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The Folk Culture of Jewish Immigrant Communities

Research Paradigms and Directions

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The Conference on Jews in North America has been particularly rich in suggesting areas of convergence and contrast between disciplines. What can the folklorist contribute to the study of Jews in North America? How can the perspective of the folklorist, musicologist or symbolic anthropologist complement the work of the historian?

First, the conference, made possible by the offices of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, not surprisingly has been primarily oriented to the historical, and, to a lesser degree, to the sociological. In contrast, folklorists stress the ethnographic approaches—that is, qualitative, observational and process-oriented research strategies. As a result, contemporary immigrant communities are of special interest.

Second, the emphasis in much historical and sociological work has been on normative or mainstream Jewish life, however it is defined. For the folklorist, the size or representativeness of the communities being studied is of less concern and the goal is not necessarily to arrive at broad generalizations; a folklorist is as likely to study "exotic" Jewish communities as "mainstream" ones. The emphasis tends to be on small-scale settings and group life at the level of social interactions. Recent work in folklore is closely aligned with developments in symbolic anthropology and sociolinguistics. Increasingly, theoretical concerns are to the fore, many of which are best explored through the close observation of particular cases.

Third, many historical and sociological studies use statistical data essential to the study of migration, settlement and philanthropy, or they examine institutions in their investigation of social organization, or they focus on important individuals and their political activity. Folklorists stress the importance of the symbolic organization of experience through the expressive behaviour of ordinary people in everyday life—parades, memorials, storytelling, humour, food, ritual, song, language and material culture.

Finally, the place of historians and sociologists in the intellectual history of ethnic studies as it relates to Jews is better known than that of folklorists, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists. I will therefore briefly delineate the history of Jewish folklife study in North America for the useful contrasts it provides and for indications of how the various disciplines can complement each other.

Since the 1890s, several paradigms have emerged for the study of Jewish folk culture in North America: the first, salvage ethnography, focuses on the folk culture immigrants brought with them from the old country. This concern with survivals goes back to the beginnings of European folkloristics during the enlightenment and romantic periods. The second paradigm, which has been particularly important in my own work, focuses on the formation of immigrant folklore and culture as a distinctive, if transitional, phenomenon—what I call the folklore created out of and about the immigrant experience. The third paradigm may be loosely termed the folklore of ethnicity.[1] The fourth, which may be designated "the traditionalizing process" focuses on the problematic nature of "heritage."[2] I will deal with each of these in turn.

SALVAGE ETHNOGRAPHY: PRESERVING THE HERITAGE

The following statement, with a few stylistic emendations, could have been written today:

> I am proud of the riches and compass of our Journal [*Journal of American Folklore*], as proving the progress of our science. But there is one thing which I miss, namely: information in regard to Jewish folk-life in America. European journals also offer a similar deficiency, but assuredly not for the same reason . . . . Even now, at the eleventh hour, it is possible to note and record for the purposes of science a folk-life which is in process of rapid decay—I mean that of Jews . . . . Under the pressure of the present tendencies of civilization, this folk-life is rapidly disappearing . . . . [I wish to call] the attention of my co-members of The American Folklore Society to this investigation before it is too late. The next generation of Jews will have become merged in Anglo-American folk-life, now in continual evolution . . . it will have become assimilated to the Yankee, and cease to be more than a variant of Americanism.[3]

These words were written almost a century ago by Friedrich Krauss, a Jewish folklorist working out of Vienna, and active in promoting the study and publication of Jewish folklore in Europe. What would Krauss think if he could see what has transpired in the time since he wrote? Not only has Jewish folklife in North America flourished in a diversity of forms, but scholars are increasingly turning to the subject as a serious field of study.

When Krauss was writing in the 1890s, the field of Jewish folklore was only just beginning to emerge, first in Germany and later in eastern Europe. Furthermore, the Jewish immigrant community in North America was in an early stage of its formation. The relatively small German Jewish communities established in the United States earlier in the nineteenth century fed American popular culture with a stimulus for ethnic stereotypes in humour and popular entertainment, the subject of numerous studies by Rudolf Glanz. In *The Jew in Early American Wit and Graphic Humor,* Glanz gathers together cartoons and jokes from nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines such as *Puck* to make his point. These jokes pivot on images of the Jew as usurous, devious, clever at business, preoccupied with money and lacking in culture and refinement.[4]

For various reasons, German Jews failed to inspire studies of their own folk culture. Jewish folklife had yet to emerge as a field of study in its own right, and once it did, the earliest Jewish folklorists were by and large German Jews: they preferred to study their exotic brothers, the Ostjuden, rather than their own folk culture, which remains to this day a rich, but relatively untapped, research subject.

Sephardic Jews in North America have received even less attention. It was not until 1906 that Sephardic Jews began to immigrate in significant numbers, mainly from Turkey, Greece and Syria. By the early 1970s, Sephardic Jews made up about 3 per cent of the Jewish population of the United States, estimated at about 5,500,000. It is thus not surprising that as late as 1977, Victor Sanua could still write: "Literature on the Sephardic Jews in the United States, apart from journalistic reports, tends to be scarce."[5] Scarcer still is information pertaining to other Jewish communities in North America, for example, those who emigrated from central Asia before and after the new American immigration laws of 1965.[6]

Krauss's statement also signals the prevailing approach to Jewish folklife during the next half decade, namely the salvaging of the last vestiges of traditional culture before it yields in the face of cosmopolitanism and assimilation, whether in Europe or North America. The sense of urgency in the face of change had been propelling European folklorists to study Jewish folklore in Warsaw, the Ukraine and the towns of Poland and Russia. When Y. L. Cahan, a folklorist who pioneered in the collecting of

Yiddish folksongs and folktales in Poland during the 1890s, arrived in New York in 1904, he was delighted to find in the Jewish immigrant community of New York the entire spectrum of eastern European Jewish regional traditions. "Here folklore can be scooped up in handfuls," he is reported to have said. Comparing Europe and America, Cahan explained:

> Expeditions into unknown townlets never worked out [in Poland] because of the prohibitive expenses. Here, however, in America is an undisturbed folklore to the extent that it survives and still lives in the memory of the folk, which awaits its collectors, waits for them to come and gather and research, even in the eleventh hour, before it is too late.[7]

Most of Cahan's folklore collecting was indeed done among Jewish immigrants in New York City. His sense of the eleventh hour, like that of Krauss, was based on a rather strict definition of folklore. The corpus was essentially closed, and as change continued to affect the Jewish community, the corpus could only get smaller, a view that is contested by scholars working today.

By the 1920s, collections of Sephardic folklore made in the United States began to appear. Shortly after M. J. Benardete wrote a master's thesis at Columbia University in 1923 entitled "Los Romances Judeo-Espanoles en Nueva York," Max Luria surveyed dialects of Judezmo using Sephardic Jews in New York City. By the 1930s, George Herzog was making cylinder recordings of Syrian and Iraqui Jewish music in New York City.[8] Sephardic folklore was perfectly suited to survivalist studies which sought in old ballads relics of medieval Spanish poetry.

Though immigration precipitated some interest in studying Jewish folklife, the phrase "in North America" would have to be understood as "old world Jewish folklore as remembered by Jewish immigrants living in the new world." In 1919, the *Journal of American Folklore* published an article entitled "Present-day Survivals of Ancient Jewish Customs." Even in 1928, Leah Rachel Yoffie could write in the same journal:

> The children and grandchildren of Russian, Polish, and Galician Jews in this country, who comprise the Yiddish-speaking group, are fast becoming Americanized. With the gradual completion of the Americanization process, many customs and traditions are dying out . . . . This paper is an attempt to present the popular customs and superstitions which still prevail among Yiddish-speaking Jews of St. Louis, Missouri. The task of gathering the material extended over a period of several years, all of it being collected from the old Russian Jewish immigrants, most of whom have been in this country twenty or thirty years.[9]

Yoffie supplements her collection of texts with detailed comparative notes, showing the antiquity and wide distribution of the charms, rhymes and other items she recorded.

In contrast to folklorists, who focused on the survival of endangered traditions, American anthropologists were directing their attention to the problems of racism. Using the study of physical anthropology to prove that Jews were not a race, Boas and his students measured heads, demonstrated that the presence of immigrants did not lead to the deterioration of native stock, and wrote long reports, all in an effort to influence American immigration policy. This research, which was indebted to the prolific earlier work of Maurice Fishberg, failed to stop the legislation that closed the doors to foreigners in the twenties.[10] However, Boas did set the direction for Melville Herskovits and Melville Jacobs, whose work on Jews was confined exclusively to issues of race. American anthropologists, who were used to studying non-literate, small-scale societies about whom almost nothing had been written, were intimidated by how much preparation would be required to master the languages and cultures of an ancient, literate and diverse civilization. Or in their zealous efforts to combat racism, they claimed that Jews had always borrowed from their neighbours and had, as a result, never produced a culture of their own. Therefore, there was nothing to study, and no basis for the Jew's claims of distinctiveness, an important point in his fight against racism. As a result, it really did fall to folklorists, literary scholars, linguists, folk music specialists and skilled amateurs to study Jewish folklife in America. Anthropologists, the specialists in the study of culture, were not about to do the job.[11]

After the Holocaust and a half-century of Jewish immigrant life, the situation began to change radically. Despite warnings almost a century earlier that Jewish folklife was fast disappearing, folklorists waited until after World War Two to do most of the work we have today.[12] Salvage folklore collecting and ethnography continued, at the same time that new research questions and paradigms found fertile ground in Jewish folklife materials. Whereas before the Holocaust, scholars predicted that Jewish folklife would disappear as its bearers assimilated to American life, the Holocaust destroyed the European settlements and almost all of their Jewish inhabitants.[13] Hereafter the study of Jewish folklife would have to focus on the United States.

In the United States, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, two of Boas's most distinguished students, initiated a pioneering ethnographic project to study eastern European Jewish folklife at a distance, relying exclusively on the memories of immigrants living in New York City during the 1940s. Unlike so many earlier collections of data, which had been inspired by a philological perspective, the Research in Contemporary Cultures Project was shaped by current anthropological theory about the relationship between culture and personality. However flawed it may be, *Life Is with People,* the volume on East European Jews, is based on an extraordinary body of interview materials, which have been preserved as

part of Margaret Mead's archives. The focus of *Life Is with People* is on reconstructing culture at an unbridgeable distance.[14]

THE CULTURAL CREATIVITY OF IMMIGRANTS

Salvage ethnography, the need to preserve folklife before it vanishes, though a prevailing perspective for the first half of this century, is but one perspective. Since World War Two, scholars have recognized the capacity of Jewish communities to continue to generate a vital folk culture of their own, shaped by historical experience, regional context—the lox and grits variety of southern Jews comes to mind—ethnic identification and religious orientation.

A particularly vivid example of Jewish folk culture formed by historical experience is the immigrant culture of the mass migration period. The circumstances are special, as millions of Jews, primarily from eastern Europe, migrated during a few years and settled in great density in American and Canadian urban settings, as well as in secondary areas of rural settlement. As I have argued elsewhere, under such conditions a folk culture created out of the immigrant experience has an opportunity to arise.[15] The folklore of the immigrant experience draws on the trauma of upheaval, the shock of culture contact, the ambiguities of transition in a period of rapid change. The result in the case of Toronto and New York City, two settings I have examined, is an efflorescence of Yiddish folksong about life in North America,[16] and multilingual anecdotes about immigrant bunglers and tricksters: there are ludicrous name changes, naive immigrants eat the banana with the peel, cultural misunderstandings lead to comic results. The Borscht Belt humour that plays on the convergences and incongruities of languages and cultures encountered by a Jewish immigrant audience on holiday in the Catskills and other Jewish vacation areas has been much maligned for its vulgarity, yet it offers some of the richest material for study.[17] A scholar such as Alfred Sendrey, for example, so disdained such material that he refused to admit Yiddish theatre music to the list of over ten thousand titles in his comprehensive *Bibliography of Jewish Music*.[18]

In my work among Jewish immigrants who arrived in Toronto during the twenties and thirties from central Poland, I found a distinctive narrative form, identified by my most gifted narrator as "classics" because they depended not on their punch line for their effect but upon the telling. Classics can be told over and over again. In one example, the narrator begins with an elaborate description of the hardships of immigrant life and discourses on the love of Yiddish and the importance of charity. He then relates a personal experience about an old man who always came to his

shop asking for donations for widows, orphans, schools and other worthy causes. Finally, the narrator explains that he sent the man to the red-light district of Toronto, and the story imperceptibly shifts to the third person. There, the old man and a prostitute interact, he in Yiddish, and she in English. In the course of their business, each item of his traditional garb, accurately designated by its Yiddish term, is removed by the prostitute. The narrator provides parodic glosses for several items of clothing, explaining that the *gartl* is the belt that separates meat from milk, for example. The punch line, delivered by the old man in Yiddish, is "You should see another year and again give such a nice donation." The features of a classic are its length, easily ten minutes, its substantial prologue which provides information about cultural details essential to an appreciation of the tale, code-switching among up to five varieties of English, Yiddish, Hebrew and other languages, parodic glosses, and other evidences of delight in the ability to play upon the cultural convergences and incongruities so characteristic of the immigrant experience.[19]

Though the period of mass migration is long past, immigration continues to shape North American folklife: the post-Holocaust influx of survivors, especially ultra-Orthodox Hasidism, has contributed to a flowering of religious community life in the east coast area and elsewhere. Since 1965, with the liberalization of American immigration laws, Soviet Jewry has settled in major American and Canadian cities, particularly New York. In the last eight years alone, more than ninety thousand Soviet Jews have arrived, half of them settling in New York City. They have formed regional enclaves: Brighton Beach is known as Little Odessa; the Georgian Jews from the eastern Caucasus have settled in Forest Hills; the Bukharan Jews from Soviet Central Asia now live in Boro Park and Rego Park and Ashkenazic Jews from the western provinces have concentrated in Parkchester and Flatbush.

In the case of Brighton Beach, an ailing neighbourhood has been revitalized by the influx of Soviet families. Today, all the layers of Jewish immigration are represented there: the elderly who came during the first decades of this century; the Holocaust survivors who arrived in the fifties; and the recent Soviet wave. There is a golden opportunity to study intragroup interaction, the emergence of distinctive immigrant institutions—the Soviet Jewish restaurant plays a very special role in this community; the intensification of Jewishness among immigrants from the western republics of the USSR; and the heightened awareness of distinctiveness in the American context. For example, in Tashkent, Bokharan Jews prepared food in much the same manner as their non-Jewish neighbours, whereas in New York, their cuisine sets them apart from other Soviet Jews. Paradoxically, an aspect of Bokharan Jewish culture that, with the exception of

kashrut, did not significantly distinguish them from their non-Jewish neighbours, serves here to differentiate them from other Jews. In the North American setting, new contexts are found for old skills—a master kamancha player, Zevulon Avshalomov, teaches American students; Fatima Kuinova, a virtuoso Tadjik singer, now performs at folk festivals; and veterans of the Yiddish stage such as Nechama Sirotin, find appreciative audiences at senior citizen centres and Yiddish clubs.[20]

The immigrant experience continues to generate expressive behavior. Just recently in a beauty salon on Wilson Avenue in Toronto, a Soviet Jewish beautician who has been here four years recounted her immigrant saga. She explained that since Soviet Jews had never been outside the Soviet Union and could not anticipate with any accuracy what they would find, they devised ways to communicate under the watchful eye of the censor; the code was that if those who left were happy with their new circumstances, they would send a photo of themselves standing; if they were unhappy, the photo would show them seated. She received the photo—the emigrants were standing on a table.

The 1950s and 1960s have also seen the arrival of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East. By the early seventies, about twenty thousand Syrian Jews formed a very cohesive religious community in the Ocean Parkway section of Brooklyn. Pockets of Jews from Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen and Israel may be found throughout the metropolitan area. These communities offer opportunities to explore the formation of immigrant culture in situ, in contrast to the studies of the earlier period which have generally been made many decades after the fact.

FROM ASSIMILATION AND MARGINALITY TO ETHNICITY

Oddly enough, immigrant folklore as a subject in its own right arrives late on the scene of American Jewish folklife study. Indeed, for many years this subject was totally overshadowed by the interest in Americanization—that is, in how old world forms are altered or adapted to American life. A classic study of this kind is Beatrice Weinreich's "The Americanization of Passover," in which she describes such innovations as machine-made matzoth, the matzoth made in 1942 in the the shape of a V for victory, the introduction of the third seder (the hotel seder), the increased variety of Passover foods, the association of Passover with freedom ideals and the introduction of new Passover games.[21]

Acculturation studies have generally posited a linear progression from old world culture through acculturation to assimilation, with the eventual disappearance of Jewish folklife, a welcome course of events in some circles and the inspiration to record and preserve what remains in others. A

related concept, one that goes hand in hand with minority group theory, is that of the marginal man, that unhealthy creature caught between cultures. The premise here is that divided cultural loyalties lead to psychological pathology. In support of their claim that "ambiguity is the major pervasive element of the current Jewish situation in America," and that this ambiguity derives from the Jew's "position as a perpetual stranger and marginal man," Bernard Rosenberg and Gilbert Shapiro present jokes about conversion, intermarriage, the secularization of religious tradition, self-hatred, status panic and overreactions to imaginary aggressions. For example:

> Three Reform Rabbis are arguing about which of them is the most thoroughly Reform. The first one remarks, "My temple is so Reform that there are ashtrays in every pew. The congregation can smoke while it prays."
>
> "You think that's Reform?" asks the second Rabbi. "In my temple there is a snack bar. The congregation can eat while it prays—especially on Yom Kippur."
>
> "Gentlemen," says the third Rabbi, "as far as I'm concerned, you are practically Orthodox. In my temple, every Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur, there are signs on the doors saying, "Closed for the Holidays."[22]

The road from minority group to ethnic group is a long one, and intellectually much more changes in the paradigm than the shift in terminology might suggest. It is only in the last thirty years that scholars have focused on ethnicity as an aspect of Jewish folklife, or at least framed their inquiry in these terms.

Ethnic identity is only one of several identities. It is socially situated and not always relevant to a given interaction. This approach, which views ethnicity as a social construction, stands in contrast with quests for an absolute, immutable and authentic Jewish identity independent of any particular social context. Perhaps the question should be rephrased: not, What is Jewishness? but rather, When does an individual foreground his identity as Jewish, by what means, and to what ends? What is the cultural content of this social differentiation? What is the display of Jewishness counterposed to? Who are the relevant others?[23]

The answers to some of these questions are dramatized emblematically in the dress code of Hasidim, in the inversions of this code on Purim, as well as in their expressive styles. Salient intracultural boundaries differentiate Hasidim of different courts: Lubavitch, Bobov, Munkatch, Satmar, Stolin, Klausenberg, Bratslav and others. These boundaries are made visible in minute distinctions of dress: hats, socks, shoes, jackets, women's headgear and stockings. Groups are also distinguished by regional varieties of Yiddish reflecting the court's place of origin, distinctive musical repertoires, and specific customs. Thus, Lubavitch is famous for its

farbrengen, but adopts a spartan attitude to the decoration of the inside of the *suke.* In contrast, Bobov is famous for its elaborate *suke* and its Purim play. Stolin is known for its emphasis on dance as an expression of piety. Hasidim also distinguish themselves from modern orthodoxy and of course, from non-observant Jews and from non-Jews. Nor are non-Jews an undifferentiated category. In the playful costumes worn by children on Purim, Hasidic Jewish identity is defined by what it is not as well as by hyperbolic exaggerations of what it is. Children appear as non-humans (animals, androgynous creatures, objects, clowns), as non-Jews (blacks, cowboys, Indians, Arabs, "ordinary" kids in blue jeans and T-shirts, seductive females), and as figures of stature and power (kings, police, soldiers, Ronald Reagan, old Hasidic men, married Hasidic women). Small details are revealing, for example, the preoccupation with neckties: they appear in every size and variety and more than one may be worn at a time. Similarly sunglasses, especially gigantic ones, are a source of fascination. Both ties and sunglasses are considered very non-Hasidic, and they appear in ludicrous forms in these Purim costumes.[24]

In this context, the folklore of ethnicity may be defined as expressive behaviour on and about cultural boundaries. The folklore of ethnicity grows out of a heightened awareness of cultural diversity and ambiguity, out of mastery of multiple cultural repertoires and the ability to choose and switch among them. As I have stated elsewhere:

> A special feature of the folklore of ethnicity is a heightened awareness of cultural diversity and ambiguity, a well-developed capacity for reflexivity or self-reflection. The presence of cultural alternatives, which is, after all, at the heart of the immigrant/ethnic experience, [in Keesing's words] "brings to consciousness . . . premises or assumptions hitherto in the main covert or implicit." The experience of culture contact throws aspects of each into high relief, creating what may be called the *cultural foregrounding* effect, as one inevitably compares one's own ways with those of others, noting similarities and differences. The issue is not the degree of cultural difference involved, objectively speaking, but the social significance attributed to any similarity or difference, however small.[25]

Where the boundaries are drawn and what cultural content is used to render the boundaries visible will vary according to historical as well as social interactional context. Thus, for Sephardic Jews, confronting Jewish communities dominated by Ashkenazic culture, the boundary between Ashkenazic and Sephardic styles is particularly salient.[26] During earlier periods, the boundary between German and Polish Jews was of special relevance.

The interest in ethnicity is itself part of the history of American Jewish life. It represents a shift from a preoccupation with the disappearance of a

distinctive Jewish way of life, with the anxiety of being a marginal person in a society of minority groups that are by definition at a disadvantage in relation to the dominant culture, to a positive identification with Jewishness, whatever form it takes. The shift is from anxiety about one's otherness to a celebration of it. The ethnicity framework not only constitutes a more constructive alternative to an acculturation/assimilation model, it also posits a much more fluid situation.

Rather than identifying a group and looking within its boundaries for its distinctive culture, scholars now recognize that group boundaries are not "given." Rather, they are socially constructed and situated, constantly negotiated; they are multiple and complex. A subject for study is therefore how people use expressive behaviour to invoke special identities and under what conditions, how they use folklore to define social boundaries and to play on them. In the course of this shift, ethnicity has become the dominating concern in Jewish folklife studies of the last two decades.[27]

THE TRADITIONALIZING PROCESS

Preservation, reconstruction, revival, awareness and innovation are all aspects of the "traditionalizing" process, a complex venture that involves the constant making and remaking of heritage. In her study of the elderly Jews at the Israel Levin Senior Citizen's Center in Venice, California, Barbara Myerhoff examines the resurfacing of particular traditions as an aspect of the life cycle, rather than in relation to assimilation; that is, she examines how the elderly recycle their dormant natal culture, which may have been inactive through their middle years, for the special needs they face in their advanced old age. Narration, song, dance, festival—these are not simply examples of cultural survivals and adaptations. There is a life-cycle pattern at work here, one that converges with the disjunctures of secondary migration.[28]

Though Myerhoff's case may seem like an extreme example, it is especially helpful because it emphasizes how active continuity is. Survival has connotations of passivity: we tend to think of cultural elements surviving, rather than of people choosing to activate a musical or narrative tradition. Stated differently, the premise in such work is that persistence is the norm, and that change is what needs to be explained. We may want to distinguish between a reluctance to change and a desire to perpetuate. In either case, continuity must be considered as an active process, as an aspect of traditionalizing.

In Lenore Weissler's study of a Havurah[29] in an east coast city, a group of young, American-born professionals have formed a religious fellowship in which they pursue their core concern with the problematic

nature of tradition—what to incorporate, how to resolve conflicts between particular religious traditions and values they hold as modern Americans. Their discussions of the problems and their ingenuity in devising solutions, some more successful and enduring than others, offer rich evidence for examining continuity as an active process. While the centrality of the Torah and of prayer are accepted, the status of the commentaries is questioned, especially relative to the importance of making a personal connection to the reading of the week. Indeed, the Torah discussion, an important feature of a Havurah service, often focuses on the difficulty of reconciling a particular passage with values held by the participants. Especially troubling are sections on menstrual impurity and animal sacrifice, for example. The conduct of the service itself, even to the way in which the chairs are arranged, expresses the value placed on egalitarianism: there are equal opportunities for men and women to lead services, there is no figure of authority to conduct the service as a paid professional, and rituals for girls are created as counterparts to those that exist for boys. The baby-naming ceremonies for girls are among the most ingenious.[30]

Innovations may lead to the creation of novel expressive forms to suit new social and historical circumstances, or they may serve to strengthen traditional values. Modern Orthodox and Hasidic Jews have been particularly inventive in adapting modern technology to further their abilities to adhere strictly to Sabbath and holy day prescriptions against work, while living in modern highrise buildings that require the use of elevators. Sabbath clocks which regulate the electrical lighting of a residence as well as the motor of the refrigerator are another example.

Traditionalization also takes the form of reconstruction, which is closely tied to the interest in revival. Both may be seen as aspects of ethnicity—that is, as efforts to find, create, or reconstruct the right cultural content for emerging new identities. Forms which have changed radically or which have disappeared from the scene for decades are now being revived by Yiddish folksingers, klezmer bands, and Sephardic musical groups. The results are fascinating, as Slobin demonstrates in his presentation of the doina. The entire process reveals the extent to which tradition is itself a construction and a process. At least two principles are at work here: first, the act of reviving is simultaneously an act of constructing a hypothetical original; and secondly, each generation stands in a special relation to that which has come before.[31]

These revivals are part of a larger development, namely folk festivals and public programs devoted to the traditional arts of Jewish communities in a given area: the shtetl fair in Washington, D.C., the Jewish Arts festival on Long Island, the Jewish cultural days and weekends on college campuses, the workshops and demonstrations at museums, and the National

Jewish Film Festival that originated in San Francisco. Such events, many of them new contexts for old skills as well as showcases for new talent, are worthy of study in their own right. They should be viewed in relation to other expressive forms such as parades, demonstrations, commemorations and new days of observance in the Jewish calendar (Yom HaShoah, Israel Independence Day).

What would Friedrich Krauss have said could he have been in Brooklyn last Purim? Or at Carnegie Hall when the California Klezmorim played recently? Or at the Odessa restaurant where Soviet Jews celebrate in Brighton Beach? Or if he could have heard Zevulon Avshalomov from the Caucasus play the kamancha, or have seen Firuz from Bokhara dance? He would have been impressed with the evidence that North American folklife is a well-spring of cherished tradition and irrepressible innovation, a diverse and vital array of life styles. The eleventh hour has lasted a century. Research concerns that have informed decades of study—salvage ethnography, the culture of immigration, the folklore of ethnicity, the traditionalizing process—may now be applied to Jewish situations that have not been examined before or that have newly arisen. What folklorists can offer are approaches and tools for examining the expressive behaviour of Jewish communities in North America, the symbolic manifestations of the immigrant experience and ethnic boundaries and the process by which traditions are constructed and meaning is made.

NOTES

1. See Stephen Stern, "Ethnic Folklore and the Folklore of Ethnicity," *Western Folklore* 36, no. 1 (1977), pp. 7–32.

2. See Dell Hymes, "Folklore's Nature and the Sun's Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 88, no. 350 (1975), pp. 345–369.

3. Friedrich S. Krauss, "Notes and Queries: Jewish Folklife in America," *Journal of American Folklore* 7 (1894), pp. 72–75.

4. (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973), pp. 126, 114. See also Rudolf Glanz, *The Jew in the Old American Folklore* (New York, 1961).

5. "Contemporary Studies of Sephardi Jews in the United States," *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish Subcommunities in the United States,* ed. Abraham D. Lavender (Westport, Conn., 1977), p. 277.

6. See Rebekah Ziona Mendelsohn, "The Bokharan Jewish Community of New York City," master's thesis, Columbia University, 1964; Dina Dahbany Miraglia, "Yemenites in America: The 'Invisible' Jews," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Newsletter* 4, nos. 1–2 (1980), pp. 12–13; Uri Sharvit, "The Role of Music in the Yemenite Jewish Ritual: A Study of Ethnic Persistence," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1977, and Dina Miraglia, "An Analysis of Ethnic Identity among Yemenite Jews in the Greater New York Area," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1983.

7. J. Shatzky, "Yehudah Leyb Cahan (1881–1937): materyaln far a biografye," *Yorbukh fun amopteyl fun yivo* 1 (1938), p. 21.

8. M. A. Luria, "Judeo-Spanish Dialects in New York City," *Todd Memorial Volumes* (New York), 2 (1930), pp. 7–16. I am indebted to Pamela Dorn for the information about George Herzog. Sephardic ballads and songs continue to be collected in North America: I. J. Levy, "Sephardic Ballads and Songs in the U.S.A.: New Variants and Additions," master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1958; R. R. McCurdy and D. D. Stanley, "Judeo-Spanish Ballads from Atlanta, Georgia," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 15 (1951), pp. 221–238; D. Romey, "A Study of Spanish Traditions in Isolation as Found in the Romances, Refrains, and Folklore of the Seattle Sephardi Community," master's thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, 1950; and most recently, Pamela Dorn, "Transmission of Ethnic Music and Dance among Greek, Jewish, and Syrian Lebanese Americans in an Urban Setting," B.A. honors thesis, Indiana University, 1977. The Sephardic folktale has also received considerable attention in André E. Elboz, ed., *Folktales of the Canadian Sephardim* (Toronto, 1982).

9. "Popular Beliefs and Customs among the Yiddish-Speaking Jews of St. Louis, Mo.," *Journal of American Folklore* 38 (1925), p. 375.

10. One of the most interesting outgrowths of Boas's work is the dissertation by his student David Efron, *Gesture and Environment: A Tentative Study of Some of the Socio-Temporal and "Linguistic" Aspects of the Gestural Behavior of Eastern Jews and Southern Italians in New York City, Living Under Similar as well as Different Environmental Conditions* (New York, 1941).

11. For a detailed consideration of this subject, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "From Race to Ethnicity: American Anthropologic Interest in Jews, 1890–1952," *Ashkenaz: Essays in Jewish Folklore and Culture* (Bloomington, Ind., forthcoming).

12. For example, Ruth Rubin, a native of Montreal, pioneered in the recording of Yiddish folksong in Canada and the United States from the 1940s to now.

13. The Holocaust also began to serve as a subject in its own right for such folklorists as Toby Blum-Dobkin, who is interviewing survivors living in New York City in her efforts to reconstruct the expressive culture of Jews in displaced-persons camps immediately after the war, and for historians such as Yaffa Eliach, whose collection of stories from survivors about their experiences, particularly miracle narratives, is entitled *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982).

14. Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little Town in Eastern Europe* (New York, 1952). Though their focus was on East European Jews, the team also interviewed Yemenite and Syrian Jews in New York City. The project and its methods are described in Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux, *The Study of Culture at a Distance* (Chicago, 1953). For a critique of the project, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "'In Search of the Primitive': The *shtetl* Model in Jewish Ethnology," *Ashkenaz*.

15. "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity," *Folklore in the Modern World,* ed. R. M. Dorson (The Hague, 1978), pp. 109–122; "Studying Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore," *The Handbook of American Folklore,* ed. R. M. Dorson (Bloomington, 1983), pp. 39–47. On distinctive Jewish immigrant organizations, see William E. Mitchell, *Mishpokheh: A Study of New York City Jewish Family Clubs* (The Hague, 1978) and Philip Goodman, "The Purim Association of the City of New York," *The Purim Anthology,* ed. Philip Goodman (Philadelphia, 1949), pp. xx–xxx.

16. See E. G. Mlotek, "America in East European Yiddish Folksong," *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature,* ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York: Publications of the Linguistic Circle of New York, 1954), pp. 179–195 and Ruth Rubin, "Yiddish Folksongs of Immigration and the Melting Pot," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 17 (1961), pp. 173–182.

17. Compare R. M. Dorson, "Jewish American Dialect Stories on Tape," *Studies in*

Biblical and Jewish Folklore, ed. Raphael Patai, Francis Lee Utley and Dov Noy (Bloomington, 1960), pp. 133–146, and Sam Levenson, "Dialect Comedian Should Vanish," *Commentary* 14 (1952), pp. 168–170.

18. (New York, 1951). In contrast, see Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs: The Popular Music of the Jewish Immigrants* (Urbana, 1982) and Herbert J. Gans, "The Yinglish Music of Mickey Katz," *American Quarterly* 3 (1953), pp. 213–218.

19. See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Traditional Storytelling in the Toronto Jewish Community: A Study of Performance and Creativity in an Immigrant Culture," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1972.

20. See *Festival of Soviet Jewish Folk Traditions of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Western Republics of the USSR* (New York: Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, 1982).

21. *Studies in Biblical and Jewish Folklore,* pp. 329–366. The questionnaires and responses that form the basis for this study may be found at the YIVO institute for Jewish Research in New York.

22. "Marginality and Jewish Humor," *Midstream* 4, no. 2 (1958), p. 74.

23. An important project on Fairfax, a very diverse Jewish neighbourhood in Los Angeles, begun under the direction of Barbara Myerhoff, should offer interesting hypotheses for research elsewhere. Myerhoff adds questions about the relationship between ethnicity and territory, the inner city enclave as fictive homeland, ethnicity as achieved social differentiation and as mediating structure, and the role of elders in creating and transmitting culture in a modern urban setting. See also Leonard Plotnikov and Myrna Silverman, "Jewish Ethnic Signalling: Social Bonding in Contemporary American Society," *Ethnology* 17, no. 4 (1978), pp. 407–423.

24. See Sydelle Brooks Levy, "Shifting Patterns of Ethnic Identification among the Hasidim," *The New Ethnicity: Perspectives from Ethnology,* ed. John Bennett (St. Paul, 1975), pp. xx–xxx. Hasidim in North America have received considerable folkloristic attention as well. Jill Gellerman has videotaped and analysed several hundred hours of Hasidic dance in New York City as the basis for her dissertation in Performance Studies at New York University and has published "The Mayim Pattern as an Indicator of Cultural Attitudes in Three American Hasidic Communities: A Comparative Approach Based on Laban-Analysis," *CORD: Dance Research Journal,* 20 (1976), pp. 111–144. See also Ellen Koskoff, "The Concept of Nigun among Lubavitchers in the United States," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1976; Shifra Epstein, "The Celebration of a Contemporary Purim in the Bobover Hasidic Community," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1979; Jerome R. Mintz, *The Legends of the Hasidim: An Introduction to Hasidic Culture and Oral Tradition in the New World* (Chicago, 1968). Better known are the sociological monographs of Solomon Poll, George Kranzler, Israel Rubin and William Shaffir. For bibliographical material, see *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Newsletter* 4, nos. 1–2 (1981).

25. "Studying Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore," pp. 43–44. See F. M. Keesing, "Recreative Behavior and Culture Change," *Men and Cultures,* ed. Anthony F. Wallace (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 130–133.

26. See Stephen Stern, "The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles: A Study in Folklore and Ethnic Identity," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1977, and Ruth Fredman, *Cosmopolitans at Home: The Sephardic Jews of Washington, D.C.* (Philadelphia, 1982).

27. Contrast sociologist Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York, 1964) with anthropologists Fredrik Barth, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston,

1969); Robert A. Levine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York, 1972): and Anya Peterson Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity* (Bloomington, 1982).

28. *Number Our Days* (New York, 1978). See also Giselle Hendel-Sebestyen, "The Sephardic Home: Ethnic Homogeneity and Cultural Traditions in a Total Institution," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1969, and Jack Kugelmass, "The Miracle of Intervale Avenue: Aging in the South Bronx," *Natural History* 89, no. 2 (1980), pp. 26–35.

29. The Havurah is a religious fellowship established as an alternative to established congregations. Small, intimate, egalitarian and highly participatory, the Havurah offers its members the opportunity to experiment with Jewish tradition and find personal meaning in the liturgy and ritual. Since the 1960s many such groups have formed.

30. "Making Judaism Meaningful: Ambivalence and Tradition in a Havurah Community," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1982. See also, Riv-Ellen Prell-Foldes, "Strategies in Conflict Situations: Ritual and Redress in an Urban Jewish Prayer Community," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978. For comparable treatments of modern orthodoxy, see Samuel C. Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago, 1976) and id. *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship, and Religion* (Chicago, 1983).

31. A theoretical framework for analysing such activities is provided by Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," *Studies in Visual Communication* 4 (Summer 1981), pp. 2–45. See also Mark Slobin, "The Neo-Klezmer Movement and Euro-American Musical Revivalism," *Journal of American Folklore* 97 (January–March, 1984): pp. 98–104.