

RE-INVENTING AND DECONSTRUCTING EUROPE

All in 136 Centimetres

Comment for the Anniversary Issue

Orvar Löfgren, University of Lund

Down in the basements of the humanities library at Lund University I find 50 years of *Ethnologia Europaea*, tightly stacked. Even in this old analogue form, they take up surprisingly little space. Is this all, 136 centimetres?

Instead of leafing through them chronologically, I start diving in here and there. It works like a time machine, travelling back and forth through different eras of European ethnology. Sometimes it makes me a bit dizzy.

Looking at the first issues, I'm reminded that launching an international journal is always a big project. There are the tricky questions about funding, market, and audience, finding editors as well as picking an editorial board that balances different interests and stakeholders. Once the new ship starts sailing, it may turn out that it takes a course not planned or foreseen. Much energy is devoted to keep it afloat, struggling for subscribers, enough funding, and not least: good papers. For editors these daily tasks usually overshadow grander plans about "The Mission of Our Journal".

Ethnologia Europaea was very much started as a journal with a mission, an attempt to pull together all kinds of research activities and academic traditions under the umbrella of a nascent European ethnology. The journal was a tool for building a

scholarly community and the carefully composed editorial board was essentially a club, which owned the project.

When Erixon wrote his introduction to this new project, he was 79 years old and died a year later. This was his final call. In her comment on his paper, Dorothy Noyes nicely captures the mood in which the journal was launched and the roads taken or not taken in the process. She points to Erixon as a *bricoleur* making do with the scarce resources available. Reading Erixon's paper I am struck by his constant effort to build cooperation and also his cautious navigation in the "geo-politics" of European ethnology (East and West, South and North). Another striking element is that of intergenerational differences. As in American folklore there were many young Turks mobilizing – demanding a new European ethnology. Actually, there were several generations of young Turks, the not so very young ones, who already in the late 1950s wanted to reinvent the discipline, and the very young ones we today associate with 1968 and the German "Abschied vom Volksleben". For many young scholars *Ethnologia Europaea* was seen as an old men's club. Back then, a colleague of mine said in a derogatory tone of the new journal: "too many papers on goat cheese making and a design that looks like something from the 1930s". *Ethnologia Europaea*

was held together not least by the European atlas projects, which still worked as a centripetal force. It was a Europe united by historical flows of farm buildings, tools, and traditions, by processes of innovation and diffusion, borders and cultural regions. In a sense it made Europe (or some aspects of it) very visible and material, in ways which later appeals for European cooperation and community-building has found it hard to do. On the other hand, the political concept of Europe was a very vague idea back in 1967 compared to the intense European debates of 2017.

Leafing through the journal, I am also struck by how the Europe of *Ethnologia Europaea* is constantly changing. Back in 1967, it was important to get every corner of the continent into the project, with reports on the situation from Albania to Lithuania. There are presentations of national ethnologies from 25 European countries in the first issue and during the first years, it is striking that there is a constant search for presentations of national research. Sometimes it makes for too much catalogue reading.

Ethnologia Europaea's history can also be read as the constant re-invention of Europe. A good example of this is found in Nevena Škrbić Alempijević's comments on Konrad Köstlin's paper "Vanishing Borders and the Rise of Culture(s)" from 1999. Both of them discuss the paradox that the making of European regions create boundaries and formulas which separate but on another level pulls Europe together. Different corners of the continent are made to stand out as special with the help of an intensely European tool box and check list.

From time to time, new *Ethnologia Europaea* conferences were arranged to discuss the Europeanness of European ethnology or possible paths of cooperation, but as the years pass, this European project is no longer so evident in the journal. Southern and Eastern Europe are less present in the 1980s and 1990s. And as English becomes the preferred language during the 1990s, the number of German and French contributions dwindle, at least for a number of years.

There are also other factors at play in this de-Europeanization of European ethnology. In the 1970s and 1980s, the discipline expanded in many plac-

es, attracting more students and resources, which helped create a more inward-looking national focus. Europe was not needed in the same way to promote the discipline. New dialogue partners were found in American and British social sciences.

Seeing all the earlier efforts of building a comparative European framework, I cannot help longing for some new attempts at a comparative or at least contrastive approach. Today, with all the agonies of the continent, one could start contemplating some kind of joint cooperation on issues like migration, re-nationalization, political nostalgia, and much more... And the comparative or contrasting approach does not have to take the form of large-scale projects, which might get lost in the bureaucratic jungles of EU funding. It can take the form of a dialogue across national borders, increasing awareness that European ethnology is the same over there, but also different in challenging ways.

In a sense, the thematic issues of *Ethnologia Europaea* often take the form of such a European dialogue. Peter Jan Margry discusses my contribution to the thematic issue of "The Nationalization of Culture" back in 1989. Rereading that issue, I remember how important it was for us Scandinavians to go to Budapest in the 1980s to get a new perspective on the tensions of the national project in a totally different political setting. Suddenly, our notion of national identity seemed naïve or at least very provincial. Looking back, I can see many of the thematic issues as low-budget but creative forms of European cooperation, which one does not find as often in other journals in the field. This is an *Ethnologia Europaea* tradition to keep up.

Leafing through 136 centimetres of *Ethnologia Europaea*, I am struck by the richness of topics and breadth of contributors, not only from different countries but different disciplines. The choices of papers and the comments on them mirror this, but there is also the fun of revisiting earlier research, old contributions, which appear in new light. And some turn out to have strong staying power, for example Kira Kosnick's paper on queer migrant clubbing, which Silvy Chakkalakal shows addresses important issues of urban sociability and the problems of

identity politics, which are still with us.

In her comment, Martine Segalen notes how trends and foci come and go in *Ethnologia Europaea*. As a former editor I can now, in retrospect, see the selectivity that was hidden from my view at the time. Each editor (including myself) has his or her favourite approaches, topics, scholars. Bjarne Stoklund needs a special salute for his bridging of generational and national differences during his long stint as editor.

As I carry the stacks back to the shelves – what have I learned? In one of the early issues, the editor makes an excuse for introducing an overview of an older scholar's work – presented as someone not very fashionable for contemporary ethnology, but the editor goes on to say that it is not a bad idea to return and take a retrospective look at a research tradition. Diving in and out of volumes, I am reminded of the old saying that in European ethnology, one can write about practically anything. However, this freedom comes with a distinctive style of doing research, which holds the discipline together. Even goat cheese studies return in the 2000s, but now as a part of an analysis of gastronomic politics of European regions and “terroir”. And, in *Ethnologia Europaea* 2014 (44:2) two young scholars revisit the atlas project my generation loved to ridicule to discuss new potentials for mapping as an analytical strategy.

A couple of hours spent leafing through the journal issues taught me a lot. In a way, it was a quicker path to understanding the constantly changing modes and moods of doing European ethnology

than reading heavy tomes of disciplinary history. As Regina Bendix discusses in her comment, there are constant processes of ageing and rejuvenating going on.

Finally, I was struck by the many surprises hiding in the volumes and the ways in which authors still are allowed to experiment, not only with topics, but with forms and styles. There is a rapid current streamlining of academic journals going on, as big publishing factories develop assembly lines, with tight rules, digital templates, and outsourcing of editorial work. There is a constant trend towards standardization of papers and peer reviews (again more templates), often imitating the traditions of “hard” social-science writing. The result is often a too predictable format (introduction, formulation of problems, previous research, empirical materials, analysis... etc.). In this light, *Ethnologia Europaea* still stands out as an open and informal journal and these are qualities that should be safeguarded. I would love for the journal to continue to give space to ethnographic experiments, the mixes of text and images, crazy ideas, and non-conformist approaches. Now there's a challenge for the future!

Orvar Löfgren, Professor emeritus in European Ethnology at the Department of Cultural Sciences, Lund University, Sweden. The cultural analysis and ethnography of everyday life has been an ongoing focus in his research. Central research fields have been studies of national identity and transnational mobility, media and consumption.
(orvar.lofgren@kultur.lu.se)