# Folklore Archives and Constructions of the Positivist Paradigm

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**Abstract**: This study carries out an analysis, from a reflexive perspective, of the folklore archives established in Romania over the course of the twentieth century, *archived documents* representing the object of research. This approach interrogates the intended *objective character of the information collected in the field and archived thereafter*. The research shows that the archived fieldnotes are subjective constructions, shaped by the epistemological context in which they were drafted. The cultural memory built through the archival project in Romania, in the second half of the twentieth century, was referential, as it attempted a literal representation of the cultural reality. This manner of constructing cultural identity is based on the theoretical premises of the positivist paradigm and of national ethnology.

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## 1. *The* object of research and the purpose of the analysis

This study undertakes a critical analysis, from a reflexive perspective, of the folklore archives in Romania. The object of research is the status of *archived documents*. The analysis covers the types of information contained in the archived fieldnotes and the classification criteria for the records. The folklore archives that we refer to in this study are: the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy (the Cluj-Napoca Branch) and the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society. These cultural memory institutions were established throughout the twentieth century, starting in the interwar period (the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy) and, respectively, in the 1950s (the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society).

The premise of this research is that the above-mentioned information does not represent *objective data*, as it was considered for a long time. The stakes of this analysis is to show that the documentary funds from the folklore archives are the result of the epistemological context in which they were created, a context that was dominated by the positivist paradigm. The research and archiving methodology was in direct relation with the purpose of the discipline, characteristic of positivism, as they were defined during the period in which the documentary funds were established. The drafting and archiving of fieldnotes amounted to mandatory stages between field research and the compilation of typologies and ethnographic atlases – the finalities of the discipline during the period to which we refer here. The research and archiving standards were designed with a view to carrying out the goals of the research.

The source of the manuscript discourses in the archived fieldnotes is the dialogue between researcher and interlocutor (an insider to the investigated area): "Therefore, ethnographic writing is determined by a particular type of discursive situation, by its reference to the events and by the author's interaction with the informant."[1] In this dialogue, the researchers bring along their scientific background, the scientific paradigm of the period in which they live, the horizon of expectations generated by the bibliography that has contributed to their formation and structures their guidelines for field research. The scientific paradigm to which Romanian ethnologists adhered until the 1980s was a positivist paradigm. Thus, the ethnologists who wrote the fieldnotes included in the folklore archives created a discourse that was intended to be objective. However, this intentionally objective information was filtered through multiple subjective grids, which transformed the real information into a discourse drafted according to certain rhetorical rules, imposed by the research methodologies and the epistemological paradigm those researchers upheld. The mode of selecting, structuring and classifying the folklore/ethnographic information, imposed by the research and archival practices of the twentieth century, relied on *objectivity* as a fundamental principle.

The positivist paradigm relies on the idea of a reality that precedes the existence of documents, as texts are seen to represent exact copies of this reality.[2] In the nineteenth century, a century dominated by the positivist paradigm, the pre-constructed nature of the written source and the notion that the texts in the documentary archives were actually produced rather than merely reproduced were not taken into account. These texts were defined and used as *primary sources*, being analysed solely from the point of view of their content.[3] Joseph Morsel has highlighted the tremendous growth of interest in the history of scripturality in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and then in France and Italy, ever since the 1970s.[4] Archives are important on account of the volume of documents they comprise, but also for the reading grid they implicitly contain.[5] The author also questions why the researchers' attention was not focused on aspects pertaining to this reading grid at an earlier time.[6] The answer takes into account the requirements that legitimation should be ensured by configuring the past, according to the historical and epistemological context that defined the period in which these archives were established.[7] The author argues the need for retrieving the intertextuality underlying the construction of archives, lest the past should be read through the lenses manufactured by

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[1]Eleonora Sava and Maria Candale, "Ethnographic Documents and Field Textualization," in *The Ethnological Archive. Paradigms and Dialogues*, ed. Eleonora Sava (Perugia: Morlacchi Editore, 2011), 122.

[2] Christine Jungen, "De source sûre. Expérimentations croisées sur l'archive," *Ateliers du LESC*, 33 (2009), accessed 27 February 2013; doi: 10. 4000/ateliers. 8195.

[3] Joseph Morsel, "Du texte aux archives: le problème de la source", *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre BUCEMA*, Hors-série 2 (2008): 5, accessed 27 January 2013, doi: 10. 4000/cem. 4132).

[4]Ibid., 11–12.

[5] Ibid., 39.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

various generations of archivists.[1] I will apply the reading grid proposed by this study in analysing the documents included in the two above-mentioned folklore archives from Cluj.



**Teodora Cosman**, *Suspended Histories,* Anonymous photographs from the artist's collection, Installation view at the Maison des Arts, Brussells

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[1] Ibid, 40.

In twentieth-century Romania, just like in the entire Europe during the first half of that century, the major concern for constructing archival funds was explicitly outlined as the need for *salvaging the national patrimony* and *defining national identity* through the folk typologies and atlases that were to be compiled on the basis of these archived documents.[1] Folklore archives are institutions of cultural memory and construct an image of the past. In cultural memory studies, the objects of research include: individual acts of remembrance in a social context, national memory and, last but not least, the places of transnational memory: "Such an understanding of the term allows for an inclusion of a broad spectrum of phenomena as possible objects of cultural memory studies – ranging from individual acts of remembering in a social context to group memory (of family, friends, veterans, etc.) to national memory with its 'invented traditions' and finally to the host of transnational *lieux de mémoire* such as the Holocaust and 9/11."[2] The fieldnotes from the folklore archives to which we refer contain textualisations of individual acts of remembrance: text/behaviours performed in a social context (ballads, *doinas*, dirges, customs pertaining to births/weddings/funerals), but dictated/performed by individual interlocutors at the request of the researchers; ritual-ceremonial texts researchers hear during ceremonies and the researchers' observations regarding the behaviour of the people in the community under study. The working principles of the scientific paradigm that creates cultural memory through folklore archives use the individual level, but rely on the transfer of these acts of remembrance to the social and national levels. The individual acts of remembrance mentioned above are assimilated to the social level because they are considered representative of the studied community and then to the national level, since they serve as the documentary basis for the achievement of national typologies and ethnographic atlases – the main purpose of documentary funds, according to the research methodologies of the time.

## 2. Analytical approach: fieldnotes, paratextual elements, classification criteria

Archival records and documentary funds as a whole, with their ordering criteria, represent discourses structured in keeping with certain rhetorical principles. Epistemological premises require a mode of production, conservation and archiving – the so-called "savoir faire."[3] Archives and theoretical studies that support the production, conservation and archiving of documents implicitly contain a key of reading them – the "savoir lire."[4] Thus, the discourse offered by archives also has specific prerequisites and stakes. What are the discursive strategies of the cultural project represented by the folklore archives in relation to the epistemological context of the time?

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[1] Ion Muşlea, "Învăţătorii şi folclorul," ("The Elementary Teachers and Folklore"), "Memoriu adresat Academiei Române (1929)," ("A Memoire to the Romanian Academy 1929") in *Arhiva de Folclor a Academiei Române. Studii, memorii ale întemeierii, rapoarte de activitate, chestionare 1930-1948* ("The Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy. Studies, activity reports, questionnaires 1930-1948), ed. Ion Cuceu, Maria Cuceu (Cluj: Fundaţiei pentru Studii Europene Publishing House, 2003).

[2] Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning in collaboration with Sara B. Young (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 2.

[3] Jungen, "De source sûre. Expérimentations croisées sur l'archive".

[4] Ibid.

Far from being the primary field data, the fieldnotes in the folklore archive are the results of successive transformations. The nodal points of the transformation process are:

– the writing of folklore/ethnological data starting from the conversational or factual experience – a re-dimensioning of the data, through the transition from the oral/visual to the scriptural mode;

– the drafting of the fieldnote that is to be archived, following the scientific standards of the research period;

– the indexation and inclusion of fieldnotes in the archival catalogue, an action that implies extracting the information required by the tabular structure of the catalogue (the date of the research, locality, informant, age, gender, species, observations, etc. ) - re-dimensioning through the grid of scientific metalanguage.

According to studies that support the establishment of folklore archives in Romania, the archiving process is part of a research trajectory that eventually requires that the information of scientific interest should be excerpted from the documents and subjected to typology construction/mapping. This process of excerpting and typology construction is conducted through the reading key provided by the documents themselves, by the manner in which they are classified and by the theoretical studies that support archiving. In turn, the fieldnotes that become, through catalogue indexing, archival documents are written and organized in terms of the goals of the archival project: charting the information and including it within typologies. The Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy has catalogues that regroup the fieldnotes according to thematic and geographical criteria. The classification of fieldnotes by these two criteria is in itself a transformation, a regrouping of signs, which meets the researchers' needs and provides them with an already charted reading trajectory. The archive aims to offer *folklore-related information* (by classifying it according to the thematic criterion) that is *defining for the investigated area* (by classifying it in terms of thelocality/geographic region). Thus, the archive aims to construct the identity of a cultural space by assembling several micro-spaces (areas defined as representative spaces). The catalogue is an instrument whose main aim is to help researchers identify the fieldnotes that fall within their areas of interest. In a tabular structure, each call number[1] has the following information recorded next to it: the title/genre/species/ research method, the collector, the informant, his or her age, the locality, the date and observations. These are the paratextual elements that define the content of an archived document. The record should contain them, in keeping with the methodological research indications of the time. In the archiving process, it is these items of information, and not others, that are considered to be essential. According to the desideratum of the archival project, the archive should be a copy of the folklore reality in the researched space. This quality of the archive is guaranteed by compliance with the methodological principles that ensure the probative and scientific value of the archival documents.

We should note the close relationship between the collection of data according to methodological principles and the use of fieldnotes in the stages of field data indexing, classification, typology construction, etc. Indexing in the archival catalogue involves selecting the defining elements of the fieldnote, more specifically the

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[1] The call numbers succeed one another in ascending order.

paratextual elements (informant, locality, the date of research, researcher, title, genre/species). It is these data, and not others, that are representative of the fieldnote record within the context of the archival catalogue. Indexing/archiving is strictly dependent on the data written down by the researcher and on compliance with the research methodology. Outside these, a fieldnote is devoid of any value within the archival project. Consistent with research and archiving scientific practices, these data are absolutely necessary for a valid theoretical undertaking, as they confer scientific value to a document. In addition to this, they answer the premises of the positivist paradigm: they place the textual content within a real space-time framework. Methodological indications insist that this information should be included in the fieldnotes, as it is indispensable in the archiving process. Fieldnotes become archived objects thanks to the existence of this information on the folklore/ethnographic information it contains. Indexing, the investment of a fieldnote with the value of an archived document, involves the joining together of two facets: that of the archive (through the call number) and that of the field (through the paratextual elements: informant, locality, date of research, etc. ). Scientific reference to a fieldnote is made by specifying the archival call number that refers to the extratextual reality (spatio-temporally and thematically determined). The potentiation of the value of these paratextual elements – theme, space and time – is obvious. They are the ones that invest fieldnotes with probative capacity and grant them the quality of testimonies attesting to a cultural reality. A document may thus become a *reliable source* (usable in theoretical studies) since it anchors the information it contains in a well-defined reality, from a spatial, temporal and thematic perspective.

The catalogue of an archive achieves the connection between the archival (scientific) fund and the reality that a fieldnote *re-presents*. Reference to a call number implicitly entails reference to a spatial-temporal and thematic reality. Why should these paratextual elements and not others define a fieldnote? Why should the provenance of field data not be defined by other parameters, such as the informants' gender, their profession, economic status, the collectors' gender, background, etc.? Why should the elements pertaining to the source/origin of the information be the ones that are exploited rather than those related to the communication situation in which the data were constructed? Surely, the positivist paradigm, the epistemological framework for the project of the folklore archives that represent the object of this study, does not allow such re-groupings of signs. Considering that the information collected in the field is an accurate copy of reality, the archiving practice links the information to its source, to the reality to which it belongs. A fieldnote may thus become a *primary source* of subsequent studies. Invested with the value of an *authentic document* through archiving, it is regarded and used as both a theoretical reference and a symbolic object.[1] The catalogue of the archive becomes a concentrated copy of the fieldnotes, of the entire archival fund. Clearly, the catalogue is an indispensable instrument for research and for identifying the fieldnotes that fall within the potential researcher's area of interest. What should be noted, though, is that these, and not others, represent the criteria for structuring the fieldnotes. By putting order into fieldnotes, a folklore archive may offer a unique

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[1] Odile Parsis-Barubé, "Les vertiges de l'authenticité", *Histoire et littérature de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest* 36 (2007): 13, accessed 4 March 2013, http://hleno.revues.org/141.

reading key: the fieldnotes contain folklore-related information from the specified spatio-temporal frameworks. The field information is defined by the theme to which it categorically belongs and by its source. The researcher is positioned on this reading trajectory, which places the content of the fieldnote in an extratextual reality. According to Odile Parsis-Barubé, the notion of *authenticity* is foundational for the historical methodology of the first half of the nineteenth century. Authenticity is a construction whose foundations began in the period of the Renaissance and of Classicism, but could also be found in the (French) post-revolutionary political context and evolved significantly after 1830 (under the stimulating effect of positivism), in the practice of historical inventory construction and archaeologization.[1] Parsis-Barubé believes that an archived document pertains to the order of natural sciences[2] and is endowed with an unmatchable demonstrative capacity.[3]

### 3. Discursive techniques of objectivation

We will discuss several discursive strategies whereby archived documents acquire the status of testimonies and *primary sources*, being invested with a probative value.

*Constructing the identity of a spatio-temporal framework*

As shown above, the paratextual elements that are defining for fieldnotes (place, date, informant, his or her age, the provenance of the folklore information and genre/species, collector) represent also the main criteria for ordering them. In the archival project, of major importance are the space/time coordinates (which indicate the provenance of the information) and the content coordinates. Archival documents are drafted so as to represent a well-defined space and time. The reference, first and foremost, to a concrete reality, which is spatially and temporally defined, creates the effect of veracity and authenticity.

*Constructing the identity of the informant/interlocutor*

The data that construct the pattern of an informant (name, age, origin, place of residence) and that are typically found in an archived fieldnote represent the minimal and compulsory information that must be collected for the purpose of archiving the documents. This information may be significant for illustrating the origin and circulation of the folklore themes/motifs in the texts the informant is familiar with. The information about the informant that is considered to be relevant is that which can serve as a premise for explaining certain folklore phenomena, in keeping with the principle used by the realist sciences: *cause–effect*. These data about the informant represent generic aspects rather than particular, individual elements. They do not construct the identity of a man as an individual person, but that of the informant as the bearer or as the voice of a culture. Among the main features of realist ethnography, as identified by George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, is that referring to the informants' hypostasis: "Because of the overwhelming concern of early anthropologists to establish culture or society as a legitimate focus for inquiry, the existence of the individual was usually suppressed in professional ethnographic writing. In his place was substituted a composite creation, the normative role model or national character. [. . . ] The exclusion of individual characters

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[1] Ibid., 15.

[2] With the meaning of exact sciences.

[3] Ibid., 28.

from the realist ethnography probably accounts, more than any other single factor, for the dry, unreadable tone of such texts, something for which the essentially illustrative use of the case study (actually an attempt to sneak characterization in by the back door) could only partly compensate. Moreover, it is worth noting the shift back toward characterization that takes place as one turns from the ethnography written for fellow professionals to the ethnography designed for consumption by the general public."[1]

According to the data in the fieldnotes, the informant is a generic character, the representative of an age group, of a social category and of a well-defined spatial framework. Thus defined, the informant is the envoy, the representative of a culture. This approach comes in relation to the definition of folklore as the cultural product of a community, the author being *anonymous* and *collective* (an accepted definition in the scientific discourse of the time). The discursive technique of generalization, of placing the data in a syntagmatic system, is characteristic of scientific discourse in the positivist paradigm.

*Constructing the identity of the researcher*

In the fieldnotes from the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society and the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy, we may identify two patterns of the researcher, depending on the research stage. Eleonora Sava has undertaken a diachronic analysis of all the fieldnotes (both those that are indexed and those that are not indexed) in the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society and has identified three stages of research: "*La collecte a été conçue de façon différente, par rapport à des referents différents et à des methods différentes. Les documents archives permettent une périodisation en trios étapes distinctes, en relation avec le context politique, idéologique, scientifique et académique de l'époque. Une première étape, de 1958 à 1973, focalise sur l'accumulation de texts folkloriques*, ayant ainsi une priorité *folkloristique*. Le deuxième moment, de 1974 à 1992, est consacré à la recherché *de la culture folklorique*. L'année 1993 accorde la priorité à la *subjectivité*, par l'intermédiaire de *l'enregistrement des histoires de vi*e, dans une perspective proche de *l'ethnologie moderne*. Ainsi, le terme *collecte* ainsi que le syntagme *données de terrain* sont intégrés à des visions différentes, leur chronologie marquant la transition de la folkloristique à l'ethnologie."[2] In the fieldnotes from the folklore stage, the researcher positions himself outside the presented ethnographic reality, being omnipresent and omniscient, much like the narrator in realist literature. In the second research stage, some fieldnotes contain rhetorical elements demonstrating that the researcher defines himself as an integral part of the ethnographic landscape he describes, expressing his astonishment and the states he experiences, and implicitly assuming the subjective character of discourse.[3]

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[1] George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, "Ethnographies as texts," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982): 32.

[2] Eleonora Sava, "Patrimoine culturel local: Les archives du Cercle de Folklore de l'Université Babeş-Bolyai" in *Antropologie şi studii culturale. Perspective actuale* (*Anthropology and Cultural Studies. Contemporary Perspectives*), ed. Alina Branda, Ion Cuceu, Cosmina Timoce-Mocanu (Cluj-Napoca, Mega Publishing House, 2012), 21–22.

[3] The rhetoric of these fieldnotes is analysed in the study written by Eleonora Sava and Maria Candale, "Ethnographic Documents and Field Textualization", in *The Ethnological Archive. Paradigms and Dialogues*, ed. Eleonora Sava (Perugia: Morlacchi Editore, 2011).

The model researcher illustrated by the methodologies from the period we refer to (the twentieth century) is one who complies with the first pattern: a transparent medium that facilitates the transfer of folklore from the studied reality into the archives. According to Otilia Hedeşan, the scientific canon favoured a general presentation in an omniscient tone.[1] Thus, the folklore rendered through the archived documents should be an accurate copy of reality, *veracity* and *objectivity* representing the major principles of this research. These are desiderata of positivist epistemology and of the entire system of research that involves: the collection of data according to the theorized methodology – archiving – typology construction/mapping – theoretical syntheses on national culture.

The new ethnographic theories, corresponding to the interpretive paradigm, contest this hypostasis of the researcher: what should be questioned is the conviction whereby the logic of research is autonomous from the social dynamics under study.[2] It is considered that the epicentre resides, on the one hand, in the exchange between the anthropologist and the interlocutor, and on the other hand, in the events that succeed one another in the investigation.[3]

Although the field research methodologies in twentieth-century Romania did not feature this hypostasis of the researcher, the fieldnotes are indicative of various subjective hypostases researchers adopted. I refer, in particular, to the direct observation fieldnotes drafted in Satu Mare County in the 1970s and indexed in the Cluj Archive of the Folklore Society. Thus, the collection practice exceeded the reference methodology of the period, but at a rather intuitive level, without assuming or theorizing this hypostasis of the researcher. I believe that significant in this respect is the epistemological context of the Western space, a context in which most of the humanist sciences asserted the subjective character of value judgments. The Romanian ethnologists came into contact with this theoretical framework by participating in international conferences and by engaging in didactic/teaching missions at universities in Western Europe and America.

The researcher's constant tendency to embrace this subjective position in relation to the fieldnotes was directly related to the decreasing impact of the archival project, which was visible in the considerable diminution of the number of archived fieldnotes after 1980. The changing status of the researcher entailed changes in the status of fieldnotes: they could no longer be considered *objective information*. As it was conceived in the interwar period and as it was continued, with various mutations, in the first post-war decades, the archival project in Romania relied on the objective character of the data in the archived documents.

## 4. Conclusions

Between the factual or conversational reality in which the researcher participated and the archived fieldnote there were interposed two major moments of transformation/ translation into a scientific code: *writing* and *archiving*. The system of ordering the

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[1] Otilia Hedeşan, "Doing Fieldwork in Communist Romania" in *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies II. Socialist Era Anthropology in the South-East Europe,* ed. Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev, Slobodan Naumović (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 36.

[2] Gérard Althabe and Valeria A. Hernandez, "Implication et réflexivité en anthropologie," *Journal des anthropologues* 98–99 (2004): 37, accessed 2 March 2011, http://jda.revues. org/1633.

[3] Ibid., 41.

archive deploys discursive strategies through which the content of documents is objectivized. As a construction generated by the premises of the positivist paradigm, the scientific discourse that standardized the working methodology for the folklore archives was similar to that in the exact sciences. The cultural memory built by the archival system in Romania in the second half of the twentieth century was referential, attempting a literal representation of the cultural reality. This manner of constructing cultural identity was directly related to the paradigm of national ethnologies. The project of folklore archives established a macro-system, comprising the following stages: research, fieldnote archiving and analysis, with a view to mapping the data and constructing typologies. The efforts made in these three stages by several generations of researchers converged towards the creation of a representative image for national traditional culture.