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The Role of Theory in Folkloristics and Comparative Religion

Lauri Honko (1932–2002), the Finnish professor of folkloristics and comparative religion was a prolific and multi-talented researcher, whose topics of research ranged from the study of folk beliefs, folk medicine and Ingrian laments to the general theories of culture, identity and meaning. Honko studied Finno-Ugric mythologies, Karelian and Tanzanian folk healing, and South Indian oral traditions. Lauri Honko was known for his originality and theoretical innovations: he constructed multiple approaches to the study of culture that are still relevant in folkloristics and comparative religion.

In this paper I aim at explicating and analysing Honko's views about the roles of theory in folkloristics and comparative religion. More precisely, I will cover two themes. First, I will look at how Honko constructed and utilised theories during the different stages of his career. Second, I will explicate one of the central elements underlying Honko's theory of culture, namely, functionalism, which provided the framework for his innovations such as the ecology of tradition and folklore process, and for conceptual constructs such as the 'pool of tradition' and 'systems of culture'. I will conclude by assessing the future relevance of Honko's theories in folkoristics and comparative religion.

Introduction

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he constructed multiple approaches to the study of culture that are still relevant in folkloristics and comparative religion (Siikala 1992, 2003; Pentikäinen 2005).

In this article I aim at explicating and analysing Honko's views about the roles of theory in folkloristics and comparative religion. More precisely, I will cover two themes. First, I will look at how Honko constructed and utilised theories during the different stages of his career. Second, I will explicate one of the central elements underlying Honko's theory of culture, namely, functionalism, which provided the framework for his innovations, such as the ecology of tradition and folklore process, and for conceptual constructs such as the 'pool of tradition' and the 'systems of culture'. I will conclude by assessing the future relevance of Honko's theories in folkoristics and comparative religion.

In the first part of my article, Honko will emerge as a pragmatist and critical realist, who constructed theories as tools of scientific understanding. Tools should be tested, and if they do not survive the tests, they should be either rejected and replaced by better theories, or developed to the point where they will pass the tests.

In the second part of my article, I will trace the general theory of functionalism in Honko's thinking. This general functionalism is captured in the idea that things are what they do, and cultural elements receive their meanings in the contexts of use. Even though the problematics and the sets of phenomena which Honko studied changed during his career, some of the central elements in his theory of culture remained the same. They were articulated already in his early (1962) study, *Geisterglaube in Ingermanland*, where he constructed a functionalistic model for studying the supernatural experience involved

in encountering a barn spirit. The constituent elements of his theory of culture were then cultivated in individual projects, and were put to full-blown use in his final major work, *Textualising the Siri Epic* (1998).

Let me present a few preliminary remarks about Honko's theory of culture, especially tradition ecology.[*] His central theoretical innovation was tradition ecology which was the general research framework that Honko himself saw – at least in retrospect – as the unifying theme in his work. Tradition ecology is a general theory of culture that provides tools for conceptualising how cultural contents shift from one context to another, and how the context, function and use determine the meaning of these contents. In comparative religion it is especially important to conceptualise the context of cultural contents, as an apparently religious content may well lose its religious character as it is transferred to a context of artistic display, for example. Tradition ecology provides a toolbox for approaching and explaining culture – to put it succinctly, it offers a general theory of culture.

What is a theory of culture? In brief, a theory of culture tells us what culture is and how it can be studied. A theory of culture is composed of central propositions, or axioms, which characterise the essential features of the area of reality under study. When a theory of culture is operationalised, it should generate a research framework. In a fruitful research framework, the central propositions are then modified into testable hypotheses, which can be assessed in the light of empirical material. The project of finding Honko's theory of culture is made easier by the fact that Honko constantly reflected theoretically upon his own empirical work, and he saw the interaction of theory and empirical issues as a natural part of carrying out research.

Every scholar of folkloristics and comparative religion is committed to a theory of culture. In some cases the theory is hidden within assumptions that are taken for granted but never problematised. In some cases the scholar dares to reflect upon the methodological and philosophical assumptions behind the collection and analysis of the materials, and the theory of culture becomes readily more explicit. Lauri Honko constructed general theories of culture, and tradition ecology was his grand and ultimate theory of culture.

Honko's theory-building was balanced by empirical fieldwork. Even though he was interested in

theoretical issues, he did not lose sight of the importance of empirical matters. As he wrote in his *Textualising the Siri Epic*, the richness of empirical details in his material could never be contained in any theory; the scholar simply had to give up some of his theoretical ambitions and surrender to the wonders of the empirical world (Honko 1998a: 8).

Before commencing on the main analysis, it is worth noting a background factor relating to the specific character of cultural research in Scandinavia. Nordic cultural research has been characterised by a close alliance between folkloristics and comparative religion. In contrast with the North American tradition, where the departments of religion and folklore are seldom associated, the Nordic academic tradition has placed folkloristics and comparative religion together. In comparative religion, this has had two implications: first, that folk religion has been understood as the paradigmatic form of religion, and second, that issues of genre analysis have been relevant when analysing the elements of culture, especially when differentiating religious elements from the other elements of culture. In folkloristics, on the other hand, the oral traditions dealing with the supernatural have been of major interest. True to its Nordic roots, the relevance of Honko's thinking covers the issues in both comparative religion and folkloristics. This fruitful dialogue between folkloristics and comparative religion has been evident and productive also in the work of Juha Pentikäinen (1968) and Anna-Leena Siikala (2002).

Finally, as Ulf Palmenfelt noted when reviewing our book manuscript on Honko (Kamppinen and Hakamies 2013), the sheer span of Honko's research topics is breathtaking. Honko's research interests covered religion, folklore and other cultural processes and the topics ranged from folk beliefs and ethnomedicine to oral epics and cultural identity. I realised this in the hard way when writing our book manuscript during the summer 2012. I had a huge collection of Honko's offprints in a correspondingly huge bag, and every time I thought I had read through all of his writings, another article popped out of this magical bag, usually dealing with some topic that was quite new to me, as I had previously concentrated mostly on tradition ecology and the study of health behaviour systems. Reading through Honko's writings was an educational experience. There emerged themes and arguments that connected the articles together, and slowly the networks and evolutionary lines of development began to take shape.

Honko was eager to construct new tools for new

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[*] This article draws on Kamppinen and Hakamies 2013.

problems and areas of research, and he was also able to express them in a crystallised form. In that sense he was constantly building blueprints, paradigms or research frameworks that could then be used by others. For example, the large Swedish article on tradition ecology (Honko 1981) as well as the Finnish article on folklore process (Honko 1990) were both more like research blueprints, outlining the research questions and ramifications for future studies in folkloristics and comparative religion.

The roles of theories in Honko's theoretical thinking

Let us look at how Honko constructed and utilised theories during the different stages of his career.

The dominating feature in Lauri Honko's theoretical thinking was his pragmatism: theoretical models were introduced for the purpose of understanding interesting phenomena. If the models did not work, they were cast aside and replaced by better theories. This attitude was evident especially in his genre analysis: the classifications of oral tradition were inductively formed and subjected to testing by empirical data. On the contrary, tradition ecology was so general a theoretical framework that it could be applied to various fields of research: ethnomedicine, oral epics and tradition in general. Tradition ecology or its central element, functionalism, were never tested, but rather assumed and fine-tuned.

As Åke Hultkrantz (1991), Anna-Leena Siikala (1992, 2003) and Juha Pentikäinen (2005) proposed in their reviews of Honko's contribution, pragmatism in Honko's thinking showed itself in the prolific use of theories. Honko borrowed theoretical tools from psychology, social psychology, anthropology, ecology and the theory of literature: furthermore, he himself invented various theories and models. In contrast with many scholars in humanities who work closely with primary materials, he was not afraid of theories. Theory in cultural research is a serious matter, but not deadly serious.

In his dissertation *Krankheitsprojektile* (1959) Honko had already adopted a cognitive research stance which became fashionable in ethnography only later: he asked, what kinds of explanations of illness are embedded in the traditional accounts of illnesses, what are the main explanatory models used by the experts in folk medicine, and how do these explanations utilise the religious and other cultural resources available in the context. Honko abstracted an ideal scheme of healing sessions (what we would call a cultural model or script) which summarised the cultural knowledge system behind the healing explanations and practices.

Basically the same research setting was used in Honko's next major work, *Geisterglaube in Ingermanland* (1962), where the actualisation of supernatural (or supranormal) tradition was theorised and studied. As Hultkrantz (1991) noted, the extensive introduction of the *Geisterglaube* is in itself a major contribution to the theory of religious studies. In that introduction Honko constructs a realistic model of religious experience: how cultural resources (or traditions) defining the supernatural are actualised in specific conditions; how ecological, social and psychological factors have an impact on the individual who ends up utilising these resources of tradition as a tool for problem-solving.

The big picture in *Krankheitsprojektile* and *Geisterglaube* makes an important distinction between the cultural resources and the actualisation of these resources in specific contexts. Later on, in his writings on cultural identity, Honko (1986, 1995a) called these resources 'tradition' or the 'pool of tradition' and reserved the term 'culture' for the organised elements in use. Another underlying idea in these two early books that was later further developed, was the idea

Honko in Olonets Karelia conducting interviews, 1996. Cultural Studies Archives, University of Turku.

that the cultural elements are situated in different functional contexts, and that a holistic conceptualisation of multiple contexts was needed for cultural studies of religion and folklore. This idea was later developed into full-blown tradition ecology.

The Siri Epic

Honko's main (and the last) project was the documentation and the study of the Siri Epic, an oral epic belonging to the Tulu folk culture of Southern Karnataka, India. Honko encountered the Siri Epic when conducting a folklore fieldwork course in Karnataka in 1990. As he relates in his book *Intian päiväkirja* ('Indian Diary', Honko 1995b), the possibility of recording the whole epic in oral form was not something they were originally prepared for. Dictated versions of the epic had been written down earlier, but to get the whole epic in a live performance sung by Gopala Naika was an unexpected piece of good fortune. In addition to the dictated versions of the epic, its themes were used in healing sessions, theatre

Maria Vasenkari

Collecting background materials for performances of the Siri Epic in Karnataka, together with Chinnappa Gowda (in the middle), 1989. Cultural Studies Archives, University of Turku.

plays, and as work songs. It seemed that the contents of the epic were scattered in multiple contexts of different performances, and there was no hope of witnessing the performance of the epic in its total form. Finally the performance by Gopala Naika, a local illiterate agriculturist and religious specialist, could be arranged. The performance itself was a huge effort for the singer as well as for the documentation group. The singing took seven days, and the performance was not only taped but also video recorded. The material was then first commented on by the singer and two scholars, Professor Viveka Rai and Dr Chinnappa Gowda, then textualised in the original Tulu language, and finally translated into English. The end result was 15,683 lines long bilingual epic, published in two volumes (Honko 1998b and 1998c).

The process of textualisation, starting from the documentation of the parts of the epic in different performances, continuing to the tedious documentation of the sung version, and ending with the published version of the epic and its various social and cultural impacts, proved to be a complex and extensive process. It was this whole process that was studied in the book *Textualising the Siri Epic* (1998a), an independent study that accompanied the textualised epic. In this book Honko again utilised tradition ecology and invented novel theoretical tools for the purpose of explaining cultural phenomena. One such tool was 'mental text' which denoted the epic and its raw materials as they were preserved in a formal mode in the mind of the singer. Another innovation was 'multiforms', by which Honko meant content units that possessed linguistic markers recognised by the singer.

The Siri project was distinguished by Honko's productivity and pragmatism. The pragmatic assessment of different solutions is well articulated in his book 'Indian Diary', where he records and reports the development of problem solving almost as if he was posting online. In 'Indian Diary' one can read how Honko assessed the relative utility of various hypotheses, and continued the project with the most promising amongst them. The Siri project is a clear culmination in Honko's thinking: the elements he had developed during the past decades and organised in his tradition ecology were crystallised and utilised in *Textualising the Siri Epic*.

Testing hypotheses

Even though Honko was a pragmatist, he grew fond of his theoretical constructs and was willing to defend them even when they were not worthy of it. This was

evident not so much in his writings, but rather in seminars and congresses, where he sometimes gave the impression that he had already invented everything there was to invent. But for a scholar of his scope and depth, this is quite understandable.

It is quite typical of folkloristics and comparative religion that scholars work with only one theory or approach for their whole career. In order to utilise a set of theories and choose the optimal ones with pragmatic criteria, one has to have multiple theories in the first place. Lauri Honko invented multiple alternative explanations for cultural phenomena and tested them against the data. In this sense, his approach resembled the research setting in the natural sciences, where the innovation and abundance of hypotheses is encouraged, but the diversity of potential explanations is controlled by the rigorous testing and verification of hypotheses (Bunge 1998). Of course there are no decisive tests available in cultural studies, but the model of testing multiple hypotheses is important as a regulative ideal, towards which we can strive.

Another 'natural science' feature to be found in Honko's theorising was the construction of axiomatic systems. This was evident in his programmatic writings on tradition ecology and folklore process, and most clearly shown in his writings on genre analysis, where he built systems of axioms and corollaries. These constructions were easy to criticise and some of them collapsed – but to paraphrase my favourite thinker Mario Bunge: do your own thing – your reward will be doing it, your punishment having done it.

Honko's scientific method of conducting research set him apart from the ways of postmodern writings on culture, writings that do not imply any serious or testable statements about cultural reality (cf. Sokal and Bricmont 1998). Honko's scientific attitude represents the 'old school' of cultural research, especially fieldwork-based anthropology, which assumed that cultural systems should be studied systematically.

Despite his theoretical ambitions, Honko understood the value of a detailed description of the empirical data. He argued that the rich variety of empirical details is never covered by a theory, and therefore the documentation should be implemented in such a way that others besides the primary collector should be able to assess the theories with the same data. Hence the valuation of empirical details, dutiful documentation, and pragmatism with regard to the way theories feed each other.

Finally, Honko was interested in applied research, in how to use the expertise of scholars of folklore and religion in making the world a better place, or at least a more interesting place with more cultural diversity. Honko's interest in applied cultural research and tradition archives was already evident in his study of folk medicine: a scientific study of culture could be used to make a better world, and indeed cultural understanding was needed for the creation of better futures.

The UNESCO Recommendation for Safeguarding Folklore is a good example of Honko's interest in applied research: scientific understanding is applied to a practical problem, in this case the problem of safeguarding folklore (or traditional and popular culture) and its connection with the construction of identities.

Compared with the application of cultural understanding to the case of folk medicine and its integration into health care services, the UNESCO Recommendation is a much more complex system. Not only was the making of the Recommendation founded upon scientific understanding, it was also designed to create further conditions for scientific research. The process started from scientific understanding and practical problems, continued to have an impact on folklore studies and practices, and aimed at generating a more extensive research infrastructure suitable for safeguarding folklore.

In Honko's world, theories served as tools not only in exploring and understanding the world, but also in changing the world.

Functionalism and its consequences

Next I will discuss some central elements in Honko's theory of culture; namely functionalism and the distinction between the pool of tradition and systems of culture, both of which constitute Honko's ecology of tradition.

The constant theme in the study of culture is: how to identify cultural entities, or how to discover their meanings? Is the evolutionary or historical line of descent the key to the interpretation of cultures, or is it the context of everyday life? In the field of comparative religion, we inquire into the meaning of a particular form of ritual behaviour or about the meaning of a spell. In folkloristics, we try to identify the contents of proverbs or other elements of the oral tradition. The identification of these cultural entities and the study of their meanings is the principal task in comparative religion and folkloristics.

Well, how do we do it?

We use functionalism in tracing the networks and contexts of use.

It was the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, together with other early pioneers in the study of religion and folklore, who formulated a powerful tool for cultural researchers, namely, functionalism, which was eagerly adopted and further developed by Lauri Honko.

The central idea of functionalism is simple: entities are individuated on the basis of their roles – they are what they do and how they are acted upon. The network perspective, or systems thinking in terms of contexts captures the idea of this general functionalism, which is not restricted to narrow sociological functionalism.

At the core of functionalism is the thesis of functional individuation which says that cultural entities are individuated on the basis of their functional roles.

Let us take an example from the description of the Siri ritual in *Textualising the Siri Epic* (1998a), where the meaning of the areca palm tree is traced.

The areca palm tree is used for various constructional and nutritional purposes, but in the Siri ritual the areca flower acquires multiple meanings which are based on its functional roles. First, the flower expresses a mythological origin, according to which the Siri character was born out of the areca bud. Second, it is used in a healing ritual where it acts as a fertility symbol. It is used to mimic both male and female sex organs and it is used to whip the participants of the Siri ritual, in order to enhance their fertility. This standard ethnographic description (typical of religious and folklore studies) is constituted by functional individuations: the areca flower is placed in different functional roles, and the 'meaning' of the flower is thereby constructed by means of layering the various functions until they form a systemic whole. The areca flower has functional roles determined by mythological texts, fertility beliefs, cultural models of healing, and other sources.

The transition from the various functions of the areca flower to its cultural meaning is not an all-or-nothing affair. Rather, some functions are grouped together and labelled as the meaning. Honko adopted the view that meanings are functions of a higher order: functions are what things do, and meanings are groups of functions.

It can be said the meaning of the areca flower can be actualised in multiple ways, and the actualisation depends on the set of functional roles active in the particular context of use.

The obvious consequence is that a cultural entity can have multiple meanings, and that these are realised as the entity is in actual use. The areca flower is transformed from an ordinary plant into a ritual instrument that carries mythological and other meanings for its users. The meaning of the areca flower can thus be identified with a subset of its functions.

Functionalism as a general methodological framework runs through Honko's writings and its application culminated in *Textualising the Siri Epic*. Furthermore, it provides the key foundations for the ecology of tradition. Let us look at some illuminating examples from Honko's work (for other examples and discussion, see Enges 2012).

Chinnappa Gowda

Uses of areca flowers in one of the numerous versions of the Siri ritual. Cultural Studies Archives, University of Turku.

Functionalism in Geisterglaube

As Åke Hultkrantz (1991) proposed, the introductory chapter of Honko's *Geisterglaube in Ingermanland* (1962) could be used as an independent textbook on its own. What Honko does in this 'Introduction' is that he constructs a functional framework for religious (or supernatural) experience. The case he is reconstructing is an encounter with a barn spirit, a type of guardian spirit that resides in a so-called 'drying barn'. The barn spirit is told to watch over the barn workers, and alert them if something is about to go wrong; if, for example, the fire in the drying barn is about to extinguish, or if the workers are conducting themselves inappropriately – playing cards for example, or consuming alcohol.

There is extensive folklore material on encounters with the barn spirit, and Honko is tracing the original experience and its multiple functional roles. The original experience, he argues, has taken place in a context where a tired barn watcher has heard or seen something in the dark barn, and has used the resources of the tradition to conceptualise his experience. This experience has been verbalised and has been made public by means of shared cultural scripts. The individual stories about the encounters with the barn spirit have mixed with one another and have been transformed into stories with standard features such as plot, beginnings and endings.

The presumed original experience has generated a verbalized, public form that has been used in various functional roles, and as it has been passed on, it has been standardised, told in different contexts, for various purposes, and then recorded by a researcher in cultural studies.

The core idea in Honko's 'Introduction' to *Geisterglaube* is to reconstruct the multitude of functional roles where the original experience and its verbalisation have actualised. As we argue in our book (Kamppinen and Hakamies 2013), this is the very idea of tradition ecology and its concrete model, the folklore process.

Shamans and other cultural actors as functional entities

The elements of material culture (such as the areca flower) as well as of verbal culture (such as the stories of a barn spirit) participate in functional networks, and therefore they require the use of functionalism as the general analytical tool. Honko applied functionalism, not only to aspects of material and verbal culture, but also to the cultural actors. In his early article

Amazonian healer Don Pablo extracting an illness projectile from a patient in Iquitos, Peru.

on the 'Role-taking of the shaman' (1969) Honko used role theory in an analysis of shamanism. The shaman, as a religious and medicinal expert in certain communities, is an actor whose cultural behaviour conforms to a complex functional role. According to the role, the shaman is able to contact the supernatural realm, he can assume animal powers, invoke guardian spirits and travel to realms that are out of reach for ordinary people. The shaman, as a religious expert, is a functional entity *par excellence*, whose cultural meaning (or significance) is composed of the functional roles in which he enters. A parallel, yet more detailed functional analysis of actors was provided in *Textualising the Siri Epic* (1998a), where the different participants in the Siri ritual are exposed in their rich and multiple roles in the healing ritual, for example.

Functionalism and actualisation

Functionalism has consequences with regard to the theory of culture. Since the meanings of cultural entities are founded upon their functional roles, there must exist a reservoir of meaning carriers, which are then actualised in the context of use. This implicit corollary of functionalism can be framed as the thesis of actualisation: structural meanings are actualised in the contexts of use.

The issue of actualisation was discussed by Honko in his article 'Empty texts, full meanings: on transformal meaning in folklore' (1984). In this article Honko argued that the texts investigated in folkloristics (or in comparative religion) have only structural meanings, and receive their full meanings, worthy of study, in the context of use, when they are actualised in functional roles. The formal meanings are carried

in scripts, schemata, and other cultural models that belong to the pool of tradition, and the transformal (concrete, rich, full) meanings are found in the actual use of the cultural entity. Shared cultural knowledge makes it possible that 'empty texts' can be filled with 'full meanings', and the researcher studying the actual behaviour can record the full meaning.

Functionalism implies – as does its corollary thesis of actualisation – that there are two kinds of cultural entities – empty structures and full meanings. Therefore we need to make a distinction between the pool of tradition and systems of culture.

The pool of tradition and systems of culture

In the introductory chapter to *Geisterglaube in Inger-manland*, Honko was already using a model in which the resources of tradition are actualised in functional roles; for example in the contexts of use. As I argued above, the functionalistic theory of meaning requires that there exist some materials that are used in cultural contexts. This assumption entails the distinction between the cultural materials or resources and the culture-in-context, where these materials are being used.

The distinction between tradition and culture was implicitly assumed by Honko in several writings, and finally explicitly tackled in his 1986 article 'Studies on tradition and cultural identity'. In this article Honko proposed to distinguish between tradition and culture:

> Tradition, in other words, would denote the cultural potential or resource, not the actual culture of the group … the word 'culture' implies something more than mass, namely, order, the organization of elements into an integrated and functional whole, *i.e.* a system. (Honko 1986: 10–11)

The distinction between the pool of tradition and the systems of culture was motivated by cultural research. The cultural systems that are investigated in religious studies and folkloristics, are composed and organised out of materials that were originally haphazardly and loosely organised: in religious rituals, for example, actors use elements that are available for other contexts as well. In a typical move Honko proposed a theoretical hypothesis in order to explain and better understand some aspects of the reality.

Elements in the pool of tradition

The concept of the pool of tradition was put into full use in Honko's work on the textualisation of oral epics (Honko 1998a, 2000a, 2000b). The core idea is simple: the pool of tradition contains the formal building blocks of culture, the regionally specific cultural models, and some community-specific contents. Systems of culture are then those situations where the resources drawn from the pool of tradition are applied in functional roles, for example in a theatrical performance or a healing session.

In discussing the pool of tradition in the context of oral epics, Honko writes:

> Yet the elements are free to vary and combine, and it is in the variation and combination of multiforms, themes and formulas that the individual novelty can be found. That is why we cannot postulate a well-arranged library of earlier performed oral texts in the mind of the individual but rather a pool of generic rules, storylines, mental images of epic events, linguistically preprocessed descriptions of repeatable scenes, sets of established terms and attributes, phrases and formulas, which every performer may utilize in an imaginative way, vary and reorganize according to the needs and potentials present at a new performance… Whatever is shared by more than one singer belongs to the pool of tradition. The pool holds a multiplicity of traditions, a coexistence of expressive forms and genres, mostly in a latent state, only parts of it becoming activated by the individual user. (Honko 2000a: 18–19)

The pool of tradition is here discussed in the context of the oral epic, but Honko was willing to generalise this view to include cultural dynamics more widely, and hence it can be said to make up a central element in his theory of culture.

The distinction between the pool of tradition and the systems of culture is relevant not only for basic research, but also for applied research in cultural studies. The safeguarding of folklore, a process that was led by Honko in UNESCO, was based on the model where cultural groups actively select the important materials from the pool of tradition. The model of folklore process captures the relevance of applied cultural research based on the distinction between the pool of tradition and the systems of culture. The distinction is important also in comparative religion, when assessing, for example, the question why some

groups choose exclusive or xenophobic resources of tradition and elevate them into identity symbols.

To recapitulate, the distinction between the pool of tradition and systems of culture was implied by functionalism. It serves an important role in folkloristics and comparative religion: we are saved from watering down the concept of culture, as we can use the concept of culture to refer to the organised, actualised elements, and denote by 'tradition' the materials from which the actual cultural systems are composed. Honko proposed the distinction on the basis of empirical material. For him, the distinction was motivated as an explanatory tool.

The future relevance of Honko's theory of culture

If we look at the trends of the information age (Castells 1997, Kamppinen and Wilenius 2001); the growing number of cultural identities, the fragmentation of traditions, and the ever stronger hold of technology on our lives and meanings, then the general vision embedded in Honko's theory of culture will broadly be what is needed in folkloristics and comparative religion.

More precisely:

1. Pools of tradition become more dynamic as new meanings and short-lived cultural systems are constructed;
2. As cultures are fragmented, there will be more existential space for various cultural systems;
3. At the same time, information and communication technology as well as global economics create pressure for globally-shared cultural systems;
4. Global cultures are dissolved into local variants, as the information and communication technology enables actors to individualise and personalise the cultural contents;
5. Pools of tradition begin to be used without the earlier boundaries of cultural identity, nationality, ethnicity, or the boundaries of sacred and profane;
6. At the same time and in certain conditions, these boundaries grow more salient and function in the generation of identity symbols, as for example in religious or national fundamentalism.

As these trends will steer future societies, the theoretical toolbox for folkloristics and comparative religion should include the basic assumptions of Honko's theory of culture and tradition ecology: functionalism, systems thinking and the process view of the world, balanced with bold theorising, pragmatism and empirical work.

As Armin Geertz wrote in the preface of our book (Kamppinen and Hakamies 2013), Honko's curiosity and methodological clarity offered ways forward for young and old alike – for Honko, the study of culture was an adventure. I would add that it is an adventure on to which all of us are invited. ■

Matti Kamppinen was educated in the philosophy of science and comparative religion. He did his PhD on Amazonian ethnomedicine and folk religion under the supervision of Lauri Honko, and later he studied the cultural models of religion, risk, sustainable development and technology. His books include *Cognitive Systems and Cultural Models of Illness* (FF Communications 244, 1989), *Intentional Systems Theory as a Conceptual Framework for Religious Studies* (The Edwin Mellen Press 2010), *Methodological Issues in Religious Studies* (The Edwin Mellen Press 2012), and *The Theory of Culture of Folkorist Lauri Honko* (The Edwin Mellen Press 2013, together with Pekka Hakamies). He has published articles in various journals including *Futures*, the *International Journal for Sustainable Society*, *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* and *Temenos*. He is currently working as the Senior Lecturer in Comparative Religion at the University of Turku. He is also Scientific Expert at the Finland Futures Research Centre and Docent at the Department of Theoretical Philosophy, University of Helsinki. Email: matti.kamppinen(at)utu.fi

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