COMPARING COMPARISONS IN EUROPEANIST ANTHROPOLOGIES

Towards a New Effectiveness in Europeanism

Laurent Sebastian Fournier

This article compares two major attempts to frame comparative studies of European cultures in the recent history of folklore and anthropology, in 1967 and 1988. The examination of these two examples addresses the present construction of a new effectiveness in Europeanism, this effectiveness relying on the anthropologists and the folklorists' ability to share skills and competencies. The article tries to assess some essential factors which will determine tomorrow's Europeanism. Different possibilities for dealing with the European context are emphasized, such as reaching a new unity between anthropology and folklore, taking into account theoretical knowledge on mankind in the different professional organizations, privileging in-depth comparisons, and answering institutional agendas.

Keywords: Europe, folklore, anthropology, history, comparison

Countless scholarly works are now available that address the shift in focus from extra-European (or "exotic" anthropology) to the anthropology of Europe, and many books and articles have pointed out the problems faced by Europeanist anthropology as a specific part of anthropology. Few of these works, however, have tried to assess the complex historical relations which have shaped the different national European academic traditions in the neighbouring fields of "folklore", "European ethnology" and "European anthropology", even though they deeply determine the present status and standing of Europeanist research in anthropology.

In the United States, Europeanism in anthropology has recently led to discussions of the difference between the anthropology of Europe as a whole and the different anthropologies in Europe. That discussion unfortunately has focused on a standard definition of anthropology, and has avoided comparison with folklore or ethnology. For American anthropologists studying Europe, the areas of special relevance for investigation are immigration, gender, or urban studies (Parman 1998: 11). That cuts off a Europe-focused anthropology as it is currently practiced from its folkloric and ethnological roots. Studies that have been conducted in material culture, oral literature, myths and ritual are simply passed over, clearing the way for studies that address mainstream processes in complex societies, and in politically or culturally dominant countries.

Nevertheless, the research on Europe has improved significantly in recent years. Europeanist

anthropologists have focused on national or ethnic identity problems (Goddard, Llobera & Shore 1994; Balla & Sterbling 1998). They have also thoroughly studied methodological issues (Campbell & Pina-Cabral 1992), the relations between anthropology and the new political frameworks of the European Union (Wilson & Smith 1993; Bellier & Wilson 2000; Kockel 2002) as well as new political (sub-)cultures (Gingrich & Banks 2006). In France, the situation of Europeanist anthropology has been summarized in a global and comprehensive way that has pointed to the influence of the nation-state on the discipline (Fabre 1996) or emphasized epistemic questions linked to the rise of the "anthropology of the self" (Segalen 2001). But only a few works have tried to build a bridge between anthropology and folklore, even though folklorists throughout Europe have continued collecting material and conducting fieldwork in much the same manner as anthropologists have.

In the following, I would like to suggest an innovative way of approaching some of the questions that have often been asked by Europeanist anthropologists during the past decades. These questions concern the use of comparative methods as well as the definition of Europeanism as a sub-discipline of anthropology. Comparison has become an important issue in the critical self-inspection anthropology has engaged in, and conceiving of it as a "quasi-monolithic, coherent, hard science methodology" is today sharply fought against in order to address "a rich plurality of comparative methods" (Gingrich & Fox 2002: 2). Comparison is dismissed as "holocultural" when it is associated with universalist, evolutionist or structuralist grand theories, because it only compares "stable and highly integrated cultural units". Comparative methods instead are re-assessed in a way which emphasizes local-level empirical studies and focuses on "fuzzy boundaries" instead of homogeneous and static units. Typical new comparative works include the study of globally diasporic cultures (Del Giudice & Porter 2001), analyse the ways local cultures change when facing global tourism and heritage-making processes (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998), or try to theorize a "multi-sited" fieldwork (Marcus 1998). Moreover, comparative activities are criticized because they always hide "the negotiation of unequal power relations between and among the networks and processes of social actors under study, the author(s), and the audience or readership" (Gingrich & Fox 2002: 19).

My argument is that defining Europeanism as that part of anthropology devoted to the study of European material, a definition inherited from earlier scholarly traditions, is not adequate to understand the specificities of Europeanist anthropology either past or present. Indeed, in my opinion Europeanism can reach a new level of effectiveness only if and when Europeanists manage to combine the scholarly results of folklore and anthropology studies. Inherent to such a move is again the necessity to address the complexity of comparison itself.

To demonstrate this point, I first present two major recent attempts to frame comparative studies of European cultures in ethnology and anthropology, both with respect to how the area studied was defined as well as the way in which the notion of comparison was addressed. My first example concerns the foundation of *Ethnologia Europaea* itself in 1967. My second example will be less familiar to English-speaking scholars, as it is related to the constitution, under the aegis of the Council of Europe in 1988, of the French-speaking "Eurethno" network in European anthropology. These examples illustrate the differences in priorities pursued in the project I refer to as Europeanism, allowing one to grasp the complexity of the relations between European anthropology and folklore, disciplines which are often considered separately in the English and American academic traditions, but which in many respects should be addressed jointly.

These two examples of intellectual structures are also discussed in the contemporary context both to understand what they bring to Europeanism and how they (can) help make it more effective. This effectiveness is strongly grounded in the anthropologists' and the folklorists' ability to employ and share skills and know-how that is drawn from the social sciences in general. I advocate new guidelines in Europeanism that are generated from a better understanding of the notion of comparison.

Ethnologia Europaea in 1967: the Founding of a New Europeanist Journal

When it was first founded in 1967, the aim of *Ethnologia Europaea* was explicitly to break down "not only the barriers which divide research on Europe from general ethnology, but also the barriers between the different national schools within the continent", as stated in the foreword. As Sigurd Erixon wrote in the very first issue of the journal: "Every country and every independent territory has its own history and therefore also to a certain degree its own ethnology" (Erixon 1967: 3). For the founders of *Ethnologia Europaea*, this statement legitimized the project of mapping out ethnology in the different European countries, and teaching contexts and contents, academic chairs, museums and archives had to be counted in, as "the need of a systematic cooperation within ethnology has long been felt in Europe" (Erixon 1967: 5). Furthermore, Erixon regretted that "a uniform European folk-life research in systematic form, taking Europe as a whole, does not exist yet, in spite of many attempts and contributions to this end" (Erixon 1967: 5). In emphasizing the specificities of Europe as a part of the world in which "the different geographic divisions and different situations and climates have lost their importance, and frontiers and distances are being eliminated" (Erixon 1967: 11), he considered the study of development, progress, current times and changes, historical derivations and mixed circles of influences as well as the processes of distribution, selection and taste as especially worthwhile.

Thus, the initial project of *Ethnologia Europaea* was very much concerned with what one might term anthropological matters. In the early tables of contents, several sub-disciplines were listed, and even if most of them were folkloristic in aspect or emphasized rural studies (*ethnobotanica*, *studia agriculturae ethnicae*, *studia veterinaria popularia*, *studia architecturae rusticae*), a real kinship with general anthropology appeared through other sub-disciplines (*ethnosociologia*, *ethnologia urbana*). *Ethnologia Europaea* aimed at this first stage to compare the results arrived at by different ethnological research traditions in Europe. Anthropologists in general, and Europeanists in particular, should "investigate villages at different places in the world, using the same systems with the same questions and maps, then compare the results at conferences" (Erixon 1967: 11). One early issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* was devoted entirely to addressing the academic position of European ethnology in various European countries (Rohan-Csermak 1967).

The idea of carrying out actual comparative research, or comparing material instead of conclusions, seemed quite weak at the time. The initial focus was institutional, which is understandable given the weakness of ethnology as a discipline. As a result, the issues of the journal in the 1970s either presented general and theoretical essays on what was important in the ethnology of Europe, or were monographic case-studies which enabled the reader to make comparisons across individual contributions but which themselves rarely compared material coming from two or more geographical areas. Ethnology at the time was still trapped in an "objectivist epistemology" (Gingrich & Fox 2002: 3) and deeply determined by national traditions in scholarship so that it simply couldn't pay attention to empirical comparisons that were either local or of medium range.

"Eurethno" in 1988: the Founding of a New Europeanist Network

Twenty years later, in a different context, another enterprise concerned with Europeanism was founded. "Eurethno" is a small, French-speaking, network of European anthropologists working under the aegis of the Council of Europe. It was founded in Strasbourg (France) in 1988, and it still brings together twenty to thirty scholars from about twenty different European countries in annual workshops on European comparative studies, as well as special sessions for post-graduate students.

The goal is to reinforce Europeanist anthropology, and according to Professor Jocelyne Bonnet, the French founder of "Eurethno", the main point of the network at the beginning was to compare research methods in order to promote scientific cooperation in Europe (Bonnet 1990: 21). At the time, prior to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and the creation of the European Union's institutional structures, staking

this claim was of great importance. The originality of the "Eurethno" network lay in its thematic focus: to compare the forms oral European cultures took. In examining the variations and similarities in the conceptions of time and space throughout Europe, the intent was to accompany the political construction of the European Union through research, thereby enabling European citizens to share common cultural references. Through comparative studies of European myths and rituals, the different workshop meetings have emphasized questions of historical continuity and change, cultural unity and diversity. The network has focused on the cultural management of risk more recently, showing the usefulness of anthropologists in times of crises, as they can supply cultural references which may lessen the fears of the populations that feel themselves threatened.

The coexistence of very different academic traditions as well as the presence of historians in this network is particularly noteworthy. According to Professor Charles-Olivier Carbonell, the leading historian in "Eurethno", anthropologists have begun to discover the importance of European culture at the very moment when historians have discovered Europe as a single "civilisation" (Carbonell 2007: 32). Carbonell observes that traditional historians used to place the different national histories side by side but barely compared them; folklorists and anthropologists in the nineteenth century used to study only archaic remains and small-scale territories but had no interest in Europe as a whole. He calls for large-scale comparison of research conducted in folklore and anthropology, and would like to promote comparative ethno-historical studies on "Europeanity" which would analyse both unity and diversity in European civilisation. In this respect, he neatly differentiates between "European anthropology", an anthropology in which the researchers are European, and the "anthropology of Europe" or "Europeanist anthropology", an anthropology in which the research concerns are either regional areas in Europe or Europe as a whole (Carbonell 2007: 40–41). At the same time, Carbonell points to the contradictions in Jean Cuisenier's works, which for instance emphasize conflicts and violence in ethnic minorities in Europe, thus condemning the idea of a European unity (Cuisenier 1973). In contrast, he insists on the Europeanist commitment of the "Eurethno" workshops, which collect thematic materials from different culture areas in Europe each year, and that produce general comparisons and syntheses on a holistic European scale in order to reinforce the perspective of a common European identity.

Comparing *Ethnologia Europaea* and "Eurethno"

These two long-standing intellectual structures have had different priorities. In the case of the journal, Europe was still under political construction in 1967, and the cooperation between researchers was mainly anchored in scholarly ground. To found and legitimize Europeanist ethnology as a discipline, to compare methods and theoretical backgrounds, and to know which institutions were able to work in the field was felt to be urgent at the time. Moreover, Europeanists in Erixon's circle wanted to show that they were different from earlier folklorists and national schools of ethnology that had too often been instrumentalized by national politics. At the same time, they inherited the ways of thinking of the folklorists, sharing their same "naïveté" (Gingrich & Fox 2002: 2). They sought unity and were willing to understand very different national situations and data through a single analytic lens, taking for granted that comparison could be undertaken globally despite the differences between the cultural units being compared and between the different traditions of collecting material.

In the case of "Eurethno", Europe had become a concrete political project by then, and in 1988, the aim of this network was to accompany this political construction of Europe by studying European culture. Still, some of the initiatives here were similar to the motivations behind the journal. Some of the founding members of "Eurethno" had published articles in *Ethnologia Europaea*, and one workshop was dedicated to the different ways of teaching European anthropology throughout Europe (Voigt & Verebelyi 1995), which recalled and deepened the idea of counting the different Europeanist chairs (Rohan-Csermak 1967).

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But times had changed. The Europeanists in 1988 had to cope with a new political landscape, and opted to justify their efforts by examining common features in European culture in order to answer to the new political requirements. At the same time, they had to stress the differences and advocate ever more prudent comparisons so as to remain an acknowledged part of general anthropology – which itself had become stronger in the academy not least because many anthropologists engaged in extra-European research (re-)turned to Europe in the post-colonial era.

In 2008, times have changed again. The two intellectual structures discussed here remain active and serve as important forums for Europeanist ethnology and anthropology, and periodically feature and comment on rich European material in a manner comparable to other forums such as the *Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore* (and its different commissions), journals such as *Europaea, Journal of the Europeanists*, the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, or similar to what is done in research units, archives or societies located in universities and museums all over Europe. However, the journal and the network have defined their area of study and have addressed the notion of comparison in a specific way. They have defined Europeanism as that part of anthropology devoted to the study of European material, and they have brought together an enormous amount of data in order to engage in a comparative study of European cultures. Still, this approach has to be revised and renewed in order to understand the specifics of Europeanism in the present and forecast its future.

Europeanism in 2008: New Challenges in Folklore and in Anthropology

Examining the historical contexts in which two significant initiatives in Europeanist anthropology were founded leads to the conclusion that they emerged in part as scholarly responses to the political construction of Europe. But is this (still) true today? Can one grasp the essential factors which determine today's Europeanism?

Present-day Europe is characterized by changes at the political level as well as changes on an institutional and epistemic level. For one, it behoves us to re-examine and evaluate the differences in scholarship in Eastern and Western Europe – taking into account their different political histories in the post-World War II era. The last decade has seen a spate of examinations of folkloric studies conducted under communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Yet aside from the observation that regimes in many places instrumentalize folklore, it is time to engage in a broader discussion of the ways in which Eastern European folklorists have taken Western anthropology into account. In spite of the Iron Curtain, many Western anthropological publications were read by Eastern European scholars, and one could even postulate that the more Western these publications looked, the more they might have seemed interesting for scholars in search of new and original interpretations. Many Eastern European folklorists in the 1980s and 1990s have taken note of the master texts in the anthropology of Europe.

In consequence, I suggest that the gap between anthropology and folklore has been much less important in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, in Britain, or in the United States. If most of the scholars in the West separated folklore and anthropology – each with their own university chairs, journals and associations – then Eastern European scholars have tended to practice these fields jointly, though further investigation would be necessary to establish who participated in both fields and where. In this respect, it might be useful to count the references to each field in the various available bibliographies and to launch a survey of the different associations concerned with either field in the different countries.

On the whole, however, the abundance of resources in the West paradoxically seems to have led to a greater fragmentation and segmentation in these academic fields, while the lack of resources in the East led to greater unity among different disciplines. This fragmentation is quite a burden for Europeanism today, especially for approaches and publications which are located somewhere in-between the two fields. Indeed, the division between folklore and anthropology is not that clear at all. American

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folklorists often are trained in participant observation as much as in textual analysis, while German folklorists pride themselves on thorough historical methodology far more than on their capacity to do participant observation. Of course, studies in ballads and songs, oral narratives or storytelling, can be regarded as belonging to the research tradition of folklore, whereas studies in the political or institutional construction of national identities might more obviously be anthropological in nature. But what about anthropologists studying the history of folklore, like Michael Herzfeld (1987)? Or folklorists like Dorothy Noyes (2003) who engage in empirical investigations of an anthropological kind in order to analyse the dynamics of social changes and values?

Dramatizing the differences between anthropology and folklore at a time when Europe faces important changes at an institutional level seems indeed very risky, especially when the work many scholars do is supposed to be more and more useful, if not directly profitable. In this respect, bringing together different academic fields is an important issue within the framework of the ongoing process of constructing a political Europe.

Towards a New Effectiveness: Guidelines for the Future of Europeanism

In my opinion, Europeanism is facing new challenges that involve its connections with general anthropology (and with the social sciences more generally), and that are important if it is to be an effective force in the future. While it is true that folklorists were present almost everywhere in Europe before a Europeanist anthropology emerged, both specializations contributed to an increase in general knowledge, and should enter in more exchange and open, common discussion forums. This would lead to considerations of new views and approaches to Europeanism, based on a better understanding of the notion of comparison, including a reflection on its uses and purposes. Discussions of who carries out comparative studies in the different scholarly traditions of folklore and anthropology, what sort of data are compared, at which level and with which awareness and consequences regarding the scholars' public responsibility, are needed. At a time when more and more disciplines invest in "European Studies", it is essential to improve the agency of folklorists and anthropologists engaged in European research.

First, there should be more active efforts to achieve a unity among the various disciplines engaged in Europeanist efforts. Academic anthropologists, ethnologists and folklorists in the universities, as well as public sector practitioners and museum workers, need to share their findings, as they often work on very closely related materials and issues. Different academic traditions and sub-disciplines should be systematically compared so that research programs can be better structured.

Second, the sharp critique so often formulated among anthropologists against folklore should be softened. Instead of reproaching folkloristics for its obsolescence, thus showing the ignorance of new and divergent folklore research traditions, anthropologists and folklorists ought to actively import their respective new epistemic knowledge. That could provide a joint understanding of terminology, method and theoretical implications arising out of the different uses of fieldwork, historical and textual methodologies in the disciplines, helping to inform research understandings. In particular, the idea of "reflexivity" – paying attention to the consequences of the research process on the people studied (Ghasarian 2002: 238–239) – has to be discussed in folklore as well as in anthropology, as both folklorists and anthropologists deeply influence the social networks they are working with. Similarly, the implications of the notion of "otherness" requires joint attention, as it is of special relevance to decide if Europeanists should address European cultures or societies as being familiar or as being strange and different. At the very least, one should work toward a recognition of what either stance implies for both research and the results of studies that are conducted.

Third, accepted results from anthropological and folklore studies should be used to the profit of the specialists in these disciplines. It is certainly odd to on the one hand seek cooperation in practice, yet at the same time theorize complex concepts such as identity, feud, interaction, or structure. If social scientists could en-

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act their theories, they would be able to transport their theoretical knowledge of human organizations to their own disciplinary cultures and interdisciplinary borders, centres and peripheries, so that professional associations could cooperate better and show to policy makers all the benefits they can draw from collective research programs across disciplines.

Fourth, in-depth comparison should be privileged at all stages of the research process. Although folklorists and anthropologists are known as specialists of comparisons, in conference settings, "comparison" often does not more than placing different case studies side by side. Because of the monographic tradition in social sciences, very few individuals are able to undertake genuine comparative studies that include two or more places. At the same time, it is important to re-assess comparison by questioning the global frame of modernity and the "heterogeneous local responses" (Gingrich & Fox 2002: 7) made to globalization. The idea of a "multi-sited" ethnography (Marcus 1998) is of particular relevance, because it shows that fieldwork is not a simple matter of place, or of objective sociology, but a complex setting which involves mental representations and interactions between the local and the global as well as with the researcher. At a collective level, sharing the results of different projects in conferences is not enough: it is important to determine common expectations before beginning research in order to build a truly comparative project.

Fifth, requests for research programs from the European Commission or the Council of Europe have to be answered. For a long time, folklorists and anthropologists have planned and engaged in research far outside of the political agendas. Now they have to compete with those from stronger disciplines: history, economics, sociology, or political science. Completing the application forms for grants from the different governments and institutions contributes as well to creating new competencies as administrators and as network builders. Folklorists and anthropologists in the future will have to cope with new challenges related to their skills in managing their own business, so as to hold their own with respect to other disciplines.

Conclusion

Scholars have been concerned for at least forty years with the idea of comparing results and materials on a European scale. The founders of particular comparative projects in folklore and anthropology have chosen either to publish journals or to hold yearly workshops in order to bring together different sorts of studies. Despite the important work undertaken during this time, Europeanism today is facing new challenges and has to rethink its modes of action. Political as well as institutional and epistemic changes should lead scholars to deepen their reflection on comparison. This is especially relevant when scholarship is asked to take part in a new system that expects each field to become economically competitive.

In such a context, Europeanists should pay special attention to five different avenues: they should unite and encourage comparison between different sub-disciplines; they should reassess the historical oppositions between anthropology and folklore, between "us" and "others" or between "remote" and "central" places of interest; they should apply their general insights concerning mankind or social structures to themselves in order to avoid disagreements between colleagues in different professional organizations; they should try to define common expectations at the beginning of research instead of sharing only the final results; and they should train to improve their ability to build strong networks and fill the different application forms for grants in humanities or social sciences projects. Answering these different requirements and following these different guidelines would be a first step to reach a new effectiveness in Europeanism, to improve comparative work at a European scale and to address the process of building a new Europe.

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