

## Culture



# In Search of the Folk Society: Nationalism and Folklore Studies in Quebec

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Volume 3, numéro 1, 1983

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1084163ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1084163ar>

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### Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

### ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

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### Citer cet article

Handler, R. (1983). In Search of the Folk Society: Nationalism and Folklore Studies in Quebec. *Culture*, 3(1), 103–114. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1084163ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Au Québec, les idéologies nationalistes fondent le caractère distinctif de l'identité québécoise sur des traditions culturelles uniques. Selon les nationalistes, il faudrait protéger ces traditions. Comme d'autres spécialistes de la culture, les folkloristes ont travaillé à documenter la culture québécoise traditionnelle. Or, de telles recherches « objectivent » la culture traditionnelle en la plaçant dans des contextes nouveaux, y attachant des significations nouvelles. Ainsi les folkloristes—au Québec, aussi traditionnels que la « tradition » elle-même—changent la culture qu'ils voulaient défendre. Alors se pose la question : le Québec a-t-il jamais été une « Folk Society », homogène et isolée, ou bien les chercheurs et les nationalistes ont-ils continuellement recréé les traditions folkloriques ?

# In Search of the Folk Society : Nationalism and Folklore Studies in Quebec

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Québécois nationalist ideologies base the uniqueness of Québécois identity on distinctive cultural traditions which, they urge, need to be protected. Among other cultural specialists, folklorists have worked to document traditional Québécois culture. But such research 'objectifies' traditional culture by placing it in new settings and attaching new meanings to it. And folklorists, as traditional in Québec as 'tradition' itself, thereby change the culture that they intended to preserve. Thus the question arises: was Québec ever a folk society, homogeneous and isolated, or were folk traditions continually recreated by scholars and nationalists alike?

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## *Nationalism and Cultural Objectification in Québec*

For the past several years I have studied nationalist ideologies in the Canadian province of Québec. Three field visits fell during periods of heightened political activity and nationalistic fervor : in 1976, during the provincial parliamentary elections in which the *indépendantiste* Parti Québécois took power ; in 1977-1978, the first years of the new government's tenure ; and in 1980, during the government's referendum on the question of secession. But political events as such turned out to be less important than other phenomena to the direction my analysis of Québécois nationalism has taken. The truly epiphanous moments of fieldwork occurred during observation of a process that I have since come to call *cultural objectification*. Let two examples do for many.

1. I attend a folk dance *spectacle* in the vast Québec Coliseum, home of the Nordiques of the National Hockey League. At one end of the iceless arena a stage is set as a traditional farmhouse parlor. The performers are presented as a farm family and its neighbors, their performances as traditional family fun. Three thousand spectators watch.

2. I live with a farm family during the 1977 Christmas holidays. At the height of the traditional

Christmas night revelry my hostess interrupts the dancing and feasting to turn on the television. My family appears on the screen, dancing the very same dances we had just stopped. Two weeks earlier a film crew had come down from the city to film these people staging a traditional Québécois Christmas party.

I came to understand these incidents as examples of cultural objectification, a process whereby people examine their milieu in a self-conscious fashion, thereby turning it into those objects of social-scientific scrutiny that we call 'society' and 'culture'. I have taken the term cultural objectification from Bernard S. Cohn, who uses it in a discussion of the colonial era in India :

The Indian intellectuals of Bengal in the 19th century and then the whole Western educated class of Indians in the 20th century have objectified their culture. They in some sense have made it into a 'thing': they can stand back and look at themselves, their ideas, their symbols and culture and see it as an entity. What had previously been embedded in a whole matrix of custom, ritual, religious symbol, a textually transmitted tradition, has now become something different. What had been unconscious now to some extent becomes conscious. Aspects of the tradition can be selected, polished and reformulated for conscious ends. (n.d. : 5)

The term objectification corresponds to the Marxian term reification as it has been used by, for example, Peter Berger in his work on the sociology of knowledge (Berger and Pullberg, 1965 ; Berger and Luckmann, 1967 : 88-92). For the Québec case I prefer to speak of objectification because, as we shall see, an important component of Québécois nationalism has been the attempt to see and to preserve Québécois culture as an object or thing—in fact, as a thing made up of things (culture traits, ethnographic specimens) that can be itemized, evaluated, preserved and displayed. Needless to say, in such an attempt the work of folklore collectors would be invaluable.

That cultural objectification should stem from nationalist ideology is understandable in terms of the history of Québécois nationalism. Nationalist ideology has been an essential aspect of life in Québec since the time of the Conquest or shortly thereafter. The complex interaction of French and British that followed the Conquest was decisive for the emergence of national identity among French speakers ; indeed, the emergence of 'French-Canadian' and 'Québécois' (as well as 'English-Canadian' and 'Canadian') identities cannot be understood apart from the sociopolitical context in which two peoples attempted to define themselves in opposition to each other. Thus when French-Canadian politicians

and intellectuals began to think about, and act upon, their social and political situation under the new regime, they did so by elaborating a nationalist ideology that specified French-Canadian identity in opposition to that of the conqueror. This nationalistic interpretation of the world has remained a constant in Québec society and politics ever since.

In Québec, as elsewhere, nationalist ideology posits the existence of a nation—or, at least, the desirability of some sort of national existence. In the terms of this ideology, a nation is a group of people recognizably different from all other groups. That its difference is recognizable is due to the fact that it has history, traditions, customs—in short, that it has its own culture. Conversely, the national culture, according to nationalist ideology, is simply that ensemble of attributes that distinguishes the nation from all other nations.

In Québec, nationalist ideology has been of a particularly defensive temperament, as the Québécois themselves recognize. Surrounded by a sea of English speakers (as they say), Québécois have felt that their cultural identity was in imminent danger of dissolution. Thus the belief that one's collective uniqueness is based on culture has manifested itself constantly in Québec life in the concern to protect, preserve and cherish what Québécois call *le patrimoine* (heritage). Ideologues in different eras have emphasized different aspects of *le patrimoine*—in fact, we could say that national culture is constantly being redefined. But the existence of *le patrimoine*, of a culture, *some* culture, however defined, is questioned only by cynics in their most cynical moments.

For purposes of analysis it is useful to distinguish between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' versions of nationalist ideology in Québec. Again, this is a distinction recognized by the natives themselves. It corresponds to a great divide in Québec social history, a divide marked by the Quiet Revolution of the early 1960's. Between 1840 and 1960 the Roman Catholic Church was the dominant social institution in the province. In control of hearts and minds and educational institutions, it was able to propagate and maintain a conservative nationalism that (1) defined the Nation as Catholic, French, and peasant, and (2) shunned 'Anglo-Saxon' modernity and looked back to New France as a Golden Age. The Quiet Revolution saw the emergence of a new middle class—university educated, upwardly mobile (hence frustrated by 'English' control of the upper echelons of business and government bureaucracies), and secular in world view. In a few short years the Church disappeared as a major institutional force in Québec society, to be replaced by the

provincial government, newly reorganized and greatly expanded. The contemporary nationalism of the Quiet Revolution and thereafter has not attempted to forget the past. It too looks back to New France to find the birth of the Nation, and, like the more traditional variety, assumes that somewhere in the past a distinctive national culture crystallized. But contemporary nationalists differ from their predecessors in calling for continual and progressive adaptation to the social and economic demands of the future, though they nonetheless believe that the national culture, 'fixed' in its essence, must remain at the base of all further national development.

Since the early 1800's then, nationalist ideology and sentiment have manifested themselves rather consistently in most aspects of Québec life. My concern in this paper is the process of cultural objectification and, in particular, the role that folklore scholars have played in it. That social scientists and other intellectuals have contributed greatly to the objectification of Québécois culture should come as no surprise. If a people—or, better, some individuals who consider themselves to represent a people—feel the need to preserve and defend the culture of the group, who better equipped to study it than these cultural specialists? And when nationalism is defensive, as it has been in Québec, the urge to study national culture is spurred on by a fear that cultural 'pollution' will lead to cultural dissolution and, ultimately, to the death of the nation itself. Hence the attempt to rediscover a 'pure' version of the national culture, to preserve and rehabilitate the cultural past. In Québec this attempt has often manifested itself in a pursuit of the folk society.

In the central sections of this paper I shall raise the following question. How has the pursuit of the folk society by folklorists and others led to the destruction of the folk society—or, better, to the creation of traditions which, though imagined as authentic, are in fact objectifications of traditional culture, hence different from what they are believed by the objectifiers to be?

### *Québec as a Folk Society*

The idea of the folk society has been seductive for Western thinkers since the eighteenth century at least. In the sociological tradition alone one can point to a number of famous dichotomies that embody it: Maine's status and contract, Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity, Tönnies' *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, Sapir's genuine and spurious culture, and even Marx's analysis of town

and country. For our purposes I want to examine that version of this theme that has been directly applied to the Québec case: Robert Redfield's model of the folk society and the folkurban continuum. Redfield (1947 : 295-296) described the folk society as small and isolated; its members have no contact with people from other groups, but are on intimate terms with one another. Status is ascribed, never achieved, and "behavior is personal, not impersonal" (300-301). Though technology is not necessarily simple it is pre-industrial. The only division of labor is that based on sex roles, and the society as a whole is economically self-sustaining (297-298). Values in the folk society are integrated, behavior follows unquestioningly from values, and all aspects of life are relevant to one another and to the actors. There are no books, no sense of history, no cultivation of science and theology, for in the folk society tradition reigns supreme. It follows that there is no self-consciousness: "behavior in the folk society is traditional, spontaneous, and uncritical", and "there is no objectivity and no systematization of knowledge" (Redfield, 1947 : 299-300).

Redfield was careful to point out that his folk society was an ideal-type, as was its logical opposite, the urban society. In the study of empirical societies Redfield used a third type, that of the peasant society, to analyze what he called "the rural dimension of old civilizations" and peasant societies are those whose members "control and cultivate their land for subsistence and as a part of a traditional way of life" (Redfield, 1967 : 20). The solidarity of peasant society is characterized by its "folklike inwardfacingness" (Redfield, 1953 : 33), yet, unlike the folk society, it is not isolated. Between peasant society and the larger civilization there are "economic, political, and moral" relations (Redfield, 1953 : 31). In particular, the 'little tradition' of the peasant society is fed by, and in turn feeds into, the 'great tradition' of the cities (Redfield, 1967 : 41-42). In sum, the peasant society partakes of both folk and urban society (Redfield, 1963 : xv).

It was Redfield's student, Horace Miner, who first applied the notion of the folk society to Québec in his study of a French-Canadian village. In the preface to *St. Denis* Miner (1963 : IX) defined one of the goals of his study as "the ethnographic description of the old rural French-Canadian folk culture in its least-altered existent form". Miner (1963 : 5) believed that a folk society had developed in New France, enduring there for well over a century until urbanization, industrialization, and its own structural weaknesses destroyed it in all but the rural corners of Québec. *St. Denis*, he felt, had remained a folk community, but he knew that it was changing

even as he sought to capture what remained of its "folk character". Miner (1963 : 234) characterized the demise of the folk society in terms of the "increasing dependence of the local society upon the great industrial civilization of which it is becoming a part". The old self-sufficient isolation had been shattered, he argued, and the parishioners of St. Denis abandoned their folkways and replaced them with urban innovations.

This mix of old and new, and the important connections that linked St. Denis to the wider society, led Redfield to see Miner's material in terms of his own model of the peasant society. In the introduction to Miner's monograph, Redfield described those aspects of St. Denis that were folklike and those that were urban. On the one hand the villagers had a folk culture characterized by an integrated value system and behavior in conformity to it. On the other hand they participated in a money economy, were literate, and had ties to the urban world (Redfield, 1963 : xii-xiv). Neither Redfield nor Miner considered St. Denis to be typical of French Canada, for they realized that Québec in the 1930's was already an industrialized society. But they did think of their village as representative of an older, more traditional Québec, and saw it as a baseline for the study of what they called "social change" (Redfield, 1963 : xvi-xix).

Many years after the original publication of *St. Denis*, a series of articles by Canadian scholars reexamined the utility of the folk-urban model for the study of Québec. Philippe Garigue (1958 : 28) attacked the Redfield-Miner model, arguing that the Québec countryside had never been more than an extension of the towns and, in particular, that an isolated, specifically rural culture had never existed in French Canada. Several of Garigue's colleagues counterattacked, justifying the vision of Québec as a folk/peasant society (Guindon, 1964 ; Rioux, 1964). I do not want to rehearse the details that both sides marshalled as evidence. Though some statistical data were utilized in an exploratory fashion, the argument turned on the problem of whether such-and-such social fact could be interpreted as a sign of rurality. Consider, for example, the matter of the Catholic Church. Everybody agreed that the Catholic high tradition was one of the attributes that made Québec a peasant society instead of a completely folk society. But Garigue (1958 : 22) argued further that the presence of the Church "reduced the particularism of rural communities" and maintained "cultural homogeneity" between town and country. The other side, however, contended that the Church deliberately isolated its flock (to protect them from 'Anglo-Saxon' values) and enforced the

kind of homogeneous, sacred world view typical of folk and peasant societies (Rioux, 1964 : 170-172 ; Redfield, 1963 : xvii).

One of the curious aspects of this controversy, unremarked by the participants, is that the folk/peasant society envisioned by Rioux and Guindon was not the folk society that Miner had in mind. As we saw, Miner (1963 : 286) looked back to New France to find a folk society, and when he wrote of its demise he chose 1800 as a significant date :

The new elements, which have entered into the pattern of life since 1800, originate almost exclusively in the cities. They are the result of urbanization and industrialization. As these processes were largely due to English stimulus, many of the new elements are characteristic of English and American life.

Guindon and Rioux, however, located their folk/peasant society in the nineteenth century. In his reply to Garigue, Guindon (1964 : 139) tried to show "how it was that French Canada became a predominantly rural society at the end of the eighteenth century, and remained so throughout the nineteenth century". Rioux (1964 : 170) similarly argued that the folk society "reached its peak in French Canada" during the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>.

This temporal transposition of the folk society derives from an important current of historical revisionism created by Québécois historians and social scientists after the Second World War (Cook, 1970 : 113-141). The revised history has become the history accepted by those that I have called contemporary nationalists ; the older history is that of the traditional nationalists. The older history looked to New France as a golden age, and saw the French-Canadian people as a rural race whose survival would depend upon its will to resist modern innovations. In the revised history the rurality of French Canada is seen to result from the Conquest. New France had been, not a peasant society, but a trading society. The Conquest 'decapitated' this society by eliminating its nascent bourgeoisie ; those French Canadians who survived and stayed on were forced to surrender economic and political control to the English. As a result, French Canadians isolated themselves in the rural hinterlands, while the conquerors dominated the colony from Montreal and Québec City. Disastrous as these circumstances have been for the social evolution of Québec, they include one compensating factor : the subsequent isolation of French Canada led to its survival and, beyond this, to its development as a unique nation. This has been explicitly argued by Rioux (1974 : 17 ; 1964 : 171) :

Forced to isolate themselves in a rural milieu in order to survive—for the cities of Québec and Montreal remained predominantly anglophone until the mid-nineteenth century—the Québécois attach themselves to the soil during years and years and develop a well particularized social type ; it is during this long wintering that they become Québécois for good...

At this point the similarity of social-scientific discourse to nationalist ideology becomes quite clear. Indeed, as Garigue (1964 : 186) later wrote, “the emergence of sociological theory about French Canada can be considered as an ideological extension of the very social reality it proposes to study”. What I want to emphasize here is how well sociological models of the folk society match nationalistic visions of a rural Québec out of which the Nation has been born. Whatever the particular version of the folk-society model, used for whatever heuristic or ideological purposes, all answer a pressing need to find somewhere in the past an authentic version of the nation or society that can be used to make sense of the present situation. For Miner and Redfield the folk society represented a starting-point in the historical process of social change. For traditional nationalists rural, Catholic New France represented both the birth of the Nation and its finest flowering. For a contemporary nationalist like Rioux, nineteenth-century rural Québec was the milieu in which a cumulative process of differentiation led to the emergence of a new nation. Each of these quite different perspectives requires a myth of the new beginning, in which a limited group of people, isolated in a virgin natural milieu, is imagined to transform itself into a new social entity, distinctive and bounded. Each overlooks what came before by using such archetypal symbols as an ocean voyage or a military conquest to sever continuity with the past. And each then uses the new beginning to explain, justify or condemn what followed.

The fact that different scholars and ideologues have imagined different folk societies for Québec suggests that the model partakes more of the romantic and mythical than of the objective and factual. The questions that Garigue raised remain unanswered. Was French Canada ever a folk society ? Did it exist as a collection of isolated rural communities, relatively uninfluenced by the surrounding world ? In the next section I focus on two types of evidence that suggest negative answers to these questions. First, the best sociological studies of rural Québec record what would seem to be continuous processes of social change and cultural diffusion. Moreover, change and diffusion affected aspects of life that today are objectified as typical of

the folk society—folk dancing and music, for example. Second, cultural objectifiers are as traditional in French Canada as the traditions they record ; we find them active from at least the mid-nineteenth century onward. These two types of evidence—continuous change in the folk aspects of Québec life, continuous activity of folklore objectifiers—are linked, since the very researchers who recorded the facts of change were at the same time attempting to stop change and preserve the past. This will be evident in the work of Marius Barbeau, ‘dean of French-Canadian folklorists’. To the degree that Barbeau’s career, both as researcher and popularizer, is typical of the Québécois approach to the past, it suggests that the province has never been unreflectively anchored in tradition, with “no objectivity and no systematization of knowledge”, as Redfield put it.

### *In Search of The Folk Society*

As we have seen, Miner (1963 : 286-290) spoke of “new traits” in St. Denis as those that had diffused from the cities since 1800. He took the trouble to catalogue them under a variety of headings indicating their ubiquity in daily life : Agriculture and Husbandry, Food and Drink, Home-Product Techniques, Games, Music and Dance. Miner’s French-Canadian predecessors, Barbeau and Léon Gérin, shared his vision of colonial New France as the original French-Canadian folk society, where ancient French traditions, adapted to a new environment, had provided the basis for a folk culture. Barbeau (1936 : 71-96) wrote at length of the slow death of traditional handicrafts, crafts that he saw as rooted in the French renaissance. Like Miner he believed that the advance of industrial civilization, coupled with what he saw as a lack of collective self-confidence and pride, had all but destroyed traditional French Canada. “After 1880”, he wrote (Barbeau, 1949 : 75), “goods manufactured in foreign cities displaced domestic handicrafts. People buy, but make little at home anymore”. Elsewhere he wrote of the collapse of native crafts and styles in the face of importations from New York as early as 1825 (Barbeau, 1936 : 170). Gérin (Falardeau, 1965 : 277-281) believed that the ‘community family’ of the French-Canadian peasant was the key unit in French-Canadian social structure. Though Gérin (1938 : 40-41, 151-181) sought rural families anchored to their farms through the generations, he often wrote of peasants who moved regularly from farm to farm, from country to city, from Quebec to New England, and back again. Gérin, who began his field studies in 1886, docu-

mented this restless, incessant movement back at least to the 1850's in the family histories that he collected.

These glimpses of rural life reveal important contacts between Québécois peasants and the wider world, certainly for the second half of the nineteenth century, and probably before as well. Though the isolation of rural Québec must certainly have been pronounced in comparison to contemporary rural areas, there was nonetheless a greater circulation of people and diffusion of foreign culture traits than one would at first expect. As a more detailed example of this, bearing directly on modern-day conceptions of the folk society, consider the evidence pertaining to folk dancing. Because dance fashions change rapidly, and because the history of particular dances is difficult to unravel, almost any form of dancing popular before World War Two can today be presented to the public as traditional. Yet fieldworkers from Gérin in the 1880's to Rioux in the 1950's reported that rural folk not merely passively endured, but eagerly sought, city novelties in song and dance. What appears old and traditional today was at one time, often quite recently, new. Working in St. Justin in 1886, Gérin (1898 : 191) remarked that "the best-known dances today seem to be those introduced by young people returned from the United States. But the gigue, cotillions and quadrilles are not forgotten". Miner (1963 : 290) listed only cotillion and *salut des dames* as old culture traits in St. Denis ; such dances as quadrilles, reels and sets he included among the new. Doyon (1950 : 173) reported that in nineteenth-century Beauce county young people went regularly to work in Maine, where they sought fashionable novelties as well as high wages :

Old informants still remember countless amusing anecdotes recalling the good times when, as young men, they would go haying in the States. As soon as the day's work was done, they looked for fun, and danced to their hearts' content, particularly on Saturday night. New dances or new ways of dancing were sought, because they made the young dancers still more welcome at home with their sweethearts.

Doyon also commented on the difficulty of determining the origins of particular dances, due to the fact that French, English, Irish and Scottish dance elements have intermingled almost from the first years of contact among these various groups. Small wonder that the famous fiddler, Jean Carignan (Petrowski, 1978 : 25), has declared that "Québécois folklore doesn't exist. It is a folklore made up of scraps from Ireland and Scotland". Carignan's opinion is perhaps drastic, but it does point to the

intricate patterns of cross-pollination that have always characterized the folklore of France, Great Britain and, later, North America.

We thus find that research on folk dancing—one of those culture traits held to typify the folk society and even to represent the national spirit—reveals not unchanging indigenous traditions but constant innovations and importations. Furthermore, this steady diffusion of foreign cultural material into rural French Canada has been matched by a continuous process of objectification intended to recover the old traditions before they disappeared. Not only did folklore collectors attempt to record fading traditions, they attempted to rejuvenate them as well, both among the 'folk' who practiced them and among their urbanizing, modernizing fellow countrymen.

In her history of folklore activities in Canada, Carpenter has related the style, even ethos, of folklore research to the ethnic and socio-political background of Canadian researchers. She traces the relative unimportance of Anglo-Canadian folklore scholarship (both within Canada and in terms of international recognition) to its dependence upon a British model, one that has stressed "the romantic preservation and propagation of survivals" (Carpenter, 1979 : 162). This has resulted in a lack of interest in the living folklore of the researchers' milieu—that is, in 'English-Canadian' folklore—as well as in a lack of any attempt to use folklore for social or political ends. In French Canada, by contrast, folklore studies have always been conditioned by nationalism—in particular, by the defensive stance of French-Canadian nationalists. With the emergence of an indigenous French-Canadian intelligentsia in the early nineteenth century came a conviction of the necessity to defend and preserve French-Canadian culture. "As a direct result" of this conviction, Carpenter (1979 : 206) claims,

French-Canadian folklore studies are exceptionally well developed. Both at home and abroad, they are the best known and most lauded of all Canadian folklore endeavours.

According to Carpenter almost from the beginnings of New France European travelers recorded descriptions of the folk life of the colonists. In the eighteenth century these were to be found in the form of travelers' diaries and accounts of voyages 'in the interior of America', 'in the wilds of North America', as typical titles would have it. Such literature appeared continuously throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Later examples tended to be geographically more narrow-

ly focused and reflected, perhaps, the transition from travel to tourism that Daniel Boorstin (1961 : 77-117) has discussed. Most of this literature was written by outsiders to French Canada, by British and French authors at first and, later, by Americans and English Canadians. It was romantic, interpreting rural French Canada in terms of “the Rousseau-inspired fascination with the primitive, exotic, and natural” (Carpenter, 1979 : 210) ; its discussion of folk life stressed folk music above other aspects of custom (an emphasis that Carpenter sees as typical of British folklore studies) ; and it was aimed primarily at English-language audiences. What was the influence of such literature on the developing French-Canadian self-image ?—this is a question that I cannot answer conclusively. Obviously it would only have been known to that small (in the early nineteenth century especially) fraction of the French-Canadian population that was literate and even bilingual. But, as we shall see, these were the people who began to articulate a sense of French-Canadian identity and to objectify French-Canadian culture, and they have never been averse to idealize, in a romantic vein, the rural roots of French Canada. There is a time-honoured tradition among nationalist historians (Groulx, 1952 ; vol. 1 : 208-209 ; vol. 2 : 193-196 ; Wade, 1955 : 6-42) of citing the accounts of European travelers in depictions of the social life of New France—in fact, observations by certain voyagers have been built into national history. Second-hand histories, such as those of social scientists required to provide background as a prelude to some variety of synchronic analysis, dutifully cite these voyagers ‘as cited in’ the major histories of Groulx, Wade and others.

At any rate, as an explicitly nationalist ideology developed among the French-Canadian intelligentsia, lay scholars began to record the history and traditions of their race. By the mid-1880’s,

There was an educated and influential native French-Canadian elite composed mostly of clergy and professionals but including journalists and politicians. This intelligentsia became profoundly concerned with the preservation of extent traditions, very much in a “get it before it dies out” attitude, and with the popularization of French-Canadian history and culture. Their concerns derived from a desire to promote French-Canadian identification as a defensive reaction against threatening English domination in the pre-Confederation era (Carpenter, 1979 : 212).

The greatest of these lay scholars was F. X. Garneau, the first of French Canada’s two ‘national historians’ (Groulx was the second). Inspired by Garneau, as well as by French romantic writers, a

circle of young writers—the first in French Canada’s history—emerged who wrote romantically about their peasant countrymen in an effort to awaken national pride (Lacourcière, 1961 : 88). The members of this literary movement did not engage in research and collecting. Among their contemporaries, however, were two musical scholars (Hubert LaRue and Ernest Gagnon) who published, in 1863 and 1865, the first “truly scholarly studies” of French-Canadian folk songs (Carpenter, 1979 : 213-214). Carpenter claims that these studies were undertaken for scholarly rather than nationalistic purposes. At any rate, they took their place among other nineteenth-century collections of French-Canadian folk songs that became increasingly popular among more nationalistic French Canadians. By 1904 a French musicologist, Julien Tiersot, could write that the folk song in French Canada, “far from being despised by the educated classes, has remained in favor with them as much and even more than among the lower classes” (Carpenter, 1979 : 217)—though Carpenter cautions that his claim was “somewhat exaggerated”.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, then, there is an established literature that records at least some aspects of French-Canadian folk life. This literature was influenced by both romantic and nationalistic ideology and was used for nationalistic purposes ; but, once again, I can only guess as to how important it may have been in the formulation of a French-Canadian self-image. Carpenter (1979 : 220) argues that with the advent of Marius Barbeau as a researcher and popularizer of French-Canadian folk traditions, what had been merely a “persisting interest” in folklore was transformed into a “movement”.

At this point we are hampered by lack of suitable biographical materials on Barbeau ; one can only speculate as to his motives. There is no doubt, however, that he introduced into Canada what has become a traditional method of objectifying tradition—the staged folklore *spectacle* or show. It is also probable that Barbeau’s initial interest in French-Canadian folklore (starting about 1914) was not stimulated by the major currents of French-Canadian nationalism of the time but, rather, by British and American scholarship. Affiliated throughout his career with federal institutions, Barbeau never became an advocate of an exclusively Québécois nationalism, nor was he ever claimed by the nationalists as a scholar-hero, as were such people as the historians Garneau and Groulx.

Barbeau was born in 1883 in a “non-peasant, relatively highly educated family which did not commonly exhibit its peasant heritage”. After ad-



mission to the Quebec Bar in 1907, he went to Oxford as the first French-Canadian Rhodes scholar :

For three years Barbeau studied anthropology, archaeology, and ethnology at Oriel College, Oxford. Through the influence of R.R. Marett, he was directed away from Egyptology which first fascinated him and to the study of North American Indians. ... He received a Bachelor of Science and a diploma in anthropology from Oxford in 1910 with a thesis on "The Totemic System of the North Western Tribes of North America". After a year of postgraduate study at Oxford on the ethnology of Indian songs, Barbeau returned to Canada to become one of the two anthropologists on the National Museum staff. In 1911 he also joined the American Folklore Society (Carpenter, 1979 : 221-222).

While doing fieldwork among Huron Indians near Québec City, Barbeau came across much material of French origin or influence. Because he sought (in the British tradition) the most exotic and the most ancient, he ignored this material until his encounter in 1914 with Franz Boas. Boas expressed immediate interest in the diffusion of French materials among the Indians. Barbeau (1943 : 167) later proclaimed this encounter to be directly responsible for the folklore movement that he spearheaded :

It [the movement] was brought about by Dr. Franz Boas in 1914 when, at an annual meeting of the Anthropological Association in New York, he invited the author of this article to collect French Canadian folktales and publish them in the *Journal of American Folklore*. This urge released new initiatives within Canada... that have been highly productive ever since.

Among these new initiatives was the reactivation of the Canadian branch of the American Folklore Society (active among anglophone Montréalais from 1892 to 1897), which "soon reached its maximum size of about 140 members" (Barbeau, 1943 : 168). Barbeau became co-editor in 1916 of the *Journal of American Folklore*, which subsequently published eight issues devoted to Canadian research (1916, 1917, 1919, 1920, 1926, 1931, 1940, 1950). He recruited a number of colleagues to help him collect French-Canadian materials and with their aid he also began the work of popularizing what they gathered. Among the popularizing activities were the first folklore shows in Canada.

In 1916, at a resort hotel on the lower Saint Lawrence, Barbeau presented a folksinger who entertained his audience with songs, tales and dances. In 1918 Barbeau gave a paper to the *Société historique de Montréal* on "The Role of Oral Tradition in the Study of Our History". This presentation apparently stimulated him and some of his colleagues to attempt something more ambitious :

The songs and tales that we had cited naturally would suggest the idea of returning to the source, of hearing the singers and storytellers themselves. What particularly stimulated this urge was the realistic presentation that Miss Loraine Wyman had given—at the invitation of the Society—of some English songs that she had gathered in the Kentucky mountains (Barbeau, 1920 : 1).

But Barbeau had other models as well. He mentions a private show, under the auspices of the Folklore Society (of Great Britain), that he witnessed in 1910—"a realistic performance of 'Jack in the green', an ancient dance... that our esteemed professor, M. R.R. Marett, had staged on his lawn, for selected guests, at Oxford". And he cites (Barbeau, 1920 : 4-5) a performance of folk songs arranged and staged by the French musicologist Tiersot in Paris in 1885.

A combination of motives prompted Barbeau and his colleagues to attempt a similar performance in Canada. They wanted to convince "the educated classes" of the validity of their research, hoping that conviction would lead to financial support. To do this they had to overcome not merely indifference but hostility on the part of those who were ashamed of the peasant element of French-Canadian society :

In the eyes of these critics it is futile to spend one's time gathering and publishing folk tales and anecdotes. Isn't the lower class contemptible and ignorant, its language and customs boorish ? 'Why do you persist in unearthing this nonsense that we have been trying to eliminate for fifty years ?'—thus were we impatiently reproached, in a public meeting, by a colleague of the Royal Society of Canada (Barbeau, 1920 : 1).

Yet, according to the folklorists, a return to folk sources was precisely what was needed to stimulate national culture : their larger purpose was to encourage the French-Canadian intelligentsia to seek inspiration in the folk culture of Canada rather than in French high culture. As long as French-Canadian writers emulated French models the creative elan, and corresponding renown, that they sought would escape them. "Wasn't it time to attack urban prejudices and to make known, by examples... that humble patrimony that the rural population conserves unconsciously for the regeneration of the race ?" (Barbeau, 1920 : 1-2).

Barbeau and his colleagues presented their examples in two "public soirées" held in Montreal in 1919. Barbeau claimed that these differed from their European models in that the folk themselves were the performers (an interesting innovation in the objectification of culture !). In any case these folk performers know how to amuse the urban audience :

The first *soirée* of popular traditions... took place March 18, 1919. Its success was decisive. We had to promise a second *soirée* in the near future for those who had been unable to find a place in the overflowing hall. "This is like the good old days", people said everywhere. Even before the Repentigny singer—dressed as a logger, wearing a high felt hat, arrow-belt and log-driver's boots—had raised some excitement with his rowing song, "Envoyons de l'avant, nos gens!", we were no longer in doubt as to the fate of our enterprise. The audience seemed won over. Fiddlers, singers..., dancers, storytellers followed one another during more than two hours, while the audience never tired of applauding them. ... The stage setting... represented the interior of a rural house. ... For many of the spectators this reawakening of childhood memories was utterly delightful. Some had even come from afar to attend this resurrection of the past (Barbeau 1920 : 3).

This passage describes a folklore *spectacle* identical to several that I attended sixty years later. By the time of my fieldwork this peculiar objectification of traditional culture—the intimacy of family life displayed publicly on stage—had become an established practice. I do not yet have data on the history of its establishment after Barbeau had introduced it to Canada. I do know that Barbeau continued to experiment with methods for bringing folklore to the attention of the urban public. Between 1927 and 1930, for example, he organized three "Folk-Song and Handicraft Festivals" at the Château Frontenac in Quebec City (Barbeau, 1936 : 105 ; Carpenter, 1979 : 226). And again, by the time of my fieldwork such festivals had become established practice—traditional modes for the preservation of tradition.

At this point I break off the discussion of the history of folklore studies in French Canada. Carpenter (1979 : 233-263) sketches the official institutional history, but says little about the relationship between folklore studies, nationalist ideology, and cultural objectification. From the point of view outlined in this paper, future research must focus on the political beliefs and motivations of folklore researchers and popularizers, as well as on the history of folklore shows and festivals. For example, what combination of influences sparked Barbeau's initial interest in ethnology and folklore ? Once directed by Boas to the French-Canadian materials he had at first rejected, what led him not merely to study and collect, but to popularize them ? Though his 1920 rhetoric about the regeneration of the race echoes a sentiment common to French-Canadian nationalists of the era, his focus on folk sources as inspiration for national high culture suggests European influences. This is borne out by Barbeau's subsequent situation in Ottawa and his life-long interest in pan-Canadian

(rather than Québécois) folk culture. Nonetheless, the methods of popularization that he introduced have been cultivated by various ethnic-awareness movements in Canada, as well, of course, by Québécois nationalists.

With respect to the latter, future research would do well to examine the role of the Québécois government in the objectification of what it perceives as the national culture. Though the provincial government has always concerned itself to some degree with national culture—in the form of historical monuments and official symbols such as flags, stamps and coinage—this concern increased by a quantum leap with the creation in 1961 of a Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The initial concern of this ministry was 'high' or elitist culture, but an anthropological definition of culture—which includes folk culture—rapidly displaced this narrower focus (Handler, 1981 : 748). The ascendancy of an anthropological conception of culture, and subsequent massive efforts to objectify Québécois culture (museums, research, publications, genealogical services, etc.), went hand in hand with the professionalization of the Ministry—the professionals employed being academic social scientists. The trend continues with the Parti Québécois government—a government of *académiciens* and journalists who in principle relate scholarly activities to political and cultural goals. Though it can be difficult to discuss the motivations for both policy and scholarship with policy-makers and scholars, I suggest this as an important task for future field research.

### *The Creation of Tradition*

We began this discussion with the following question : how have folklorists created traditions which, though imagined as authentic, are in fact objectifications of tradition, hence different from the pristine traditions that the folklorists mean to preserve ? And we considered a related question, debated by Quebecois scholars : was Quebec ever a folk society ? The history of folklore studies in Québec suggests a third question : what could have been the effects of folklore shows and, before them, of the long tradition of folklore collecting, on the folk themselves ?

In general these questions are rarely raised, much less answered, because scholars have tended to overlook the possibility that fieldworkers might alter, by their very presence, the social worlds that they study<sup>2</sup>. Carpenter (1979 : 205), for example, speaks of the relationship between folklore studies and "the evolution and maintenance of a distinct

French-Canadian culture". Yet for her the term evolution does not seem to mean change but, rather, preservation of past social forms in an unchanging state. Folklorists have 'maintained' French-Canadian culture because they have prevented the disappearance of essential traits and customs. These essential features of the culture, once secured, allow for an adaptation to modernity that preserves Québécois distinctiveness—so that in this sense there is evolution. But Carpenter implies, as do the nationalists themselves, that future changes will be based on the essential culture that was 'fixed' somewhere in the past and 'preserved' by the concern of folklorists and other culturally-conscientious activists.

As a contrary hypothesis I want to suggest that the work of folklorists and others *creates tradition* by teaching the 'folk' to see themselves in a new light. When Miner set out to describe the folk culture of St. Denis, he quickly learned, not only that it was disappearing, but that it was not naive in the way he had imagined. "I just got track of a storyteller in a neighboring parish", he wrote Redfield from the field, "and am arranging to get some of his old tales, anything he has not gotten out of a book" (Miner, 1937). E.C. Hughes (1963 : 172), working in an industrial town in the 1930s, remarked that long-time residents, representatives of the "business and professional classes... are perhaps more concerned than others lest their recently arrived rural fellow-countrymen lose their rural orientation". Doyon's (1950 : 172) Beauceron informants argued among themselves about whose version of a particular dance was "authentic". Rioux (1961 : 53) noted that even in a "homogeneous culture such as that of French Canada," several versions of an ancient folk song existed side-by-side ; these ranged from the relatively naive—"sung by certain peasants who have conserved it in their oral tradition and who become less numerous each year"—to the relatively objectified—"sung by people influenced by the folklore campaign of the past twenty years". Elsewhere Rioux (1961 : 93) gives a wonderful glimpse of the anthropologist helping to keep alive tradition through his participation in local events—in this case, a wedding between a woman from Belle-Anse, where Rioux was working, and a man from a nearby village :

After the meal the wedding party enjoy themselves in the hotel. ... A hotel employee accompanies on the piano a young woman... who sings more 'cowboy' songs ; a few old women listen. The men have begun to drink beer again. To create some excitement and observe the reaction, a linguist who was working at Belle-Anse, his wife and myself sing some old response-songs. We ask the

crowd to give the replies ; the songs are a big hit. People gather together, sing and laugh. An old man with the appearance of a peasant, a relative of the groom, even sings "La Belle Française". Some women from Belle-Anse find the song and singer so comical that the mother of the bride has to leave the room in order to stop laughing.

Thus have the folk come to abandon and even to ridicule those traditions that urban collectors have come among them to discover. The displacement of folk customs has long been combatted by folklorists who, like Barbeau, struggled also to awaken urbanites to the beauties of their rural roots. But in so doing the folklorists have objectified the traits and customs that they sought to preserve—that is, they have transformed them into things to be studied, catalogued, and displayed. And such a process involves, as Cohn notes, the selection and reformulation, "for conscious ends", of those aspects of the past that are seen as traditional. In other words, the objectifier looks at a familiar milieu and finds that it is composed of patrimonial things, things that he carves out of a hitherto taken-for-granted cultural background and makes over into typical specimens. But to set old traits in a new context—to see them as 'patrimonial', to perform them on stage, to immure them in museums—must necessarily change the meaning that those traits have to objectifiers, trait-bearers, and onlookers alike. Paradoxically, the attempt to preserve brings change, for, on the one hand, cultural phenomena are meaningful phenomena and, on the other, those who objectify them reinterpret them in terms of meanings implicit in their own perspective. To the degree that their reinterpretations become incorporated into the 'things' themselves—that is, become part of the understanding that the folk have of their culture—to that degree will the objectifiers change folk culture by creating it as 'tradition'.

That a folk tradition has been created for urban Québécois who are no longer folk seems unquestionable, and in this the Québec case is no different from most European nationalist movements. That tradition has been created for the 'folk' themselves is a less common assertion but one that I believe deserves serious consideration. I have documented the activities of folklorists well back into the period when Québec is said to have been a folk society. I have presented some evidence that suggests that the folk responded to the canonization of their lifeways. To the extent that they came to conceptualize their lives as 'traditional' their understanding of themselves would have been changed. In my fieldwork I often encountered this process among rural Québécois who had been sought out by urbanites :

when a farm family can watch itself perform its Christmas festivities on television, it is likely that its attitudes towards them will change. (There are at least two obvious changes—first, previously neutral or unmarked practices become marked as ‘traditional’; second, touristic demand makes tradition a commodity, and the life of the folk becomes a series of staged pseudo-events, as Boorstin called them). Is it farfetched to suppose that this has happened continuously since the work of folklore collectors began? And if this had indeed been the case, one can no longer see the quarry of folklore collectors as representatives of Redfield’s folk society—people who unreflectively cling to the ways of their ancestors, people whose behavior is “traditional, spontaneous, and uncritical”. For the folklore collectors have become a part of the folk society, and to the degree that their presence alters it, the reality that they seek to preserve ineluctably eludes them.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earlier versions of this paper were read at the 1981 annual meeting of the Central States Anthropological Society in Cincinnati, Ohio, and at the November 1981 meeting of the Chicago Group in the History of the Social Sciences, University of Chicago. I would like to thank the participants in those sessions, and in particular Bernard Cohn, Michael Herzfeld, Daniel Segal and George Stocking, for their suggestive commentary.

#### NOTES

1. The terminology becomes somewhat confusing at this point because Rioux substitutes the terms *tribal*, *folk* and *urban* for Redfield’s *folk*, *peasant* and *urban*. However, he asserted that “peasant society *stricto sensu* is a variety of the folk-society”, finding both to be characterized by smallness, closeness to nature, social homogeneity, and lack both of impersonal relations and an extensive division of labour (Rioux, 1964 : 166).

2. Note that more and more anecdotes are surfacing about the complex relationship between anthropological models of particular groups, and the (so-called) ‘natives’ models of themselves : “not a few anthropologists have been given information about, say, kinship that the respondent has left the room to verify not, as presumed, with an aged relative, but in the family copy of an early ethnography” (Smith, 1982 : 130). This has become an important issue in the burgeoning literature on the anthropology of tourism (Nash, 1981).

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