

Folklore and Folk Narrative in Latin American Contexts



Salamanca, by Argentinian potter Marino Córdoba,
Museo Folklórico, La Rioja, Argentina

Photographic archive of Maria Palleiro,
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Introductory journal article

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Introduction to the Special Issue on Folklore and Folk Narrative in Latin American Contexts

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Foreword

Latin American folklore and, specifically, Latin American folk narrative, have distinctive features, one of which is the coexistence of vernacular and indigenous narratives with narrative folk expressions from migrant and Créole groups, whose combination mirrors the plural profile of local societies. The aim of this special issue of *Folkloristika* is to enhance such plural profile, by presenting interdisciplinary contributions that show this cultural blend.

Covering a large range of topics that include both narrative versions of diasporic and migrant groups and vernacular folktales in different contexts, the contributions offer an overview of the richness of Latin American local identities framed in narrative forms. This issue includes comparative studies of Latin American as well as European folk expressions.

From narrative performances dealing with Slovenian and Jewish migration in Argentina, to indigenous and Créole narratives that show the intertwining between fictional and ritual discourse in different Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Chile, México, Perú and Argentina, the articles are aimed to mirror the diversity of Latin American folk narrative expressions. Some of these contributions highlight the European cultural heritage, while others show the relevance of indigenous narratives. Majority of the texts have been collected in the field by the authors themselves or by other collectors, while others have been retrieved from written and virtual sources, such as folk narrative collections, folk narrative archives and the world wide web. Some articles focus the attention on the development of folk narrative studies, offering an overview of the different trends and topics of folk narrative research in Latin America. Other contributions include both narrative texts

and narrative analysis dealing with contemporary global epidemics such as AIDS and Covid, and with folk narratives circulating in the Internet. All the texts are verbal aesthetic expressions of local identities framed in narrative forms, either displayed in narrative performances or stored in archives and written collections. Overall, the issue shows the mosaiclike composition of Latin American cultures, and the blend between European and vernacular folk traditions.

Folklore, narrative and performance are the key words of the articles herein included, classified into three sections. The first one comprises three contributions, dealing with folklore studies and folk narrative collections in Argentina and Chile. In *Revisiting Folklore Disciplinary Narratives Produced by Scholarly Community in Argentina. Social Dimension in Focus*, Ana María Dupey underlines the changes in the narratives that constitute Argentinian Folklore as an academic discipline in relation with the social dimension of folklore, from the second half of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. The author highlights the role of these narratives as vehicles of knowledge that contribute to explanation of phenomena with complex social, historical and causal connections. *Argentinian Folktales in the Latin American Context: Collections and Belief Narratives* by María Palleiro focuses the attention on Latin American belief narratives, in the context of Latin American folk narrative studies. The article starts by offering a diachronic itinerary of the most relevant Argentinian folk narrative collections, noting the trends in Folklore Studies in each period. It goes on to present an example of how the focus of collecting folk narrative in Argentina can change, by making more flexible the boundaries between tale types and belief narratives. Such example deals with globally spread infective diseases such as AIDS and Covid-19. The last contribution of this section, by Cristian Yáñez Aguilar, is focused on *Traditional Culture and Folklore Science: Two Approaches in the Discursive Construction of the Cultural Field of Folklore in Chile*. The author presents a historical review of how the cultural field of folklore was built in Chile since the second half of the 20th century. He thus identifies two conceptual approaches in the discursive construction of folklore in Chile since the second half of the 20th century: one oriented to legitimize folklore as a science, with its goals and methods, and the other one, connected with a humanistic and philosophical perspective, incorporated the notion of traditional culture as a framework to interpret ethical values and cultural manifestations from the popular and rural world.

The second section deals with Latin American indigenous narratives from México, Perú, Brazil and Argentina. As the author himself summarizes, *Folkloric Narratives of the Peruvian Amazon* by Daniel Orlando Díaz Benavides is focused on Amazonian folk narratives of Peru, which make visible

the singular conceptions of its population about substantial elements in their lives. It shows as well the Amazonian people as human beings with cultural singularities in contrast to the stereotyped image of them as exotic or primitive creatures. *Reflections on How to Study Folktales and Legends From Oral Indigenous Heritage of México* by Mercedes Zavala Gómez del Campo affirms that oral tradition collections of tales and legends of Mexican indigenous peoples are expressions of a deep syncretism between indigenous and Hispanic cultures. Through the analysis of themes and motifs from a wide corpus of tales and legends collected in indigenous languages – especially Nahuatl, Purépecha, Otomí, Maya, and Tzeltal published in bilingual editions from the 1950s to the present – the article is aimed to underline the coexistence of indigenous and Hispanic cultural heritage in Mexican vernacular folk narrative expressions. This section comprises as well a contribution dealing with the performance of orality in Brazilian contexts by Luciana Hartmann and Renata de Lima Silva. As the authors explain, through an interplay of ethnographic data obtained with two different groups of storytellers, gauchos of the Brazil/Argentina/Uruguay borders, and Angolan Capoeira practitioners of Bahian tradition, the article, titled *Between Borders and Crossroads: the Performance of Orality in Different Brazilian Bodies and Contexts*, proposes a discussion of the meanings that emerge from traditional performances produced by subjects who are situated within these different borders and crossroads. The last paper of this section, *Narratives of Pilagá Native Societies in the Argentinian Context* by Alejandra Vidal and Sabrina Maciel, is focused on Argentinian indigenous narratives. It describes a corpus of folk narratives and tales of healing and shamanism from the Pilagá culture, collected in fieldwork in the Northeastern Argentinian province of Formosa. These narratives mirror the symbolic construction of a cultural landscape, which reflects the worldview of this indigenous community.

The last section deals with migrant groups, such as Jewish and Slovenians ones, in Latin American contexts. *Jewish Traditions in a Latin American Background. Enacting an Intercultural Diaspora in the Context of Argentine Identity Politics*, by Fernando Fischman, analyzes the contextualization of traditional Jewish practices in public performance events in Buenos Aires City that were began to be held in the 1980s. As the author himself underlines, the article focuses on the social and political implications of the staging of traditional forms related both to a precedent diasporic Jewish culture and to the intercultural dialogues accomplished from the beginning of Jewish immigration to Argentina to the present. Migrant culture is also the subject of the contribution *Elements of Latin American Culture in the (Folk) Narratives of Slovenes in Argentina* by Barbara Ivančič Kutin, based on field research conducted among Slovenes in Argentina in 2019 with the purpose of document-

ing their folk narrative material. The article is aimed to determine which elements from Latin American culture appear in their narratives at the level of Slovene language or content and what differences between Slovene and Latin-American culture are most emphasized in their narrative discourse.

These three sections, dealing with folk narrative studies, indigenous and Créole narratives, Hispanic cultural tradition and other migrant European and Asiatic cultures – such as the Jewish and the Slovenian ones – show the richness and complexity of Latin American folklore. Through these contributions, the aim of the issue has been to highlight the multicultural profile of Latin American communities and to underline the relevance of folk narrative as intangible cultural heritage.

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