ortner's woman : man :: nature : culture model, women have been universally oppressed because of their perceived existence in a position closer to nature. Ortner's ideas are interesting to folklorists because, of course, tradition clearly lies within the realm of culture; though clearly an anthropological approach, Ortner's theory offers insight into the concept of tradition as folklorists have perceived it. I quote from David Whisnant's argument on "tradition" at length:
I suggest, in fact, that "tradition" is problematic precisely because it functions so readily as a kind of analytical short-circuit, causing us to gloss over the internal politics of cultural systems (perhaps especially the gender-linked politics), not to raise certain questions, and not to push others as far as they need to be pushed. . . . One could cite numerous areas in which such pushing is indicated . . . the traditional anti-unionism of so many Southern workers; the traditional disregard for the environment; the traditional sexism, anti-intellectualism and political regressiveness of much Southern religion . . . If one sums all of those traditions (and more of the sort) into "heritage," it is clear that we have a good bit of tough-minded self-criticism, reconsideration, and re strategizing to do . . . (1992:187)

As I am suggesting, Whisnant perceives that there are times at which such value judgments should be made and that folklorists are in a good position to make them. As I stated in Chapter Two, however, few folklorists have even begun to look critically at the values contained within folklore, oppressive or not. For instance, Alan Dundes does not apply his discussion of folk ideas to those traditions of dominance that folklorists might study in order to change (1971). Despite his work with topics that other folklorists may regard as taboo, he has limited his discussion of folk ideas to safer terrain.

What I am suggesting will not be an easy task. There are many dilemmas and questions that have kept folklorists from this task and that will, in many cases, continue to do so. First and foremost, we must continue to question the idea that the role of the folklorist is only one of documentation, preservation (or, more recently, conservation), and celebration. The recent work of folklorists who have examined the politics of culture have already begun to challenge this role. As folklorists work as advocates and in other "political" arenas, they are making judgments by taking sides in conflicts. How different is it to begin to consider the folklore of dominance and the role folklorists may play in making change in society in this way?
Folklorists are engaging in innovative work that attempts to move beyond celebration. Many public folklorists would vehemently refute the idea, commonly maintained by some, that for the most part folklorists enter into public sector work only because of a lack of available jobs in academia (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988:141). Many have done so because, among other reasons, of their own ideological commitment to a better society. Folklorists in both public sector and academic settings have entered into the discourse of the politics of folklore and folklife out of a desire to affect change. I do not think that folklorists have avoided examination of traditions of dominance out of disinterest, but because we have accepted the way that our field has been defined, and because of the methodological problems posed by such studies.

In order for folklorists to begin to examine traditions of dominance, problems of methodology will have to be addressed. Some of these have come up in my discussion. How do we even begin to go about collecting and documenting traditions of dominance? From whom do we gather such traditions? For most of the century--since fieldwork methods became a topic of study of their own, anyway, and as tradition-bearers began to be viewed as more than mere vessels--folklorists have set themselves apart from other investigators in large part because of their common formation of relationships with the researched. For the most part folklorists (good ones at least) do not go into communities, gather what they are looking for, and run back to their desks, whether their desks are in a university or a state folklife program. Folklorists are unique in large part because of the respect that they hold for those with whom they work, and the ethics statement of the American Folklore Society reflects this responsibility. I am not attempting to imply that those in fields such as anthropology and sociology do not have equal respect for their informants, but only that folklorists tend to form bonds with tradition bearers that may last decades, such as Barre Toelken's friendship with the Yellowman family, Michael Owen Jones' with Chester Cornett, and so on.
The experiences of Henry Glassie and Elaine Lawless provide examples of how value judgments can change such relationships, even end friendships. But I must reiterate the question I asked in Chapter Two: Are we friends with our informants to begin with? The answer can sometimes be yes, I am sure, and sometimes no. Unfortunately it often comes down, in large part, to power. After all, we are there in order to gain something, not to make friends. Fieldwork texts such as Georges and Jones' *People Studying People* (1980) and Bruce Jackson's *Fieldwork* (1987) state clearly that as fieldworkers we must always remember that the power of the encounter lies not with us but with our informants. So what happens if we are gathering folklore that we intend to make judgments about? How would such an approach change the way that we interact with the researched? It is my guess that this is one reason that folklorists have avoided this area of investigation to begin with.

Another difficulty of this topic, perhaps the most fundamental, is Why would anyone want to give us what we are looking for to begin with? In Chapter Two I mentioned the work of non-folklorists who have looked at the values expressed in the *Märchen* and folksong. The problem with this work is that these scholars are working primarily with written texts. As folklorists have shown, texts without contexts can really tell us very little. In order to find the answers that we need we must continue to carry out fieldwork with live informants, not lifeless texts. Yet if we are honest about our intentions, how will we go about gathering materials?

There are many questions to be resolved in approaching traditions of dominance. I do not claim to offer answers to all of these questions, but a challenge to folklorists to enter into a discourse on an important area of study that has been neglected. The history of our discipline has defined the traditional approach to folklore as aesthetic expression, resulting in deeply ingrained assumptions that are rarely questioned. As folklorists continue the discourse on the politics of culture it stands to reason that we will also continue to critique our current approaches; in so doing, many folklorists will find it
necessary to reassess their goals and include in their work examination of traditions of dominance.

Notes

1 I am not referring here to studies of battering by folklorists. Until very recently this issue was not dealt with at all. Elaine Lawless (1998, 1999), Marjorie Bard (briefly 1994), and I (Ferrell 1998) have looked at this issue from a folkloristic perspective; in these cases the experiences of battered women were once again under the microscope.

2 Portions of this discussion of battering were previously presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society in a paper entitled "Traditional Ideas of Family in the Lives of Battered Women" based on my experience working with battered women (Ferrell 1998).

3 A reminder that I am continuing to use a capital "F" to refer to Functionalism as a school of thought, as discussed in Chapter One.
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