

## Scholastic Before and Scholarly After? Ukrainian Folklorists and Their Folklore after 1991

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Résumé de l'article

Après l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique en 1991, l'Ukraine, comme plusieurs anciennes républiques soviétiques, s'est vue obtenir le nouveau statut politique de nation indépendante. Les sciences sociales et humaines de l'Ukraine se sont fortement dissociées de l'héritage de l'État soviétique et ont confronté le besoin de promouvoir leurs propres projets de revitalisation culturelle, qui est, cette fois, basé sur un agenda national. Les études de folklore prennent une part active dans ce nouveau projet national ukrainien. Dans cet article, je me penche sur l'orientation particulière du discours actuel de l'ethnologie en Ukraine, sur la notion de folklore elle-même, analysant son utilisation et examinant l'ambiguïté et la polysémie de son épithète « folk » [narodnyi]. J'analyse comment la notion de folklore est employée par les Ukrainiens spécialistes du folklore dans leur tentative de redéfinir leur discipline et de légitimer la nouvelle émergence, prétendument homogène, des nations ukrainiennes. La verbalisation, la formulation et la conceptualisation de la notion de folklore dans les travaux ukrainiens contemporains est une pratique discursive importante qui fait du folklore ukrainien un objet de propriété nationale et qui contribue au processus de construction de la nation.

# SCHOLASTIC BEFORE AND SCHOLARLY AFTER? Ukrainian Folklorists and Their Folklore after 1991<sup>1</sup>

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Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, Ukrainian folklorists have been facing the pragmatic dilemma of reformulating the primary objectives and philosophical essence of their discipline. This presupposes a thorough revision of the subject matter of their discipline, including the concept of folklore itself, which was conceived in terms of Soviet Marxist methodology in Soviet times. One could anticipate that the disintegration of the Soviet system and the emergence of the new political order with its wide range of competing ideologies would trigger *critical* re-evaluation of former paradigms developed under the intellectual and political pressures from Moscow, the Soviet Center. Is this the case? Did these political changes really foster *conceptually* new discourses within the discipline, and new approaches towards its subject?

Having posed these questions as a starting point for discussion, I examine in this paper (re)definitions of folklore suggested by Ukrainian folklore scholars in 1990-1997. Examining the historical roots of today's readings of folklore and of its principle of *narodnist*' (pertaining to the people), I contrast current visions of folklore with those formulated in different historical conjunctures in support of various ideologies. Analysing various publications on folklore that appeared in Ukraine in the early 1990s, and bringing in the opinions of leading folklore scholars on this issue, I explore current (re)definitions of folklore as rooted in and affected by the post-Soviet nature of Ukraine's intellectual and national projects.<sup>2</sup>

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1. The original version of this paper was presented at a joint session of the Canadian Association of Slavists and the Folklore Studies Association of Canada, Learned Societies Congress, 1997.
  2. My sources include a wide range of publications in late 1980s and 1990s in Ukraine which discuss the concept of folklore in one way or another; textbooks written for

Throughout history, ruling ideologies and folklore scholarship intervened in each other's domain, resonating in and in some cases promoting each other, helping to formulate and narrate each others' stories. The current national project as well as the ongoing intellectual project of Ukraine to revive its national scholarship has been conditioning (and disciplining) the discipline of folklore as well. This to a great degree determines the direction in which folklore studies proceeds. All this affects conceptualisations of folklore itself. The Soviet nature of Ukrainian folklore studies as an institutionalized discipline up to 1991 continues to affect the project of national revival. Looking through the interpretations of the terms "folklore" and the "folk" can be quite revealing. It is in their terminologies that national scholarship and the nationalist agendas are conceived. Their vocabularies have become a huge cultural reservoir for legal conceptualisations of a new nation. Though rarely consulted directly by Ukrainian law-makers, these interpretations help to identify ideological positions and points of departure for formulations of Ukrainian nationhood.

Narrating the nation through folk legacies presupposes a certain language, an elaborate terminology and a sufficient vocabulary. The language of "those who narrate the Nation" and its role in nation construction are widely attended to in contemporary Western criticism. In fact, the intersection of language and its narrative strategies with political rationalisation of the nation has become the key theoretical inquiry in the fields of literary, cultural and post-colonial studies. It is not merely verbal fixations and narratives, but the actual process of producing them, the discourse itself, that becomes part of the national culture. As Fanon put it, it is in the efforts of intellectuals to describe, justify and praise the *folk* that the people creates itself and keeps itself in existence (Fanon 1968). Benedict Anderson turned to this question in 1983. His vision of first nationalisms, born from the formations of national languages with further establishment through the media, can easily be applied to Ukraine. Homi Bhabha, referring to national processes in the post-colonial world, develops this position further by asking:

If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual interdeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then

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graduate students in folklore and ethnography; and numerous publications devoted to the so-called regional studies, *kraieznavstvo*, or peoples' studies, *narodoznavstvo*. In the summers of 1995 and 1997 I visited several scholarly centers in Kyiv and Lviv, where I attended folklore seminars and conducted interviews with seven leading Ukrainian folklorists. Their vision of the state of the discipline and their understanding of folklore are important components of this study.

what effect does this have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of “nationness” (Bhabha 1990: 2)?

In the majority of cases of post-colonial criticism it is the interplay of literature and nationalism that becomes subject to such examination. I would like to suggest another field for analysis and to have a look at recent texts from Ukraine’s folklore scholarship. Sharing Bhabha’s concern over the interdependence of the narrative/textual constructions of the nation and their political realisation, I discuss the notion of folklore as it has been interpreted by Ukrainian folklorists after 1991.

One may find it surprising that with Ukraine’s independence there were few theoretical discussions in scholarly writings on the concept of folklore.<sup>3</sup> Instead of the expected criticism of the Soviet notion of folklore, numerous textbooks and teachers’ guides appeared in which the definition of folklore was often fashioned in neo-romantic and neo-populist terms, reminiscent of nineteenth century approaches. On the contrary, in interviews in 1995 and 1997, various scholars revealed a certain historical continuity in their uses of the notion of folklore. This continuity in usage but not in meaning is best illustrated by current applications of the concept of *narodnist*. This concept, coined by nineteenth century scholars to refer to a peasant nature of folklore, maintained and further reformulated by Soviet folkloristics as the reference to working masses as its bearer, has acquired new meaning in the new political context. When applied to Ukrainian folklore, the range of its meanings has narrowed to the principle of “nationness.”<sup>4</sup> Such a shift in meaning of a basic folkloristic notion reflects new demands imposed on folklore studies by participants of the national project.

Even a brief excursus into Ukrainian history reveals close interconnections between the scholarly agenda of folklorists and the political situation at certain moments. It could be said that in the course of the last hundred and fifty

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3. This was expressed by all scholars whom I interviewed. Before Ukraine gained its independence the single scholarly journal on folklore was *Narodna tvorchist' ta etnografia* [*Folk creativity and ethnography*], published in Kyiv. In 1991, the independent journal *Rodovid* appeared, and in 1995, the L'viv Institute of Ethnology initiated their own *Narodoznavchi zoshyty* [*Notebooks in people's studies*] and the first issue of *Berehynia* came out in Kyiv. Since 1991 other journals have been coming into being, but their content tends to be popular rather than scholarly.
  4. There is no simple translation of this Ukrainian word into English. Literally it means “pertaining to people.” Thus it could be translated as “people’s,” “national,” “folk,” “populist” depending on the context in which it appears.

years each attempt to construct a Ukrainian national idea resonated in scholarly discourse and was reflected in discursive practices used to define folklore. A close look at this relationship reveals a complex interplay between folklore studies and the national project of Ukraine.

### The search for folklore, the search for a nation

Over the last two centuries Ukrainian folklore scholarship has participated in various national projects. It would not be a mistake to say that the discipline itself was born in the first moments of national self-revelation. As was the case all over Europe, intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Ukraine found themselves engaged in the quest for a nation and national culture. The growing interest in peasant culture among Ukrainian intelligentsia coincided with the emergence of the idea of nationhood in Europe and with the growing popularity of Herder's ideas on the primacy of ethnic and national bonds that unite individuals into a people. The very first attempts to collect Ukrainian folklore reflected, according to Subtelny, the initial phase in the evolution of a Ukrainian national consciousness (1988: 222). Thus, the beginnings of Ukrainian folklore studies as a scholarly discipline are generally traced to the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Early romantic and idealist visions of folklore were similar in Ukrainian territories and in other areas of Europe. Such romantic Herder-inspired visions of folklore as the "unspoiled, authentic, and organic culture of the common people" (cited in Subtelny 1988: 228) and its connection with the *masses* (ie. the "peasantry") determined the meaning attributed to folklore by consequent generations of scholars. This was encoded in concept and terminology used for defining the subject even before the 1880-90s, when the English word "folklore" entered the scholarly vocabulary in Ukrainian territory.<sup>6</sup> Among the tropes were, to name only a few: *narodna poezia* [people's poetry], *narodna slovesnist'* [people's verballity], *narodni zvychai* [people's customs]. At a time of populist visions of *narod* [a people], the tropes *narodnyi*, and *narodnist'* referred mainly to a peasantry, inspiring following generations of scholars to see the folk as peasants and folklore as a socially bound phenomenon. Such a bias haunted Ukrainian and Soviet

5. Specifically to such persons as M. Maksymovych, N. Tsertelev, O. Bodians'kyi, V. Antonovych, Ia. Holovats'kyi, M. Drahomaniv, P. Chubyns'kyi and many others.

6. In 1895, in the introduction to the first volume of *Ethnografichnyi Zbirnyk* [*Ethnographic anthology*], M. Hrushevs'kyi refers to "the new term folklore" (p. viii).

scholarship until the very end of the Soviet Union (Tishkov 1992; 1994-5), and still underscores theoretical positioning of post-Soviet folklore discourse.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Ukrainian intellectuals, nurturing their dreams of Ukraine's cultural uniqueness, experienced persecutions and bans against the Ukrainian movement and language, manifested in bans introduced by the imperial center in 1863 and 1876.<sup>7</sup> Perceived as marginal within the Russian empire, Ukraine's folklore scholarship tried to establish itself against the pressures from the center to abolish Ukrainian language, culture and intellectual traditions.

The Ukrainian national project was once again attacked with the establishment of Soviet rule and ideology in 1919-1921. The politics of military communism imposed by the Soviet government suggested another "Russification" of Ukrainian culture, but sometime in 1923 new winds blew to Ukraine from the Soviet center, bringing an era of so-called "Ukrainization" (1924-1929).<sup>8</sup> This was an era of cultural upsurge and national growth in Ukraine in almost every field of intellectual activity. Folklore studies were marked by an unprecedented growth and establishment of research centers,<sup>9</sup> by new theoretical quests, and by the growing popularity of folklore outside

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7. The historical outline of this period is given in Subtelny's work (1988).

8. In April 1923 the twelfth congress of the Russian communist Party criticized Russian chauvinism, marking a new course in its "nationalities policy." In Ukraine, the Decree on Ukrainization recognizing Ukrainian culture as a state culture of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic followed on August 1, 1923. See G. Grabowicz's "Sovietization of Ukrainian Humanities," for his recent critical account of the state of the humanities under Soviet rule (p.19). See also Subtelny's (1988) and Semchyshyn's (1985) accounts of this period. The latter extends the boundaries of this period to 1932 (1985: 422).

9. During the years 1921-1925 a number of such scholarly centers were opened: Etnohrafichna Komisiia Akademii Nauk URSS [Ethnographic Commission of the Academy of Arts and Sciences of URSS (AN URSS)], (1921), Kabinet Antropolohii Ta Etnolohii AN URSS [Program of Anthropology and Ethnology, AN URSS] (1921), Kul'turno-Istorychna Komisiia [History and Culture Commission] (1924), Kabinet Primityvnoi Kul'tury Kafedry Istorii Ukrainy [Program in Primitive Culture, the Chair of History of Ukraine] (1925), Etnoloho-Kraieznavcha Komisiia Naukovo-Doslidnoi Kafedry Istorii Ukrain's'koi Kul'tury [Ethnological and Regional Studies Program of the Academic-Research Chair of History of Ukrainian Culture], Kharkiv (1924), Etnohrafichno-Dialektychna Sektsiia Odes'koi Komisiï Kraieznavstva AN URSS [Ethnography and Dialectology Section, Odesa Regional Studies Commission, AN URSS] (1923) and other smaller divisions (Stel'makh 1958: 46-57).

academia.<sup>10</sup> This was also the time of excessive promotion of the new Soviet ideology by communists against other ideological currents. By the end of the 1920s, with the “cultural effervescence of sociocultural changes” over, to use Wallace’s apt metaphor (1979: 421-430), political struggle for the establishment of the Soviet ideology intensified.

In the early 1930s, a new scholarly discourse was born of the forced marriage between communist ideology and folkloristics. At that time a forcefully established Soviet ideology, along with the formation of a Soviet intellectual elite as its promoter in folklore and literary studies, seriously conditioned new interpretations of folklore and the folk.<sup>11</sup> As Howell shows in her study of the developments in Soviet folkloristics at that time, the majority of folklorists turned to the *working masses* (the peasantry *and* proletariat), naming these masses the folk, bestowing them with recognition as bearers of lore, and proclaiming folklore “material for conscious political agitational work” (Iu. Sokolov, cited in Howell, 1992: 270). Of course, such a shift in theoretical models did not take place without problems. The Soviet state implemented its own national project to create a new Soviet person and a new Soviet people, forcing scholars to reconsider any independent theoretical positions and to recognize “collective” Marxist-Leninist methodology.<sup>12</sup>

Given its new connection with *working masses*, folkloristics became an important tool of Soviet political powers in the advancement, popularization, and realization of Soviet ideas “among the masses.” Needing to cultivate a close relationship with scholars — or in other words, to have control over

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10. Regional studies, or *kraieznaustvo*, also studied folklore and conducted ethnographic research in different regions of Ukraine. Under the new political order regional studies received special attention from the authorities. In 1922 the Kraieznavcha Komisiia [Regional Studies Commission] was initiated in Kyiv under the All-Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences. At that time, the major Ukrainian institution whose main task was to conduct research on ethnographic issues was the Kabinet Antropolohii ta Etnolohii [Program of Anthropology and Ethnology]. Due to its presence, the Ethnographic Commission focused primarily on research in folklore. Almost all scholarly institutions affiliated with the study of folklore were mainly concerned with fieldwork and collection of primary folklore data as well as with the creation of archives and depositories of folk knowledge.
  11. The outcome of this long development was the creation of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1932 and their infamous All-Union Congress in 1934.
  12. Analyses in English of the complex history of Soviet and Ukrainian folkloristics are given by Howell (1992), Oinas (1973, 1975a, 1975b, 1984), Klymasz (1976, 1978) and Slezkine (1991).

them — the official powers could not afford to have other than Moscow-Leningrad advanced research centers in folklore.<sup>13</sup> As in the case of some other Soviet republics, Ukrainian folklore scholarship gradually deteriorated. From a well-established discipline with a number of independent research institutions prior to the 1930s, it became a weak replica of Moscow-based academic folklore studies with little advanced theoretical research, and few academic rights. From 1936 on, there was only one academic institution, the Institute for the Study of Art, Folklore and Ethnography [*Institut Mystetstvoznavstva, Fol'kloru ta Etnohrafii (IMFE)*], in Kyiv.<sup>14</sup> In the case of dissertation defenses, the Ph.D. candidate had to send all his/her documentation to Moscow for approval.

By the 1980s, Ukrainian folklore studies had lost its position and its potential to regain quickly a reputation for theoretically advanced scholarship: cut off in the 1930s from the scholarly discourse of the rest of the world (and specifically the West), it was not fully engaged in the post-Stalin rehabilitation of scholarship after 1956 (the year of the party's official announcement of destalinization). It was limited in contacts with neighbouring disciplines (such as the Soviet [Tartu-Leningrad] school of semiotics and cultural analysis that won academic minds globally in the 60s). Periodically, it gave promising young scholars away to the Soviet center.

Some aspects of this Soviet scholarly discipline were quite traditional; folklore was seen as the verbal art of the people, or the oral creativity of the working masses. There was little self reflection and self-analysis on the ways scholars conceptualized and problematized folklore and “the folk,” while the practice of collecting folk texts absorbed much time and effort. Felix Oinas emphasized the principles of collectivity, orality and social belonging as basic criteria of the Soviet notion of folklore (1975; 1984). Robert Klymasz underscored another principle, that of historicism, that obliged scholars to view folklore as a means of the ongoing reconstruction of the past (1978). Later Oinas concluded that, even if all the other criteria of folklore are met,

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13. Valery Tishkov argues that, by 1960, this role was played by Moscow alone (1992: 371-382).

14. The reorganization of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences and Arts took place in 1934 (Berezovs'kyi 1968: 63). As a result, only one folklore institution was subsequently established in 1936, Institut Ukrain's'koho Fol'kloru [Institute of Ukrainian Folklore], Kyiv. In 1939, with the annexation of Western Ukraine, the Soviet government opened another institute in Lviv, replacing the one run by the Shevchenko Scientific Society.



Soviet folklorists considered creative work as folklore only when it was “*narodnyi*” [national] (1984: 177).<sup>15</sup> Superseding the original meaning of this adjective as “pertaining to peasants and petite artisans,” *narodnyi* came to mean “collective” and “pertaining to all Soviet persons,” to the ephemeral entity, the supraethnic nation called a Soviet people. The same meaning was retained by folklorists when they applied “*narodnyi*” to the subjects of their studies. In such an indirect way, Ukrainian folkloristics found itself bound to yet another national project, this time instituted by the Soviet center.

### One discourse, many vocabularies

Even if Ukrainian folkloristics remained a single scholarly discourse in the last decades of Soviet rule, its discursive tools sometimes varied. Whenever the notion of folklore was discussed in Ukraine after the 1960s, there was little disagreement in principle on the subject matter, but the variety of designators used for these purposes continued to be surprisingly great. The old synonyms for folklore, as they were employed in scholarly literature at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, were revitalized without much discussion, brought again into scholarly discourse, and often used interchangeably: *narodna tvorchist'* [folk or people's creativity], *narodna poeziia* [folk poetry], *narodna slovesnist'* [folk or people's verblivity]. The revival of the term *narodna tvorchist'* owes a great deal to Maksym Ryl's'kyi who was its most vocal promoter (1958; 1965). His vision of folklore also remained the most representative until the late 1980s: “The people's creativity is the creativity of the exploited masses in antagonistic class societies, and in the Soviet era this is the creativity of all the working classes, builders of socialism” (Ryl's'kyi 1958: 30).

Such multiplicity of vocabulary in identifying their subject never seemed to puzzle scholars, leaving outsiders on their own with the problem of multiple interpretations and meanings of this term. In the 1970s and 1980s the term *narodna tvorchist'* reached, perhaps, the highest point of its popularity and was used as often as the term folklore itself. It was probably used even more often when it referred specifically to the folklore of Ukrainians. Not only scholars assumed this trope, but literature directed towards the general public

15. I cannot agree here with Oinas' translation of the Russian/Ukrainian modifier *narodnyi* into English as (only) “national” and find his translation in this context misleading for an English speaking reader.

promoted it as well, purveying the new *public* value of folklore, creating a new imagery of a hypothetical world of the national culture with some aesthetic integrity. The Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary [*Ukrains'kyiadians'kyi entsyklopedychnyi slovnyk*] defines folkloristics as “a discipline that studies folklore (or people’s creativity),” but does not give a definition for folklore itself, referring the reader to the dictionary entry for *narodna tvorchist'* (1986-87, 3: 529). That term is defined as “artistic, collective, creative activity of a people. It reflects life, world view, ideals of a people, that are expressed in poetry, music, architecture, decorative, theatre and dance arts”(1987 [1967]). Although this term distinguishes the people’s creativity as the cultural product of the working masses, rarely were those masses, or the folk, seriously conceptualized by folklorists. Concerned mainly with the textual aspects of the lore rather than with the folk, the term “creativity” overwrote other interpretations of folklore that implied folklore’s contextuality and dynamic nature. The oral “texts” as fixed variations of traditional folklore were subjected to collecting, classifying, aesthetic analysis and publishing. These were perceived as the major tasks of Ukrainian Soviet folkloristics (Ryl's'kyi 1965: 50-60).

### **New times, new meanings**

The year 1989 was the turning point in the transition from the perestroika period to a total collapse of the Soviet state (Malia 1994). In that time of “severe cultural distortion” of the Soviet system, *Rukh*, the national front headed by intellectuals which eventually led Ukraine to its independence in 1991, proclaimed the cultural and national rebirth of Ukraine’s society as its political goal. A new national project was thus unleashed. Ukraine’s humanities and social sciences, eagerly dissociating themselves from the cultural legacies of the Soviet state, faced the need to promote their own projects of cultural revitalisation, this time based on a national agenda. The ambivalent image of the future Ukrainian nation, supposedly based on a homogeneous society, began haunting Ukrainian intellectuals. To what degree, referring to Bhabha’s question once again, did the image of the nation-to-be affect “narratives and discourses that signify a sense of ‘nationness’” (1990)? Still another question, highly relevant here, is “to what degree do those narratives and vocabularies affect the image of the nation-in-progress”?

Once the uneasy process of the birth of a nation had started, symptomatically, at that transitional moment in Ukraine’s history, the modifiers

“national” and “cultural” became conceptually intertwined and the boundary between their meanings blurred. Much of the Ukrainian media, supporting the new cause, became devoted to national and cultural revival, and often drew parallels between the current national project and those of the past. The revival of the long-oppressed national culture was seen as synonymous with the revival and building of the nation. The linkage between the nation and its national culture was not only *supported* by folklorists and ethnologists, but to a significant degree it was *created* through their programmatic writings (cf. Skurativs’kyi 1995: 5-12; Pavliuk 1995: 47-50).

Given the new political context, what were the choices and options of folklore scholars? Subject to, yet co-authors of, a newly unleashed national project, folklorists eagerly engaged themselves in many “re”-s: reevaluation of the discipline, rehabilitation of expelled names, restructuring of institutional bounds, reconsideration of certain directions of research, etc. The early 1990s witnessed several conferences devoted to the current state and goals of Ukrainian folklore scholarship, from seminars that claimed to question the current meanings of the subject of the discipline,<sup>16</sup> to those conventions that discussed the issues of teaching and propagating folklore in light of new political demands.<sup>17</sup> It became obvious that folklore, and specifically Ukrainian folklore, was treated as one of the key elements needed for a successful construction of the nation (Komarynets’ 1991; Kostiuk 1994; Pavliuk 1995). Folklore studies fell under the auspices of new state officials who became involved in public discussion on the historical value of folklore studies in the construction of the nation.<sup>18</sup> To cite one example, L. Dunaiev’s’ka, Chair of Ukrainian Folklore in Kyiv National University, confessed in 1995 that the

16. To name only a few: “Folklore in the spiritual life of the Ukrainian people. Regional readings,” Lviv University, January 24-25, 1991 (Komarynets’ 1991); “Art and People’s Creativity at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” April 1990, Kyiv, IMFE (Boriak 1992); All-Ukrainian Slavic Studies Conference: “Spiritual Rebirth of Slavs in the Context of European and World Cultures,” Chernivtsi, 1992; “Contemporary ethnological scholarship in Ukraine: Problems and perspectives of development,” Kyiv, IMFE, 1994, a conference organized by the newly established Association of Ukrainian Ethnologists.

17. “Problems of studying and propagating people’s creativity as a component of Ukrainian national culture: All-national theoretical conference,” Rivne Institute of Culture, 1990; “Problems of teaching folklore and ethnology in Ukraine’s universities, colleges and schools,” Kyiv State University, 7-19 May, 1993.

18. As illustrated in the speech of the Vice-minister of Culture, S.V. Koltuniuk, at the conference in Rivne, 1990.

folklore program at her university would not be financially supported if its scholars had not designed a long-term fundamental research project, "Folklore and the Rebirth of the Ukrainian Nation."<sup>19</sup>

Assuming that changes within scholarly discourse would have some impact on how the discipline is to be defined, one wonders how these newly reformulated goals of folklore studies as a support for nation building processes affected the reconceptualisation of folklore and its principle of *narodnist'*. The late 1980s and early 1990s did not witness any serious attempts to revise the theoretical bases of the discipline. One publication, however, stands out in this regard. In his 1991 monograph *Folklore: Traditions and the Contemporary*, M. Rusyn made an attempt to reconsider the enduring interchangeability of the terms "folklore" and "*narodna tvorchist'*." As a late tribute to Soviet Marxism, his book conforms to the methodological premises of Soviet folkloristics and claims folklore to be born from class antagonisms within capitalist societies and to "belong to all people in socialist societies" (1991: 24-31). Nevertheless, this book voices the problem of multiplicity of vocabularies that had not been critically assessed in Soviet Ukrainian scholarship since the 1960s. Rusyn claims that it is necessary to distinguish *fol'klor* [folklore] from *usna tvorchist'* [oral creativity], *narodna tvorchist'* [people's art] and *usna poetychna tvorchist'* [oral poetic creativity], for they represent different subjects (1991: 23). He tries to draw a line between folklore and *narodna tvorchist'* along with their different so-called aesthetic and sociological qualities. According to Rusyn, while *narodna tvorchist'* of peasants and petite artisans in medieval society can be considered folklore, the same cannot be necessarily said in today's world. Rusyn argues that folklore should be considered as *part of narodna tvorchist'* in contemporary (in his case, socialist) society (1991: 25). To support this claim, which not only clarifies his position but, in my opinion, rather clouds it even more, he formulates a "socioaesthetic principle of *narodnist'*," which according to him is not necessarily a characteristic feature of folklore, but is a feature of a broader notion of *narodna tvorchist'*:

*Narodnist'* is not an attributive property of all folklore and is not necessarily conditioned by the social class of its creators. The main criterion of *narodnist'* is the *ideological* orientation of folkloric texts, and the character of presentation of the most important tasks of social development. *Narodnist'* as a socioaesthetic category is the expression of concerns, thoughts and moods of the *masses* (emphasis N.S.) by the most progressive artistic means within a certain historical period (1991: 29).

19. Interview with L. Dunaiev's'ka, May 1995, Kyiv.

Having defined *narodnist'* in ideological terms, Rusyn approaches the notion of folklore from the positions of Soviet Marxism and historicism:

Folklore inherited the oldest forms of human culture and preserved in itself aesthetic perceptions and artistic experience of the past, tested by centuries. Expressing the level of consciousness and the world view of the masses, in each historical time folklore preserves meanings of the artistic reshaping of the whole, real and spiritual experience. Folklore is a complex aesthetic, social, and artistic phenomenon (1991: 3).

Rusyn comes to the conclusion that today (1991) folklore can become *narodnyi*, a people's art, only when it can satisfy cultural and spiritual needs of the *narod*, the people. "A people" here, as employed by Rusyn, does not necessarily stand for a nation, but rather for a certain group, united by culture and tradition, territory and customs, and not divided by social antagonisms, as in the case of socialist society as he imagines it.

Although Rusyn's work can be seen as an attempt to redefine the principle of *narodnist'* and its connection with folklore, his often confusing theorising did not draw other scholars into a debate on this subject. In some manner, however, it paved the way for subsequent interpretations of folklore as a discipline predestined to serve the political goals of the new Ukrainian nation. Perhaps Rusyn's outdated approach towards folklore as a product of social struggle and his heavy reliance on Russian sources were the reasons that his book did not trigger further discussion in Ukraine. Perhaps the lack of debate is not surprising for other reasons as well. In 1991, the year of Ukraine's independence, the needs of the new state to create a new ideology were outweighing the needs of folklore scholarship to reassess abstract theoretical positions with regards to their subject. Scholars tended to continue to apply the traditional modifier *narodnyi* to their subject, avoiding any criticism or analysis of it.

### **Six unpublished visions of folklore**

With the rapid political developments since 1991, Rusyn's voice became lost among many voices representing a new national stance in folklore discourse. As in the 1930s, folklore once again extended beyond academia and became a popular concern. A sometimes romantic, sometimes idealistic, but necessarily *narodnyi* stance is voiced by folklorists in scholarly journals (Kyrchiv 1995; Pavliuk 1992), in numerous textbooks on folklore (Kyrchiv

1994; Polischuk 1991; Tsytaliuk 1992; Talanchuk and Kyslyi 1993; Bezverkha and Lohvyn 1996), and in textbooks and methodological guidelines for *kraieznaustvo* [regional studies] and *narodoznavstvo* [people's studies]. The latter two terms were resurrected from the 1920s (Dmytrenko and Dmytrenko 1995; Ivannikova 1995; Koval'chuk 1995; Lozko 1995; Makarchuk et al 1994; Olifirenko 1994; Selezhan 1995; Strumans'kyi 1995; Tsymbaliuk 1996; Tymchenko 1993). The new stance — from an interest in the folk's lore, or the people's lore, towards the “national lore” — was also evident in my interviews with leading folklorists.

It is rather difficult to find serious contemporary analyses of the notion of folklore in scholarly periodicals or in academic publications. This issue has not yet been scrupulously analyzed by Ukrainian scholars. Yet when addressed directly, Ukrainian scholars were eager to share their ideas on what they understood by the notions of folklore, the folk, and the principle of *narodnist'*. While visiting Ukraine in 1995 and 1997, I arranged for several interviews with leading scholars in Kyiv and L'viv to discuss their visions of folklore and their understanding of current national scholarship.<sup>20</sup>

As far as the subject of folklore is concerned scholars treat it variously. Some emphasize orality and textuality as important criteria, returning to a narrow sense of folklore as verbal cultural constructions. They continue to employ the tradition in Ukrainian scholarship and approach the subject of their discipline as *usna narodna tvorchist'* [oral people's creativity] (Kyrchiv 1994; 1995; Denysiuk interview 1995; Ostapyk interview 1995). Roman Kyrchiv, Chair of the folklore department, L'viv Institute of Ethnology, and a leading specialist in Ukrainian folkloristics, is convinced that the subject of folklore should be restricted to traditional texts, transmitted orally within a large group of people, “the folk.”

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20. These include selected interviews and conversations with Dr. Valentyna Borysenko, former head of the archives at the Institute of Art Studies, Folklore and Ethnography, and currently head of the Chair of the Ethnology Division, Shevchenko National University, Kyiv (June 1995, May 1997, May 1998); with Olena Britsyna, Acting Director of the Institute of Art Studies, Folklore, and Ethnography, Kyiv (June 1995); with Dr. Denysiuk, professor of folklore, Chair of Ukrainian Folklore, L'viv State University (May 1995); with Dr. Lidia Dunaievs'ka, Chair of the Ukrainian Folklore Division, Shevchenko National University, Kyiv (May 1995); with Dr. Roman Kyrchiv, Chair of the Folklore Division, L'viv Institute of Ethnology (May 1995, May 1998); with Dr. Ostapyk, professor of folklore, Chair of Ukrainian Folklore, L'viv State University (May 1995).

Some tend to broaden the notion of folklore by including not only the verbal aspects of traditional culture but also such cultural phenomena as rituals, dance, and theatre, thus opening the way for an ethnographic approach to their subject (Borysenko interview 1995; Dunaievs'ka interview 1995). O. Britsyna, a specialist in folk tales, is interested in context and considers it the crucial criterion in understanding how folklore functions in natural settings. She approaches folklore with more flexibility, while placing an emphasis on its aesthetic value: "Perhaps, we should talk not about folklore but about *traditional art* which is synonymous with it. That would allow us to broaden the traditional understanding of the notion of folklore. The concept of folklore should also include the mechanisms of its traditional functioning. Nevertheless," she claimed, "today traditionally the majority of our folklorists understand folklore as specifically *verbal / oral / culture*, and those who study folk art would not argue with this approach, because they would deal with the art of the people and not with their oral lore" (interview 1995).

Dr. L. Dunaievs'ka, Professor of Folklore, the head of the Chair of Folklore at Kyiv University, also tends to broaden the notion of folklore by treating it as a form of art. "I personally consider folklore to be inclusive of everything that could be called *people's creativity* or folk art." She also insists on contextual approaches towards the study of folklore: "It is also impossible to separate folklore from the ethnographic reality in which it is rooted" (interview 1995). Stressing the importance of acting and performance in which the text is transmitted, she includes in this notion even literary texts performed by professional groups. For example, according to her, songs performed by the Marenych trio<sup>21</sup> can find their way back into the everyday life and the discourse of ordinary people who then start performing the same songs without knowing their origin. Dunaievs'ka does not agree with the distinction made by Britsyna between the text and rituals that function within the traditional context of everyday life and the same texts performed on stage by an amateur group. "Both are folklore, both are produced by the same folk, it is not correct to state that the performance is just an imitation of folklore."

Yet other scholars do not even recognize the need to reevaluate the meanings invested in terminology. Dr. Ostapyk, Professor of Folklore at L'viv University, sees no reason for the notion of folklore to undergo any changes, since "its traditional interpretation as people's oral creativity and oral culture that survived

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21. A popular trio that performs traditional folk songs with contemporary pop-arrangements.

several historical formations is a proper definition of the subject” (interview 1995). Ethnologist Dr. V. Borysenko, Chair of the recently established Ethnology Division of the History Department at National Shevchenko University in Kyiv, suggests that Ostapyk’s vision is shared by many scholars, including those who conduct ethnographic studies of Ukrainian peasantry (interview 1995).

As for the folk, scholars approach the concept of *narod* variously as well, investing this word with diverse meanings: working masses, peasants and proletariat, and a people. There is a certain duality in what is understood today in folkloric discourse under *narod* (and consequently *narodnist*). On one discursive level, this notion defines a certain group of people “large enough” to be characterized as culturally, economically and sometimes politically specific. “If we want to name a cultural phenomenon as folklore, there should be certain criteria: the folk group should be large enough to guarantee the principles of orality, variation, and collectivity of this creativity” (Kyrchiv interview 1997). Here, Kyrchiv’s “folk group large enough” suggests the narrow meaning of *narod* as “a folk” that consists of traditional peasants, workers and artisans.

For others who study traditional genres and folk knowledge, *narod* first of all implies peasants. In Borysenko’s view, the folk are *traditional peasants* who use folklore and its texts, songs, and rituals in their everyday life. This vision of the folk leads her to claim that folklore is dying in contemporary villages, because of “...the ongoing processes of de-structuring of the social organization of village life. People (the folk) go to cities, they forget their roots (they stop being the folk). Folklore undergoes devaluation. As folklorists we should study these negative processes of the de-traditionalization, de-folklorisation of the village (of the folk)” (interview 1995; interview 1997).

Her vision is developed further by Dr. Denysiuk, Professor of Folklore, L’viv State University. Dr. Denysiuk sees folklore as solely a product of *peasant* traditional culture: “We can cry for *real* folklore, but it is disappearing. If we did not have transistors in the village, we would still have more folklore there, and people, the folk, would still sing while working or at their home parties their real folk songs and not those pop songs, that are not worth being called folklore” (interview 1995). And there are still other scholars who tend to broaden the notion of *narod*, the folk, by including in it both peasants and recent migrants to the cities, such as blue collar workers (Dunaiev’ska interview 1995).



### **Narodnist': from narodnyi to natsional'nyi**

The principle of *narodnist'* did not seem to preoccupy the scholars per se. "What is *narodnist'*?" was often translated as "who were the folk" or "who were the creators of folklore." Professor Kyrchiv was willing to theorise on this subject more than the others. Kyrchiv agrees there is the necessity to reevaluate Soviet interpretations of folklore based on the principle of *narodnist'*, for it was formerly used to refer to the lore of the Soviet working people or the Soviet nation. On the other hand, he emphasizes that, in the contemporary world, folklore should always be ethnically or nationally defined. Otherwise, he exclaims, it would be hard to find any folklore at all not grounded in either ethnic or national symbols (interview 1995). Bridging both folklore and the national, Kyrchiv invariably supports Ukraine's national project, claiming that Ukrainian folklore is the "national" folklore.

There seems to exist some kind of differentiation though in use between the trope *narodna tvorchist'* and the word *fol'klor*, as reflected in recent presentations and writings of folklore scholars. For example, when Dunaievs'ka's or Borysenko's students research the folklore of Russians or Gypsies or any other ethnic groups in Ukraine, they tend *not* to refer to their subject in terms of the "people's creativity" of Russians, Gypsies, etc. The word "folklore" is used instead. At the same time, as if to confirm the new alliance between the "folk" and the "national," many theses and dissertations on Ukrainian folklore, or to be precise, on Ukrainian "people's creativity" [*ukrains'ka narodna tvorchist'*], cover such new subjects as *natsional'ni rysy ukrains'koho mentalitetu* [national features of Ukrainian mentality], and *natsional'nyi kharakter* [national character]. Folklore native to ethnic Ukrainians is becoming more and more negotiated in national terms and in the native language [*narodna tvorchist'*], while "others" are seen through neutral terminology of foreign origin (folklore). This subtle politics of naming differently subjects of folklore research is not yet theoretically argued, and it is a tendency rather than a rule. Yet this discursive practice, distinguishing whether "the folk" are the national majority or an ethnic minority, promotes seeing these various groups as different agents of national state building in Ukraine.

The concepts of *narodnist'* and *narod* are clearly becoming associated with the idea of "the national." While by "national folklore" folklorists often understand "Ukrainian folklore," there is also the attitude that Ukrainian folklore should be recognized by all groups living in Ukraine as their cultural legacy as

well. Scholars seem to share the idea that the modifier *narodnyi* attributes specifically Ukrainian folklore to the “all-embracing” entity of those who are bound to Ukraine by blood and kinship ties, and who are entitled to be Ukraine’s *narod*, the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian nation. These people, from various ethnic and social subgroups, with differing human experiences and wishes, are conceived as a collective consumer of Ukrainian folklore, even though the latter is produced by only a fraction of their nation. Such imposed consumption is a result of a new political demand to justify Ukrainian folklore as national property; to support its collecting; and to secure its prestige within the new society that is composed only 70% of ethnic Ukrainians. In such a paradigm, national ideology finds fruitful ground for growth.

### **Folklore: the soul of the new nation?**

All of my interviewees are actively involved in preparing a new generation of researchers, either on the undergraduate or on the graduate level. What is used for such training? What kind of teaching materials are available today for these purposes? Within which theoretical frames is folklore defined in these publications? Do textbooks present the same variety of approaches towards folklore as expressed by scholars in our conversations? I looked through a number of folklore publications and textbooks that were published in Ukraine since the late 1980s and which were described as their teaching materials. If I heard a variety of positions on folklore while conversing with my Ukrainian colleagues, textbooks usually did not reveal such a variety. Instead, rather traditional (i.e. late Soviet) interpretations of folklore dominate.

One widely used textbook for university folklore courses, published in 1991, defines folklore in this way:

Folklore, the people's creativity, is a complex and synthetic art, which combines elements of various other arts, music, and theatre. This creativity is closely connected to people's everyday life, their rituals, and reflects the specifics of different historical periods (Polishchuk 1991: 26).

Folkloristics, continues the author, is the study of people who create this *high poetic culture*:

The major problems of folklore are its textuality, artistry, its origin and development in different historical formations, the issues of individual and collective creativity in the creative process and its relationship with literature. The major aim of folkloristics is to analyze texts and forms of folklore, which is treated as the *collective traditional art of working people* (1991: 26).

It is rather common for such teaching materials to treat folklore in romantic-patriotic intonations: “Folklore is the bottomless well of the people’s wisdom” (Polishchuk 1991: 26).

The introduction to another textbook states that:

Folklore is a voice from the past and at the same time it is a voice of the present. This is the voice of the people, it is the *soul* of the nation, that expresses the highest and most sincere hopes and expectations of the people. This is the most hidden and *deepest wisdom* of the people, their special philosophy and aesthetics, religion and morality, this is the core of their life (Bezverkha and Lohvyn 1996: 5).

A recent reinvention within academia is *narodoznavstvo*, or “the study of the people,” which to a great degree shares the same subject matter as folklore studies and ethnography. After 1991, *narodoznavstvo* was introduced widely into primary and secondary school and university programs. In many instances, its methodology is borrowed from folklore and ethnography, while its main purpose is the popularization of folk culture rather than any extended theoretical analysis. Its reappearance strengthens a neo-romantic, neo-idealistic stance in which folklore becomes defined as national pride and national property. This corresponds to the visions of some academics such as Roman Kyrchiv, who is the author of chapters on folklore in several textbooks of *narodoznavstvo*. Once again the lore of the people is treated as the “wisdom of the nation” which should serve today as the reservoir of codes and symbols that constitute the new national identity of Ukrainians. Its best “achievements were passed from generation to generation and played an important role in uniting people and marking out their ethnic uniqueness” (Kyrchiv 1994: 404). Kyrchiv continues:

Despite differences in regional folkloric traditions and the long-term occupation of Ukraine by foreign countries, the oral creativity of Ukrainian people developed on the common *national* ground of all Ukrainian people. The major criteria of such national unity are the linguistic and cultural unity of the Ukrainian people, its *national mentality* [...] The singularity of Ukrainian folklore tradition and the ongoing exchange of its creations between various regions in the system of the all-national cultural network are both intensified in the process of the building of the Ukrainian nation and its further consolidation. This is especially obvious in our time when the best folkloric works cross the boundaries of their regional popularity and become the cultural property of the people (1994: 405).

If folklore was treated as the product of the working masses in Soviet times, in post-Soviet Ukraine it is seen as a property of the *narod*, where *narod* is the nation. At the same time folklore is seen as the sacred agency, the “wisdom of the nation” born of the Ukrainian peasantry. Peasantry, conceived in terms of nineteenth century populism and twentieth century Soviet positivist sociology was once considered to be the social basis of Ukrainian nationhood. In the context of today’s nation building processes, this social group is not treated in such terms, though folklorists continue to see peasant culture as the locale (or “the well”) of the nation’s wisdom. Meanwhile, folklore studies and especially *narodoznavstvo*, as “the study of our people,” is elevated to become “the study of our (national) unity,” according to I. Selezhan, professor at Chernivtsi University (1995: 19).

## Conclusions

Obviously, disciplines that share the subject matter of folklore in Ukraine are not indifferent to the current political situation in the country. Some attempts to approach the issue of folklore theoretically are made today in Ukrainian scholarship, some serious Russian theoretical works in this direction are available in Ukraine<sup>22</sup> and, in casual conversations, folklorists are demonstrating a great concern in reevaluating their scholarship. However, the official folkloric discourse that is established today in Ukraine is a more popular stance, connected with romantic nationalism. This trend is best expressed in writings by Kyrchiv:

The people’s poetic word reacts in its own way to what is happening in our life, often characterising various phenomena, events and people differently from their officially established readings and interpretations. It is especially characteristic of today when we witness how the mobilising processes of the revival of the Ukrainian nation and its state intensify folkloric life as well. The theme of building the new independent Ukrainian state, to which a people refers its dearest dreams and expectations about freedom, humanism and equality, have become the main theme in today’s people’s creativity (1994: 406).

The principle of *narodnist’* acquires a new meaning in such contexts. As in the 1920s, when the *folk* were sought in the masses among working people,

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22. For instance, folklore is given a serious treatment in *Svod etnograficheskikh poniatii i terminov* [Compilation of ethnographic concepts and terms], edited by Bromlei and Shtrobakh (1991).

the folk since the late 1980s were also sought among the masses, but this time among a *nationally* and not socially defined group of people:

The major subject for Ukrainian folklore scholarship today should be national (*natsional'nyi*) folklore, although the folklore of other ethnic groups should be, of course, under investigation. We need to pay more attention to the national folklore, because when imposed upon us, Soviet methodology did not allow us to analyze the differences between Russian and Ukrainian folklore (Kyrchiv interview 1995).

Ethnically defined folklore of Ukrainian peasantry is presented nowadays to the rest of Ukraine's citizens. According to Skurativ's'kyi, a prolific writer on folklore and the editor-in-chief of the folklore journal *Berehynia*, the Ukrainian people (traditional folk) who carried on the *national* traditions are responsible for the Ukrainian nation (Skurativ's'kyi 1992: 5-9). In the light of this vision (and in connection with the practice of naming the folk differently depending on their ethnicity ["nationality"]), Russians, Greeks, Poles, Gypsies, Jews, and other ethnic groups that live today in Ukraine are not seen by intellectuals as active agents in nation-building processes in Ukraine. They are left out in the margins of both the folkloristic discourse and the politics of nation-building.

Given the conditions of its development and its goals of assisting national revival, Ukrainian folklore scholarship is not yet able to devote its energy to theoretical reconceptualisations of its discipline as might be expected by outsiders. The current project of Ukrainian folkloristics has become aligned with the national agenda of the new Ukraine: "The major subject for Ukrainian folklore scholarship today should be national (*natsional'nyi*) folklore" (Kyrchiv interview 1995). On the other hand, this should be seen as a result of the historical developments in Eastern Europe in which the main subject of both folklore and ethnography was their own people, their own folk. It was not the fascination with alterity, as in the case of Western, or Anglo-Saxon anthropology, but the continuous search for the national self, as in the case of Eastern European ethnology (Jakubowska 1993: 148) that inspired Ukrainian folklore studies to undertake the project of constructing the nation out of the folk in newly independent Ukraine. Discussing the collapse of communism and the imminent growth of mutual interest among Western and former socialist social scholars in each other's work, Ernest Gellner rightly predicted in 1992 that East Europeans would not be eager to reject their established academic traditions (Gellner 1992: 7). Folklorists in post-Soviet Ukraine are these East European

scholars who are not yet ready to embrace the multiplicity of voices and positions in the folklore discourse of the West. National issues are still of great concern today in the scholarship, and, at the time I was researching this paper (1995-1998), there was minimal interest in research on other than Ukrainian folklore as well as little interest in Western theoretical developments in folklore studies. This is not surprising, for the immediate tasks they faced right after 1991 were of primarily national, rather than theoretical, importance. However, these tendencies are presently changing. In 1997 Ukrainian historian Oleksii Tolochko shared with me in Kyiv that some scholars realize that the slogan "national revival" keeps researchers "in the shadows of the past, restraining them from involvement in international scholarship" (conversation 1997). More students at universities choose to research other than Ukrainian folklore (Borysenko, conversation 1999).

In the first five to seven years of independent Ukraine, Ukrainian folklore scholarship has become one of the intellectual agencies most responsible for promoting national ideology in today's Ukraine. Being caught in the web of a transitional social reality with its competing ideologies, it has taken the role of producer and purveyor of a national idea based on the primeval presence of "the Folk." Folklorists, with their current project of rehabilitating Ukrainian traditional culture and elevating it to the heights of national currency, have become as much involved in the dramatic new narrative of the nation as politicians, historians and writers. Theirs is not only the project of supplying co-nationals with a new text, and not just about refashioning public taste for folk art. In what they profess, folklorists are involved in reinventing a new collective memory, reimposing forgotten symbols and mythologies of the past, so necessary for what Anthony Smith calls "the ethnic survival" of the nation (1992: 439; 1988: 13). And yet, their current theoretical constructions, aligned with the interests of national ideology, still reflect the ambiguities of Soviet Marxist methodology that continue to haunt Ukraine's intellectual thought.

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