

Folklore Fellows' NETWORK



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The Where, How and Who of Digital Ethnography

A Brief History of the University of California, Berkeley's
Folklore Graduate Program

Beyond Content Analysis

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Cover: The Hilltop looking down Broad Street toward the Center of Columbus. Photo: Katherine Borland 2017. (See also Borland's "Beyond Content Analysis" in this issue.)





Editorial:

FF Communications under Duress

Frog

The name *Folklore Fellows* places emphasis on the people of whom it is comprised. People maintain the FF and have driven its evolution across changing times since its founding in 1907. This year, a new challenge has emerged. The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters has been the FF's publisher almost since it was founded. That relationship was recently brought to a sudden end, cutting loose the FF Communications series and *FF Network*. In September, the Academy decided to completely change its publishing profile and is jettisoning its relations to all current series. The decision came without warning. In order to avoid any interruption to FFC or the bulletin, the Academy will uphold the FF's publications as we negotiate the transition to a new publisher across the coming year.

Members' initiative and ingenuity in getting things done has determined the history of the FF. The FF took form in June of 1907 when Kaarle Krohn first travelled from Helsinki to Copenhagen and met Axel Olrik. Together with a young Carl W. von Sydow, who was still working on his doctoral dissertation, they formulated the first draft of the FF's statutes. The FF's first 'communication' (*Mitteilung / meddelande*) was published at the end of that year. Krohn and Olrik made publication a cornerstone of the FF's activities from the very beginning: they had already lined up the first two FF monographs to appear in 1907 and 1908, even though with different publishers.

The relationship between the Folklore Fellows and the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters was no less driven by initiative. Krohn became one of the Academy's founding members in 1908, where he maintained a central position. It was no accident that at their third meeting in November of that year the Academy decided to publish a Folklore Fellows' series. FF Communications first appeared in 1910 and became the Academy's most internationally visible, respected and longest-running publication series.

The FF has had its ups and downs and has had to adapt over time, but that evolution has always depended on people. The rich dialogue and active interpersonal exchange among the FF's members during the first half of the twentieth century was fostered by the comparative methodology

that dominated the intellectual environment of the time. That methodology went out of fashion and was even aggressively rejected in the decades following World War II, a period when folklore studies was dissolved or assimilated by other fields across much of Europe. Researchers' interests and needs had changed. FFC remained a mooring post for the Folklore Fellows, but a transformation became necessary for the network to hold relevance in the changing intellectual and political environment.

A new era was initiated in 1990, when Lauri Honko, Matti Kuusi, Anna-Leena Siikala and Leea Virtanen redefined the international network on a global scale, reconceived its structure and situated it under the auspices of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters. *FF Network* was founded as a complementary organ of communication to connect members around the world in a way that FFC never had. This initiative did not simply restructure the FF and how it connected members: it avoided the FF's obsolescence and extinction.

The importance of FF Communications is not being questioned – on the contrary: it is highly respected. The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters' decision is to stop engaging in its current, internationally-oriented publication activity, with the intention that this be replaced by publishing works by and for members of the Academy in their own languages. FFC will nevertheless continue as always. The situation has been stressful and progress has unavoidably been in fits and starts as we move between scattered meetings of different committees interspersed with strategizing and lobbying on various fronts. However, this has not impeded our activities. We are developing ways to increase the utility of *FF Network* and our website for the FF and planning to digitize back numbers of FFC. Owing to the number of high-quality submissions and proposals, we are going from two to three FFC volumes per year. The third number for 2019 is currently in press, three volumes are lined up for 2020, and maintaining that rhythm is a target in our publisher negotiations, so we encourage you to offer your manuscripts. Folklorists are a determined breed and we will drive FF Communications into the future.

The Where, How and Who of Digital Ethnography

Copp lie Cocq

“I found it on the internet.” I am convinced that I am not the only one who has received this answer when asking a student to specify the origin of her/his material. “The internet” is part of everyday life for most of us, to some extent and in some form – in our homes, at work or in our pockets via a smartphone. “The internet” is, however, not a satisfying answer, I would say. The broadness, messiness and multitude of contributors and channels “out there” make this kind of place ungraspable, undefinable, and often (not least from the perspective of a teacher and a researcher) unreliable. But still, our cultural and research practices imply that we often turn toward the internet to observe, find, collect and create data. Many cultural practices have become digital: the way we communicate, share information, play games, buy items and share moments of everyday life as well as major events. Many students are well acquainted with internet content and more digitally skilled than many teachers. Nonetheless, approaching and using the internet as a place, a source and a research context requires perspectives, a reflexive approach and ethical considerations that are not necessarily obviously relevant (although rarely superfluous) in everyday use of the internet, but that are central for us in folkloristics and ethnology (see for instance Cocq & Johansson 2017).

With a disciplinary interest in the study of culture, its expressions and practices, we have naturally found in the internet an extensive and rich source of materials. And it is not only the increased number of digital sources and examples of digital practices that influence our research practices – it also implies increased possibilities through available methods, tools and so forth. And when our habits, practices and methods gain ground on the internet, the need for studying the internet cannot be ignored. Our usage and application of digital sources, methods and materials have motivated a rapidly increasing body of research and literature about what is called netnography, netnography, online ethnography, virtual ethnography or digital ethnography (Hine 2000; Hjorth et al. 2017; Kozinets 2015; Pink et al. 2016; Underberg & Zorn 2013).

What Is the Internet?

“But *where* on the internet?” would be my first follow-up question. I would restrain myself from asking “*What* is the internet?” for the risk of giving the impression of being too troublesome (or too old!) – although I am convinced that I would receive many interesting and diverse answers, from access to favorite applications on a smartphone (regardless of the form of connection) to patterns of communication and monitoring of time and space, or illustrations of how the internet can be a tool, place or way of being (Markham 2004; Markham & Baym 2008).

“*Where?*” can be on traditional media platforms, websites and homepages, or on the web 2.0 – as often when students come with references to the internet. This is the web as we know it today, constituted of social participatory and interactive online media – the web as a place where we meet, create and so on, which became possible when new technologies increased possibilities of access and a higher degree of interaction than with the previous rather static web 1.0. Social networking services (SNS) such as Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram or Facebook have in common their participatory nature and ease of access but they differ in many other ways: demographic groups – for instance, a survey among US teen shows that YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular platforms among this group (Gramlich 2019);¹ politico-geographical factors, not only due to digital divides, but also to political and ideological choices (as a Nordic citizen would rapidly experience when traveling for instance to China); or in terms of affordances, i.e. the relationship between an object (for instance here a website) and the human being and how it affects how we can interact with it: a tool’s properties give clues to what can be done with it (Norman 1999). For instance, a website offers us the possibility to interact with it in a certain way or a specific SNS invites us to do things by showing what is possible (upload a picture, how to comment or react to it, etc.).

1 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/16/facts-about-americans-and-facebook/>

Everything digital is not online

“Where?” should not be restricted to online contexts. Studies in digital ethnography do not have to take place solely online; depending on the phenomenon to be examined, it could be offline, online or both. In a similar manner to how we may experience the difficulty of not taking the digital into account because of its omnipresence, what takes place offline cannot be excluded either. Therefore, digital ethnography often combines online and offline methods and sources. Offline data allows us to include contextual and additional data, to put a greater emphasis on the users and their intentions, and so on. In contrast to early internet studies talking about virtual communities, contemporary research emphasizes how groups, phenomena and so forth exist both online and offline, infuse each other, and become integrated. Most cultural practices and so-called communities exist both online and offline and it is therefore difficult – and not suitable – to draw a sharp line between the two. As C. Hine reminds us, we have to “take account of movement between online and offline spaces and between different online activities” (2017: 317). However, the distinction between online and offline realms is still relevant for methodological purposes, because online ethnography requires some adaptation of traditional methods. For instance, our modes of presence as researchers have to be adjusted when we approach the study of digital expressions and phenomena online or in relation to the internet. Physical, face-to-face interaction such as we know it from traditional fieldwork can be combined with other forms of presence and co-presence: remotely, mediated or through a virtual presence for instance in the case of games or virtual worlds – combining ways of “being there”.

Tracing the Way There

The question of “where” on the internet is as valid as asking “where” in Europe or in the US. But the question of “where” is actually just a first step for digging further into the process of the collection and creation of data, because “where” – i.e. identifying the source – leads us to the issue of the reliability of the source and how to relate to it. It is about the contributor, the intended audience, if it is produced within an institutional frame, or if it is a vernacular initiative, and how the institutional and vernacular might interplay (e.g. Cocq 2013). It is also about the patterns of distribution, for instance in the case of a meme that has spread virally through several platforms.

And from there, we get to my favorite follow-up question: “How did you get there?”. The importance of tracing our choices and patterns of selection cannot be overestimated. Documentation is key in the ethnographic process, and this is also relevant when it comes to internet navigation. Search entries in a browser might lead to new terms,

new entries; a page might lead us to click on a link, on yet another page; a thread in a conversation might lead us to another discussion thread, and so forth. Nevertheless, a search on Google gives us what can be seen as a selection of data already at that stage. The hits that it shows on my screen can differ from someone else’s screen and be influenced by my previous searches or by what the search engine has learned about my (assumed) interests and patterns of online behavior. Neutral search engines that do not save our data can help us to get a better start – i.e. leave the selection to us. Still, the intuitiveness of internet navigation implies that we need support if we want to remember and be able to retrace our way back to the source that we eventually identified as what will be included in our data. Screen captures (photos and videos) are easy ways to do this, and also have the advantage, as a side effect, of making us more conscious about our modes of navigation.

Teaching digital ethnography therefore also comprises a practical dimension focusing on “How?”. The hands-on part of digital ethnography should thereby provide examples of tools (for instance screen recording, digital diaries, etc.). Here, I find particularly important to strive for lowering the threshold when it comes to the technology, to not focus on the instrumental but to keep in sight the analytical purposes of the study. Students’ relation to technologies vary a lot – from the tech-savvy to those who are easily overwhelmed by new digital tools. Whatever the case, the technologies applied for conducting a study in digital ethnography should be selected, applied and motivated by the purpose of the research. A strong focus on the instrumental always implies a risk that the choice of methods is influenced and limited by technical knowledge or attitudes to new technologies. Introducing open access, free tools or tools made available by the home university can prevent such risks.

Who Is behind the Data?

Back to our inquiries about internet data. Yet another key question for evaluating selected material would be “Who?”. Here, I want to focus on the subject and the intentions behind the data, and thereby address issues of ethics and ownership. Identifying who is behind the data is necessary in order to ask for informed consent, to evaluate and consider if and when we are entitled to use the data, how to quote (if applicable), to estimate the research benefits etc. Internet research ethics is a field under constant development, and we can benefit from the extensive work of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) and the guidelines they continuously develop. Their first ethical guidelines were published in 2002, revised 10 years later in a second edition of the report (Markham & Buchanan 2012), mainly adapting to a digital media landscape influenced by the development of social media, mobile technologies

and the emergence of big data. Presently, in 2019, the AoIR Ethics Working Committee is updating the guidelines into a third version. In an age when digital media channels and platforms keep multiplying, and bearing in mind the development of new dimensions such as Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence, a continuous review of current and upcoming ethical challenges is greatly needed.

Core to the ethical guidelines are a processual approach and a context-oriented day-to-day ethical practice. Other central aspects emphasized in internet research ethics and in line with perspectives in ethnology and folklore are the values of cultural awareness and ethical pluralism, i.e. the recognition and inclusion of the diversity of perspectives, practices, cultural backgrounds and so on that we meet during the research process. Ethics, cultural sensitivity and respect for the research subjects are nothing new to our fields. I see these as important contributions that we can offer to digital research and methods when ethnography is being applied in many other disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, design and so forth.

Research subjects are to be found behind all data, even if their presence is less visible in, for instance, big data samples. Large data collections are made possible thanks to more powerful tools and technologies and this big data opens possibilities to ask new questions. Digital ethnography has a fruitful role to play in the field of digital research, also when it comes to putting forward the benefits of small sample analysis (Cocq 2016; Hitchcock 2014; Kaplan 2015; Wang 2013). Our disciplines' ability to conduct in-depth analysis of small samples, what T. Wang (2013) describes as "thick data", is in this context even more central than before.

The concept of "thick data" – built on the concept of "thick description" developed by Geertz in his seminal essay "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (1973), a description that explains not only a phenomenon or a behavior, but its context as well (compare also Honko 2000; Pekkala & Vasenkari 2000) – brings to the fore how big data analysis needs small data perspectives.

Central Questions

The list of questions to be asked in order to grasp the complexity and richness of digital resources does not stop here. The concepts, methods and approaches in digital ethnography keep pace with developments of practices, platforms and so on, and not least the entwinement and interplay between online and offline spaces. But the *where*, *how* and *who* of digital ethnography are, I believe, a good start for highlighting the contribution, need and value of ethnography in the study of the digital in a broad sense. The study of routes and places (the *where*), the value of documentation (the *how*) and the key role of research subjects (the *who*) are familiar themes in our disciplines. Folkloristics and ethnology have indeed been driving forces in the production of knowledge about these topics. It is therefore both evident and expected that our disciplines continue to be major actors in developing the field of digital research.

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A Brief History of the University of California, Berkeley's Folklore Graduate Program

Charles L. Briggs

Please join me on a whirlwind tour of the University of California's Folklore Graduate Program.¹ In 1957 William Bascom came to the Department of Anthropology. A specialist on African art, Bascom served as president of the American Folklore Society in 1953–1954. Trained at Indiana University in anthropology, folklore, and linguistics, Dell Hymes joined the Berkeley faculty in 1960; he convinced Bascom that hiring Alan Dundes would enable Berkeley to establish a preeminent folklore program (see Zumwalt 2017).

Recruited to the Anthropology faculty in 1963, Dundes created his celebrated course, *The Forms of Folklore*; enrollment reached some 500 each year, and Dundes became one of Berkeley's most treasured teachers. The course inaugurated the Berkeley Folklore Archive, which

houses folklore collected by students. Undergraduates still encounter submissions by such leading folklorists as Regina Bendix and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in the Archive's cavernous files. Dundes' charisma and the post-World War II boom in U.S. support for higher education enabled the Folklore Graduate Program, opened in 1965, to thrive. Some BA and MA graduates stayed at Berkeley to earn PhDs through other departments, while others left for doctoral programs at Indiana University, the University of Pennsylvania, and elsewhere.

Forty-two years of stability under Dundes's leadership ended with his sudden death on 30 March 2005. Joining the faculty just months later, I faced not the smooth transition that we had planned but the tasks of creating a vision for the future and assuring its fiscal and institutional base.



Alan Dundes in the Berkeley Folklore Archive. Undated; permission courtesy of the Dundes family.

¹ A more detailed history of the Berkeley Folklore Program is scheduled for publication in the *North American Folklore Studies: An Institutional History*, edited by Rosemary Zumwalt and Patricia Sawin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming in 2020).



Undergraduates working in the Berkeley Folklore Archive, 2017.

I knew that the Program would be challenged by shifting university-wide priorities: A small academic MA program in an institution that emphasizes PhD programs and professional degrees was particularly vulnerable as the expansionist plans and generous support of prior decades gave way to belt-tightening agendas and boom/bust cycles affecting California's public universities. Providing support for graduate students was much easier in 1965, when residents paid no fees, than in 2017-2018, when residents were charged \$9,000 a year and nonresident graduate students \$26,000.

The Folklore Graduate Group, which included Ronelle Alexander, Ben Brinner, John Lindow, Dan Melia, Candace Slater, and Bonnie Wade, created a "Designated Emphasis in Folklore," enabling PhD students recruited into other units to include Folklore as part of their doctoral training and degrees. A second step enabled students to pursue the MA in Folklore and a PhD degree simultaneously. Two initiatives served simultaneously to honor Dundes's contributions and secure Berkeley Folklore's future. First, funds from the Alan Dundes Distinguished Chair in Folklore permit an annual Alan Dundes lecture. Secondly, the Dundes family, along with Dundes's friends, colleagues, and former students, contributed to an endowment whose income enables the Program to name an Alan Dundes Graduate Fellow each year.

Towards a Multi-Genealogical Folkloristics

Creating new futures requires creating new pasts. Richard Dorson's (1968) disciplinary genealogy projected a straight line from seventeenth century British Antiquarians to a single future for folkloristics—carefully shielding "authentic" folklore from "fakelore," amateurs, popularizers, and other scholarly disciplines (see Bendix 1997). This genealogy intersected with race and colonialism only when folkloristics traveled into the British Empire, and Dorson overlooked the contributions of Indian "assistants" (see Naithani 2006). Rather than trying to enshrine a single vision of folkloristics, Berkeley's program began in 2005 to place a

multi-genealogical folkloristics at the center of graduate training (see Briggs and Naithani 2012). Two aspects are key:

First, Américo Paredes (1958) constructed folklore as revolving not around homogeneous national cultures but heterogeneity, race, conflict, power, and borders. Reading work by South Asian and Latin American folklorists and scholars from U.S. racialized minorities suggests the importance of genealogies that do not begin with white, northern European elites. Second, building alternative archives involves not simply rejecting the canon but developing new ways of reading canonical texts. For example, Dorson positioned John Aubrey as a folkloristic father figure who discovered Englishness in rural people. Rereading Aubrey involved seeing how he wove English folklore into a broader colonial tapestry that included Asia, the Americas, North Africa, and colonized Ireland. We trace how Aubrey fashioned traditional subjects in dialogue with visions of modern subjects emerging through Locke's writings on language and politics and Boyle's and Newton's program for scientific knowledge (see Bauman and Briggs 2003).

Positioning Berkeley as the center for multiplying genealogies would reproduce Euro(-American)centrism. A persistent feature of Berkeley's Program has thus been its international reach, recruiting folklorists from other countries as visiting faculty members; recent visitors include Pertti Anttonen, Rahile Dawut, Valdimar Hafstein, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Sadhana Naithani, Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, and Kwesi Yankah. Moreover, we recruit graduate students who have specific forms of training and/or life experiences that position them to read the canon against the grain in particular ways. From 1965 through the present, it is the diverse interests of graduate students, along with the quality and creativity of their scholarship, that drives our goal of training leaders who will ensure the discipline's future vibrancy.



Visiting Professor John McDowell performing a corrido during a podcast interview with (left to right) Charles Briggs and graduate students Cameron Johnson and Leah Simon, 2019. Photograph by Elena Klonsky.

Conclusion: New Pasts for New Futures

Our program resolutely remains the Berkeley *Folklore* Program. This disciplinary commitment does not signal, however, acceptance of the sort of boundary-work that fosters intellectual isolation or limits efforts to challenge the discipline's geopolitical and historical underpinnings. How, then, can programs form vibrant parts of larger intellectual debates without sacrificing the discipline's future? We have learned three lessons regarding the need to continually create and critique visions of folkloristics' pasts in order to fashion new futures: First, folkloristics' pasts are less history lessons you learn in graduate school than forms of commonsense that limit presents and futures. If our students are to make new futures for the discipline, they must construct their own histories; uncritically reproducing the ones we have fashioned will constrain their potential contributions. Second, both accepting canonical genealogies and just beginning with current scholarship leave Eurocentric genealogies and racialized hierarchies in place. In the face of demands to recognize the contributions of scholars from U.S. racialized minorities and countries beyond the Euro-American orbit, declaring "game over—no more genealogies, please!" would leave those exclusions in place, impoverishing the range of ideas that count as folkloristics' stock-in-trade. Third, by viewing the discipline in relation to other scholarly traditions, folklorists position themselves

not as isolated advocates for a vanishing object (folklore) but as offering unique insights into ways that regimes of knowledge and power are made.

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Beyond Content Analysis

Narratives of Belonging in a Changing Neighborhood¹

Katherine Borland

Recently, I have been exploring the significance of contradictory statements in oral personal narratives and what they might tell us about social identities on the one hand and about the limitations of our research methods on the other. Although much of the early literature on life review focuses on the importance of achieving a coherent sense of self through narrative (Meyerhoff 1978, Linde 1993), speakers do contradict themselves in the course of being interviewed, and these moments often signal a discrepancy between their beliefs about themselves and the world and their actual experiences in the world.

My material comes from a larger collaborative project called *Be the Street*, involving faculty and students from the departments of Theatre, Dance, Spanish and Portuguese, Comparative Studies and Folklore at The Ohio State University. The immediate goal of *Be the Street* is to create ensembles of performers in the Hilltop neighborhood of Columbus to devise theatre around the themes of migration, mobility, immobility and placemaking. Devising is a collaborative approach to performance that allows ordinary people to

create work out of their shared group process (Heddon and Milling 2005). In *Be the Street*, pairs of graduate students, under the supervision of faculty mentors, conduct twelve to fourteen weekly devising workshops with their community ensembles. The ensembles subsequently perform together in a final public sharing of the work. Unlike other kinds of applied theatre projects at the university, the resulting performances are by, about, and for community members, and they take place in the Hilltop community.²

Performance-based Engagement with the Hilltop

Directly west of downtown Columbus, the Hilltop is a diverse neighborhood of 66,000 residents with significant refugee (most recently, Somali) and immigrant (mostly Mexican) populations. It has also long been a destination for mostly white, rural Appalachian migrants, who were initially attracted by once-plentiful jobs in the manufacturing sector. The neighborhood is 71 percent white, 19 percent Black and about 10 percent Latino. Bordered by interstate highways and bisected by Broad Street (the old Highway 40), it lacks a visible center. With a poverty rate of 22 percent, the Hilltop is not the poorest part of the city. However, after factories were shuttered in the 1980s, this once stable working-and-middle class neighborhood experienced a long slide into blight, with deteriorating housing stock, rising crime and the highest infant mortality rates in the city.

Over the past two years, OSU students and faculty have conducted over one hundred community devising workshops. In 2018, five different Hilltop ensembles came together for our public sharing. In 2019, three ensembles continued their collaborative work, and, in spring 2020, we will begin our third iteration of the *Be the Street* creative process. In addition to making a space for theatrical devising, reflection and cross-group dialog, *Be the Street* offers participants the opportunity to represent their communities in ways that counter and complicate the largely negative portraits of the Hilltop that populate the local news.



Community organizer Annette Jefferson during a *BetheStreet* creative movement class at the Hilltop YMCA. Photo by Victor Espinosa. April 2018.

- 1 The material for this essay is derived from my presentation at the Oral History Seminar at the Finnish Literature Society on May 6, 2019.
- 2 For more on *Be the Street*, please visit our website at <https://u.osu.edu/bethestreet/>.



The Hilltop looking down Broad Street toward the Center of Columbus. Cut off from the city by a series of intersecting highways, the neighborhood lacks a visible center. Photo by Katherine Borland. Summer 2017.

Engaged projects, such as this one, often involve considerable preliminary legwork. The interviews I will discuss here were conducted at the beginning of the project as part of our university team's initial forays into the neighborhood. We invited several community leaders to share their life histories in audio- or video-taped sessions of about one hour. For the purposes of *Be the Street*, these life review interviews functioned as a way for the research team to get to know community actors and elicit their support and assistance in identifying people who might be interested in joining the theatre ensembles. The material did not directly inform the subsequent creative work, as it does in other kinds of oral history performance projects (Pollack 2005, Carver and Lawless 2010, Wong 2013), because the ensembles were generating their own material from the ideas and experiences of participants. As our *Be the Street* leadership team contemplates how these initial interviews might also be used for research into the dynamics of mobility, migration, immobility, and placemaking in the Hilltop, we recognize that they offer an invitation for further conversation rather than constituting finished narratives of belonging that we can confidently compare and analyze. Because we used an open-ended interview style, the community leaders were tasked with rhetorically constructing a coherent self that belonged to the Hilltop. Because in most cases we conducted only one interview, we were not able to clarify, challenge, or extend the narratives from an individualized to a group-based perspective. Indeed, our format encouraged the speakers to accentuate their own agency and

distinctiveness as opposed to their participation in a collective, community building process. In other words, even though we were interviewing community activists, the focus on life review elicited tales of personal exceptionality rather than a broader social analysis. In reviewing the content of the interviews, we found that three of the activists shared a number of traits despite their diverse subject positions, providing some limited grounds for comparison.

Activists' Common Life Experiences

White Appalachian John Rush arrived in the Hilltop with his family in 2012 at the invitation of a group of local business and community leaders. The owner and CEO of a transitional employment company, John provides jobs for people with histories of incarceration, sex trafficking, domestic abuse, and addiction. In 2018, John opened the Third Way Café as well. He hopes his coffee shop will be a place for neighbors to come together around neighborhood revitalization efforts and self-study. Ramona Reyes is the Chicana director of Our Lady of Guadalupe Center, a grassroots food pantry and resource center funded by Catholic Social Services that has served Spanish speaking residents since 2000. African-American Annette Jefferson is a retired community activist who once directed and still sits on the board of the Greater Hilltop Area Shalom Zone, a conscientiously interfaith and interracial organization that provides various kinds of direct services, such as summer camps for children.



Community leader Ramona Reyes converses with OSU theatre faculty, Ana Puga and Janet Parrott, during the inaugural community performance of BetheStreet in April 2018 at the Third Way Café. Photo by Victor Espinoas.

In addition, the Shalom Zone hosts a monthly luncheon where all the service organizations operating in The Hilltop get together to share information.³

In addition to combating poverty in the Hilltop, these three community activists share the experience of having grown up poor. John grew up with his father in a trailer park in a tiny rural town in West Virginia. He recalls that although their kitchen table was a couple of cardboard boxes, he didn't realize he was poor, because his father used to take him to volunteer at the local shelter. Ramona is one of nine children born to migrant farm workers from Texas. She remembers working as a field hand at age six, picking tomatoes with her family. Nevertheless, Ramona's mother made sure all her children finished high school and moved out of migrant labor. Annette was born in the Hilltop and was on her way to success when she got pregnant and dropped out of college. Not too long afterward, she found herself divorced as a mother of three, so she moved into public housing on the South side of the city, where she lived for ten years.

Additionally, all three activists stressed the support they received from their parents, who modelled civic engagement. All three also excelled academically. As a young man John joined the Marines and then pursued a Bachelors degree. Intellectually curious, he subsequently earned six Masters degrees in several fields ranging from Theology to Business. Ramona arrived in Columbus in the mid-1980s on a Campbell Soup Migrant Worker Scholarship. She earned a business degree and is the first Latina member of the Columbus Board of Education. Taking advantage of the educational opportunities that public assistance provided, Annette returned to college, graduating with a degree in Education. While working as a school teacher, she completed a double masters in Black Studies and Community Development. Subsequently, she earned a PhD in Social Work Administration.

Positioning in the Life Review Interview

Moving from content to rhetorical analysis, we find that each speaker adopts an agentive stance with respect to their life course. Michael Bamberg (1997) points out that

3 Although all three interviewees were asked to tell the story of how they came to work in and for the Hilltop, the interviews vary, in part due to a difference in format and the interviewer's personal style. I audio-taped Annette and John in English. My colleague, Elena Foulis, video-taped Ramona Reyes in Spanish (I have translated the excerpts I include in this essay). The interviews were conducted in spring 2016.

Beyond Content Analysis

when people tell personal narratives, they position themselves in three important ways: the self who is narrating to a given audience, the self in relation to the other characters in their story, and finally, a more enduring self whose essence remains the same over time and across variable circumstances. This self can be depicted in various ways, but for Bamberg, the essential distinction is between an agentive self, who acts upon the world and a victimized self, who is acted upon by external forces. Our speakers all tell their life stories from the perspective of an older, wiser self, looking back upon a younger, less aware version of themselves. In other words, each narrator expresses considerable reflexivity about their life course. John, for instance, talks about his younger self as full of good intentions but woefully lacking in worldly experience. A quick anecdote paints a picture of his generous but somewhat misguided teenage self:

But I remember meeting this guy and, real quick, this is a story, and again I just, I'm giving you everything. This dude was on the street corner, me and a guy named Nate, and there was one other fella that was with us that day, I can't remember who it was, but... And we stopped, and asked this guy, you know, he had one of those signs, you know, "will work for food" or something. I can't remember exactly what it said.

But I'm like, "Dude just hop in, Dude. Let's just go for a ride, and we'll take you to get something to eat." We got to know this guy a little bit.

I'm like, you know, "Why don't you come to school with me tomorrow, and you can share in homeroom a little bit of your story, and like, I'm sure we can help you, like,

I'm president of student council, like, I'm sure there is something we can do as a school for you and help you."

He's like, "Oh Dude that'd be so cool," you know.

And, I'm, I mean this is in high school; I'm still so naïve to everything. Y'know. Come to find out that he's a registered sex offender and not supposed to be around minors, like, I didn't know. I got him in, I kinda got him in tr- I'm sure I got him in more trouble than I realized at the time.⁴

This anecdote illustrates John's greater adult understanding of the complexities involved in helping others. It also suggests that John enjoys a kind of invulnerability. After all, it is the sex offender rather than John who ends up worse off as a consequence of their interaction. In this and other stories of his life progress, John is moved by the suffering of marginalized people, but he does not suffer. He describes his ever-widening embrace of different kinds of people, from the impoverished white community of his youth, to his friendship with an African-American boy when he moves to a larger town, to exposure to people from diverse backgrounds while serving in the military, to embedded and engaged community work in Chicago with African-Americans, Latinos, and a Muslim faith leader. As John's world expands and diversifies, he experiences very little friction or conflict. Although he has not lived in the Hilltop for very long, John states that he and his family easily integrated into the neighborhood, which reminds him of his childhood home in West Virginia. In fact, after only a few years, John began to run for office on the Republican ticket



Community leader John Rush makes coffee at the inaugural community performance of *BetheStreet* in April 2018 at the Third Way Café. Photo by Victor Espinosa.

4 In this and subsequent excerpts, I have removed filler sounds, like *um*, for readability.

to represent and serve his adopted community. Although he has not yet won an election, his narrative of belonging remains coherent and free of conflict.

In contrast, Ramona's movement out of her home community to pursue college in central Ohio in the mid-1980s was a marginalizing experience. She mentions that only after moving to Ohio did she realize she was a hyphenated American. In Texas, surrounded by other people just like herself, she didn't recognize herself as ethnically marked. Initially, community service provided a means for her to consolidate herself in her new home. However, she distinguishes between a younger self, who was exposed to but not impassioned by radical change agents, such as César Chávez, and her current self, who, she implies, identifies more strongly with this activist heritage.⁵ She remarks, "It's difficult to go back to those times (college years) and know that I made a lot of mistakes, but at the same time, I'm happy that I've advanced a bit now." Indeed, after graduation, Ramona fell into a job at Nationwide Insurance, where she enjoyed 24 years in management. Only in the past few years has she returned to direct service with and for people she identifies as much like the family and neighbors of her impoverished youth. Throughout her narrative Ramona implies without stating that she has shifted her focus from her own escape from poverty to a concern for Latina/o progress as a whole. She ends her interview with this brief, unelaborated analysis of her community's current position, "Latinos are where Blacks were 25 years ago. Blacks sometimes fought for things that ended up not being positive, for example, integration. With integration, they lost out economically." On the surface, this series of comments appears to argue against integration, but reading it thus would not be fair to the speaker. Instead, statements such as these function as provocations for follow-up interviewing that can allow Ramona to expand on her vision of how Latinos might emulate earlier Black struggles for equality and how they might focus their struggle differently. Researchers should neither smooth over statements such as these nor seek to analyze them without further discussion.

Annette identifies her youthful ignorance as a kind of protection from racism and exclusion. Indeed, throughout her interview Annette repeats in various forms the phrase, "I thought that was just something everyone did" to signal her adult understanding that although her family was working class, Annette's parents and grandparents found ways to provide her with many of the trappings of a mainstream middle-class American childhood, such as summer trips and a savings account. More importantly, she distinguishes between her own immunity from racism and the indignities earlier generations had suffered. The following

anecdote about Annette's experience of traveling with her family in the pre-civil rights era south is representative of this positioning:

There was a Baptist Convention in Montgomery, Alabama, and my mother was a delegate. And I remember that we got on a bus, and of course, my sister and I, being from the North, we always liked to ride up front on the bus. So my dad tells a story that we sat down up front! So when Mom and Dad came—so you know, we went first, and we sat down. That's what we always did. We sat down up front. And mom always had us looking nice. And so when Mom and Dad came, they said, "Come on, you have to move." And Dad says a white woman said, "Oh, they're so cute. Let them sit here with me." So they went to the back, and we stayed up front.

In this instance the rules that apply to Annette's parents do not apply to young Annette. In the Hilltop as well, Annette distinguishes her own experience from that of her mother:

KB: Were there any integrated churches when you were growing up?

AJ: No. But Oakley Baptist Church did have a service with Burgess Avenue EUB Church once a year. And the Pastor was Pastor Lane.

And I went to school with his son, Roland Lane. We went all the way through elementary to high school together. And even today, Roland and I are still friends, you know. He still lives on the Hilltop.⁶ And actually, he's friends with my son too, because my son had Roland in high school. Roland taught at West High School.

So. And that happened for a number of years, and finally that stopped.

And I asked my mother, "Why did the service stop?"

And she said, "No sense in being false."

You'd see those people at the church service, and then afterwards, they might not speak. They might not know you.

In her substantial digression at the beginning of this story, Annette points out that she and her son have interracial friendships, whereas her mother gives up on the interracial church service, because the fellowship does not extend to her everyday life. In her life review interview, then, Annette describes a marked shift from one generation to the next from social segregation to inclusion.

As I have mentioned, our research team was not able to conduct follow up interviews with all of our initial community partners. However, I did conduct two additional interviews with Annette, the last about one year after our initial meeting. This interview, which took place after the violent Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, focused specifically on race relations in the Hilltop, and Annette quickly qualified the narrative of racial progress and individual exceptionalism she had previously authored.

5 Chávez was one of the leaders of the United Farm Workers movement.

6 In the local idiom, people speak of living on the Hilltop, which means they live in the Hilltop neighborhood.



BetheStreet Creative Movement Workshop for YMCA Seniors, spring 2018. Photo by Josh Truett.

In her final interview she describes the gradual growth of the Hilltop Black community along certain blocks, and their steady march west toward the neighborhood's stable, middle-class center adjacent to Westgate Park, but she emphasizes she had to constantly assert her own right to belong:

And you'd better be careful about going into other blocks where black people didn't live. And my mother would say, "you couldn't light over on Westgate Park," and to have her grandchildren go to Westgate School! You know, that was something. (laughs) She thought that was good! (laughs) And in fact, when my children were there, I remember going to the school, and the principal thought, you know, there was bussing.⁷ She thought my children were bussed in from outside the neighborhood, and she said as much to me, "Oh you live so and so—"

I said, "No, my children walk to school."

So that let her know, no, we live right here." (Laughs)
Those kind of separations.

Here, Annette begins her narrative in her customary way as a tale of generational progress, but the principal's error demonstrates that increasing diversity entailed conflict and challenge, rather than being the kind of seamless experience John had narrated. Moreover, the refusal of some white residents to accept their Black neighbors meant that Annette, like her parents, had to learn lessons in abjection:

And I was the first Black, the first and only West Cat,⁸ but that was nothing new, because on the Hilltop, you grew up being in the minority. You knew how to conduct yourself around white people, and certainly it was different from how you conduct yourself around your friends! It was.

Because we were raised with, "You cannot do what they do. You just can't. Cause you are colored."

We were colored back then. Negro. (laughs)

And that is not transmitted to our kids nowadays. I think it's a detriment, because the racism still exists. It's not as overt, but we can see "Make America Great Again" is just a euphemism for Make America White Again. So you wonder where are we gonna be? The gap between

7 Bussing was a federal program designed to integrate public schools after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954. Children from one neighborhood would be bussed to schools in a different neighborhood so that each school would exhibit roughly the same diversity, regardless of segregated residential patterns.

8 The West Cats is the name of West High School's drill team, an expensive extracurricular.

economic haves and have not is wider and between racial distinctions it's wider. So where are we going? You just don't know. You wonder. It doesn't look promising.

As Annette moves in this interview into a less optimistic register, she opines that contemporary Black children would benefit from learning the lessons of segregation, lessons that in her earlier life review interview, she claims not to have needed. As with Ramona's cryptic final comment, this statement offers a provocation that the *Be the Street* research team plans to take up in the next round of interviews with community leaders.

Some Tentative Conclusions

Although I cannot offer definite conclusions about how this diverse set of Hilltop activists understand, value, and promote diversity as part of their antipoverty work, I do note that the narratives of women of color contain conflicting and contradictory elements that are absent from John's narrative of an ever-widening embrace of difference. Annette, particularly, fails to reconcile her vision of herself as unblemished by racism with her experiences of social exclusion. Might it be that for marginalized individuals the task of producing narrative coherence masks contradictory positions, attitudes and experiences to a greater extent than for those who enjoy a measure of social privilege? Might the narrative dissonance arise precisely because one's sense of oneself is being challenged rather than accepted and reinforced by one's society?

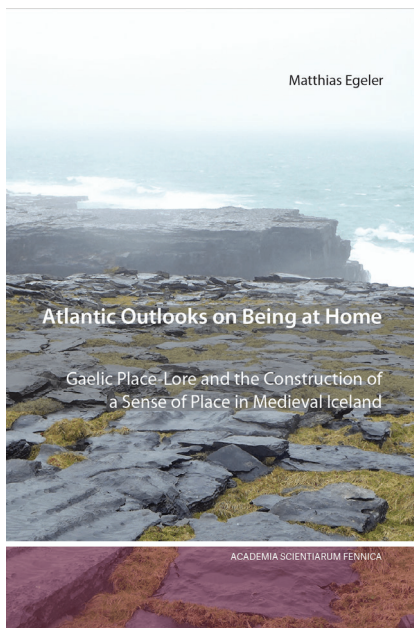
Ultimately, for the *Be the Street* research team, discovering the interracial dynamics of belonging to the Hilltop will require interviews that move beyond the life review format. Our plan is to return to the neighborhood in autumn 2019 to experiment with story circles, inviting residents, ensemble participants, and neighborhood activists, to reflect together and across lines of difference on what it means to belong to this place. Daniel Kerr (2016), the oral historian of homelessness, argues that oral history has deep roots in an activist tradition. Employing interview methods that build solidarity, is necessary, he argues, if our research is to effect social change. We at *Be the Street* plan to take the provocations that Ramona and Annette have offered as our starting point for the next phase of our work, one that we hope will move us further toward our goals of advancing social justice both through art-making and through research with, by and for the people in the Hilltop.

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Review



Matthias Egeler 2018:

Atlantic Outlooks on Being at Home: Gaelic Place-Lore and the Construction of a Sense of Place in Medieval Iceland.

Finnish Academy of Science and Letters
Folklore Fellows' Communications 314
Porvoo 2018, 324 pp.

Available at Bookstore Tiedekirja, 35 €

<https://www.tiedekirja.fi/default/atlantic-outlooks-on-being-at-home.html>

Joonas Ahola

Matthias Egeler's book *Atlantic Outlooks on Being at Home* successfully discusses medieval narratives on place-names in Iceland and in Ireland and construes connections between them. The point of departure is relevant because a remarkable proportion of the Viking Age settlers in Iceland, where settlement began in the latter part of the 9th century, were from the northern parts of the British Isles and especially from Ireland. Cultural influence on place-names may be presumed to originate in this era. Egeler's study shows that Irish cultural influence arrived in Iceland along with the settlers and left traces on narrative traditions as well as a permanent mark on many place-names. The Irish sources that Egeler refers to consist mostly of editions of medieval manuscripts whereas from Iceland he refers mostly to the Book of Settlements (*Landnámabók*) and saga literature. He also refers to selected works of European literature and later folklore as secondary sources.

Egeler's theoretical framework relies on the conceptualizations of space and place in anthropological and geographical research, especially on recent cognitively oriented approaches such as those of Yi-Fu Tuan and Robert Macfarlane. In this approach, 'space' is conceived as merely a location, a void without significance, which may become a 'place' through being associated with, or prescribed, meaning. Following Tuan, Egeler finds the processes through which a space is ascribed the meaning of 'home' especially interesting. He studies such processes through the place-names and narratives associated with places that bear marks of being imported to Iceland by Gaelic settlers, thus making the landscape feel more like their previous home.

Egeler interprets narratives and name elements especially through semantics. He interprets the polysemy of key expressions in place-names and place-name narratives against local topography and the medieval cultural context. Through comparison of entailed results on Icelandic and Irish materials, he is able to both show similarities in the principles of forming place-names and place-name narratives and to make unexpected new interpretations on the origins of place-names and on potential concurrent meanings ascribed to narratives associated with place-names. The author is able to convincingly argue that the Irish elements in many Icelandic place-names have their origin in the Irish settlers' need to make the new, strange and even frightening living surroundings familiar by giving familiar names to landmarks in it. Indeed, this may be a universal human trait. After all, we are not able to shake off the culture we have grown into just by moving from one location to another, and when a place needs to be named in this new location, it is obvious that the "imported" cultural background, "cultural memory" including language, place-names and name schemes, is an easily available source.

Besides the introduction and conclusions, the book includes ten case studies that relate to the theoretical framework from several angles. The discussion through the case studies is mostly balanced and based on source materials.

Especially the case dealing with the connections between the biography of the saintly Icelandic settler Ásólfur *alskik* (who migrated from Ireland) and of Irish saints, including Ireland's patron saint Patrick (pp. 128–155), is

interesting and studied with care. Through this reading, Ásólfur's biography appears as a truly fascinating synthesis of Icelandic and Irish, vernacular and learned schemas for representing a biography. It is likewise intriguing that the key to this reading may be found in the miracles ascribed to the saintly Ásólfur that are connected to fishing in River Írá ('Irishman River').

Another especially interesting case dealt with is the one of people transforming into monstrous bulls in both Icelandic and Irish medieval narratives (pp. 221–249). The Icelandic narrative appears in *Eyrbyggja saga*, which tells of events in the western part of Iceland where Irish influence and immigration seems to have been especially vivid. The account is peculiar and difficult to interpret solely on the basis of Icelandic culture. Egeler's reading draws on Irish medieval sources and especially on the heroic narratives of the Ulster Cycle. It is able to provide a fascinating and convincing interpretation and to open a view into the multilingual society of the recently settled Iceland which only later became exclusively Norse speaking.

Egeler's book is an admirable work of scholarship. Nevertheless, he is not completely immune to the very common pitfall in comparative research that theory or a hypothesis becomes a lens of interpretation and the interpretive lens can take the lead ahead of the evidence. While Egeler is generally very careful not to put the cart before the horse, so to speak, this seems to happen in his discussion of a brief narrative in *Landnámabók* about an extraordinarily strong horse that appears from a lake in the Snæfellsnes area (pp. 101–107). This horse performs incredible feats in pulling a hay sled and returns to the lake after breaking its harness. Egeler suggests that this narrative's background is in an Irish heroic narrative of the Ulster Cycle that presents Cú Chulainn together with the mysterious grey horse Líath Macha. Indeed, the thematic similarities between these narratives seem to establish a connection between Iceland and Ireland. However, Egeler also brings into discussion 20th century local lore from Ireland's county Aran. This tradition explains local geological formations that resemble hoof-prints as the hoof-prints of a singularly strong horse that had once appeared from the sea and returned there. By connecting such a tradition to the Icelandic narrative, Egeler seems to move into what Umberto Eco might call over-interpretation because the existence of such hoof-prints in the Icelandic case must be deduced from a mention that the horse's hoofs would sink into the ground because of its efforts before the load.

Egeler also generally maintains a high level of source criticism, which is another common area where comparative studies easily stumble. There is however a case where he seems to take a few shortcuts – in the discussion on whether Hvanndalur in Iceland was considered in the Middle Ages to be a place in which people became immortal (pp. 198–207). In this section, descriptions of Icelandic local folklore from the 17th century provide a basis for interpreting an ambiguous text from the 13th century that claims to recount events that took place in the 10th century. The main argument is that the idea of immortality connected to a place was adopted from Ireland. The case is well put forward and the argument remains convincing, but the lack of source criticism here raises slight concerns.

Overall, the general argument that traditions of place of origin were applied to the surroundings in order to familiarize them is plausible, and the mass of case studies collectively provide a good quantity of circumstantial evidence in its support. However, individual cases, especially those that are casual and / or not contextually interlinked may sometimes appear confusing or selectively chosen. It is obvious that reconstructing the distant past on the basis of scarce sources requires imagination and, occasionally, intellectual leaps. Generalizations on the basis of different texts' contents are necessary in comparative analysis, and, in practice, require disengagement from strict source criticism. In such cases, the line between speculation and grounded argumentation may be challenging to distinguish. For instance, the interpretation of a medieval text's mode as "distancing irony" (pp. 78–79) requires hypotheses concerning the author's intentions. On the other hand, medieval texts have tended to be read as very serious and Egeler illustrates the advantages of reading them in other ways. For instance, Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1968 [1965]) showed the relevance of considering the semantics of the grotesque in medieval texts and Egeler fruitfully applies this frame of interpretation for local traditions that may otherwise appear ambiguous or perplexing, leading to new and compelling interpretations.

For a reader who finds balanced self-criticism a virtue for innovative research, like I suppose most of us do, the concluding section of the book is of particular value. Egeler reviews his results and conclusions with the kind of perceptive touch that truly helps evaluating the relevance of the individual case studies and that helps make the big picture apparent. In addition to this, the transparent analysis and careful references to sources makes the book a weighty and useful contribution to the multidisciplinary research on the past and to place name studies in particular.

Joonas Ahola is a post-doctoral researcher of the University of Helsinki responsible for the project "Soviet Kalevalaic Poetry: The Form, Content and Meaning of Folk Poetry In Soviet Karelia during the Time of Stalin" of the Kalevala Society.



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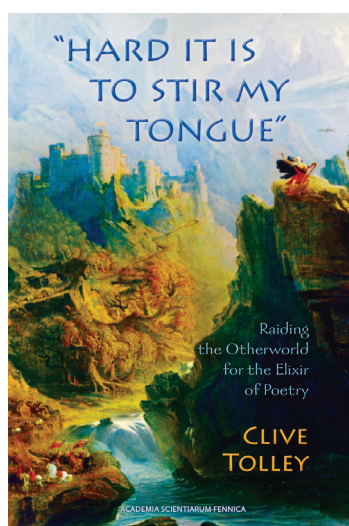
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Finnish Academy of Science and Letters
Folklore Fellows' Communications 316
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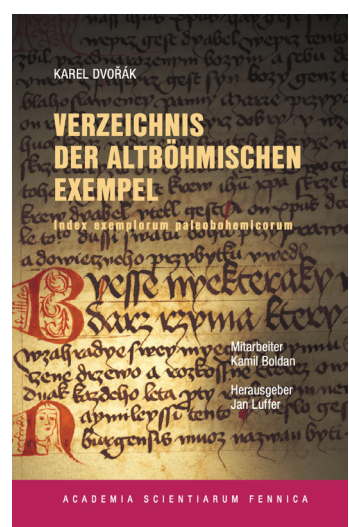


Clive Tolley

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Karel Dvořák

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