

## Some Remarks on Contemporary European Ethnological Thought

IN A RECENT ISSUE of the international periodical "Current Anthropology" one of the most engaging problems in present-day ethnological discussion was brought to the fore, the relation between American and European ethnology and anthropology. Some twenty scholars from both continents presented their opinion of the differences in subject-matter and ways of approach. While several of them—quite justly—criticized the American neglect of European contributions, the main and recurring theme was that American anthropology as an organization of different disciplines has no modern counterpart in Europe, and that European ethnology because of its domineering culture-historical orientation, particularly on the continent, fundamentally deviates from American cultural anthropology<sup>1</sup>. This is, of course, a very generalized picture, for there is a certain trend to wield together the so-called anthropological sciences even in Europe<sup>2</sup>, and a break with the monopoly of historical methods can be discerned in, for instance, Scandinavia<sup>3</sup>. At the same time many American anthropologists try to seek a path back to the historical perspective through ethnohistory and archaeology<sup>4</sup>.

Comparisons of American and European ethnology seldom take into consideration, however, that European ethnologists, despite their united appearance in certain matters and their pluralistic regional disagreement in others, do represent two different camps which have two different sets of traditions in research and methods. To be exact, I do not think that the distinction between general ethnology ("Völkerkunde") and regional European ethnology (the latter as defined by Erixon<sup>5</sup>) is a fundamental one in all European countries, particularly not in the East. But it is in many countries, and ethnologists who dedicate themselves to regional European research usually constitute an assembly of their own and communicate more often with each other than with their colleagues in general ethnology. This is, of course, what we could expect; do not Africanists and Americanists also constitute partly isolated, professional groups? Yet, they do not establish theories and concepts which solely pertain to their specific field, these theories and concepts are forwarded to, and used by, colleagues in other ethnographic fields. True,

1. European vs. American Anthropology: discussion of a problem posed by E. Ishida (*Current Anthropology*, vol. 6:3, 1965), pp. 303 ff. See in particular the contribution by P. Leser, pp. 311 ff., which summarizes the situation.

2. Cf. Å. Hultkrantz, *Antropologin som forskningsmal* (Folk-liv 1962-63, vol. 25-26), pp. 5 ff., and E. Breitingen, J. Haekel and R. Pittioni (eds.), *Theorie und Praxis der Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Anthropologischen Disziplinen* (Horn 1961).

3. See the recent writings by, e.g., F. Barth, G. Gjessing and K.G. Izikowitz in general ethnology and J. Granlund, K. Kolsrud and A.M. Nylén in folklife research. Banton's criticism that Scandinavian literature on folk communities fails to perceive sociological problems is scarcely correct today. See M. Banton, *Anthropological Perspectives in Sociology* (*The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 15:2, 1964), pp. 105 ff.

4. Cf. also Eggan's suggestion to study history via social structure, a method which from another angle has been tackled by Evans-Pritchard; see F. Eggan, *Social Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Comparison* (*Amer. Anthropol.*, vol. 56:5, 1954), pp. 743 ff., and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Anthropology and History* (Manchester, 1961).

5. S. Erixon, *Regional European Ethnology, I-II* (Folk-liv 1937-38, vol. 1-2).

their dissemination is sometimes hindered by the language barrier, for, as I have remarked elsewhere, at international congresses Germans tend to keep to themselves, so do the British, and the Americans are no different<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, concepts and theories developed by students of general ethnology are in the main a common heritage and a common technical outfit in their discipline. The students of regional European ethnology stand apart because they use other devices than their colleagues in general ethnology, devices which are partly very local and restricted in space, partly a shared theoretical framework.

MANY ANTHROPOLOGISTS, particularly in English-speaking countries, would call this stock of ideas "folkloristic". However, this term is very ambiguous, and one imagines too easily that it refers to folk-tales and oral epic traditions. It is worth pointing out that folklore as the study of oral tradition has recourse to methods which know no areal limitation; on the contrary, the dissemination methods introduced by the Finnish school have led to a recognition of the international unity in folklore research. (That later on other methods have been applied is of no consequence in this connection.) Both concerning its methods and its subject-matter, which is universal and still specialized, folklore deviates considerably from regional European ethnology.

The regretful fact is that the latter subject has only partly achieved the scientific status which general ethnology and folklore have arrived at, due chiefly, I presume, to its less international, and less developed, body of theories and concepts. During the editing of volume I of the International Dictionary of Regional European Ethnology and Folklore, I had good opportunity to observe the differences in theorizing and conceptualization between American Anthropology and general European ethnology on one hand, and European regional ethnology on the other. In my introduction to the referred volume I pointed out, among other things, that European regional ethnology because of its exclusive stress on historical research has formed "very few and often very vague concepts", whereas functionalistic British and American anthropology "has created a mass of new and often clearly delimited concepts". "It can also be shown", I went on, "that the generalizations of this anthropology, being theoretical and very useful, may easily be transferred to the European field of research and might thus preferably be grafted onto the European terminology"<sup>7</sup>.

These are hard words, and some of my European colleagues might find them unnecessarily condemning, but they should not be understood this way. They should rather be apprehended as a challenge to a better elaboration and clarifi-

6. Hultkrantz in *Temenos*, vol. 1, 1965, p. 91.

7. A. Hultkrantz, *General Ethnological Concepts* (Intern. Dict. of Regional European Ethnology and Folklore, vol. I, Copenhagen 1960), p. 12.

cation of extant concepts and a further, more intense effort to create new, refined and valid concepts. Many of the traditional concepts need to be put aside, others are workable but insufficient in their present form. It therefore seems necessary to allow American concepts to be introduced, at least for the time being. Although the theoretical framework of American anthropology is less consequent and unitary at present than it was some decades ago<sup>8</sup> it is more widely acknowledged and more concise and elaborate than the concept systems used by regional ethnologists in Europe. From the point of view of international understanding, and the internationalization of science, the expansion of these widely used concepts into the regional European field is desirable. Still, there is no reason why the "Europeanists" could not offer competition.

ON THE CONTRARY, it must be considered one of the most urgent tasks at present that European ethnologists, conscious of their common goals and interests, create an array of terms and concepts which emerge from and fit their scientific endeavours. It is necessary for the self-esteem of these ethnologists, and necessary for the benefit of their science<sup>9</sup>, that a new era of ethnological research, concentrating on definitions or working concepts and logical analysis of extant concepts, American or European, sets in.

There are perhaps two objections to be raised against this argument. First, how is it possible to reconcile it with the fact that regional European ethnology is supposed to be, according to several authorities, a mainly historical science? According to many historians, certainly among a great number of ethnologists with a philological background, the coining of terms and concepts is an occupation of very little importance to ethnological research<sup>10</sup>. I think, however, that the reverse is true, for no science can exist without a logical system of auxiliary concepts, and, moreover, no historical conclusions are valid if they are not supported by functionalistic interpretations<sup>11</sup>. And functionalism, certainly, needs a conceptual apparatus. Thus, whatever implication we ascribe to the subject of regional European ethnology, work on definitions is a necessary activity for the ethnologist. We may call this activity functionalistic. Of course it does not entail that the historical orientation of European ethnology be eschewed. Rather, it assists in clarifying and facilitating historical research. For those of my col-

8. M. Mead, *Anthropology among the Sciences* (Amer. Anthropol., vol. 63:3, 1961), p. 477.

9. If Krappe could call folklore a science, the same may certainly apply to regional European ethnology.

10. Cf. the contributions to the discussion at the European ethnological congress in Stockholm 1951: S. Erixon (ed.), *Papers of the International Congress of European and Western Ethnology*, Stockholm, 1951 (Stockholm, 1956), p. 44.

11. Cf. H. Möller, *Untersuchungen zum Funktionalismus in der Volkskunde* (Folk-liv 1955-56, vol. 19-20), pp. 32 ff. Cf. also above, footnote 4.

leagues who consciously carry out a functionalistic ethnology no problem is involved.

The second objection, what point is there in introducing new concepts when ready-made American or British concepts are generally disseminated and established? We all possibly agree on one point: it is obvious that the Anglo-Saxon concepts can be further elucidated by regional ethnologists, as several post-war papers show<sup>12</sup>. The creation of new terms, however, may seem both superfluous and unwarranted. And yet, precisely because the European terminology and conceptualization to a large degree must reflect the particular regional conditions and traditions on this continent it is indispensable<sup>13</sup>. A perusal of some concepts which have dominated European regional discussion until recently shows that they were formed as a response to the needs created by the special European cultural circumstances. This can, of course, most easily be proved in the case of all concepts which refer to the cultural inventory, e.g., transhumance, *sauna*, fairy-tale, house goblin. It is more remarkable that also the general concepts, good and bad, which have been utilized in European regional ethnology reflect the structure and organization of European culture and society.

LET US DEMONSTRATE some proofs of this general state of affairs.

(1) Some of the terms proposed for the discipline itself express the deep national differentiation in Europe: laography, folklore, "Volkskunde", etc. There is a certain regionalism in terms and concepts also in the U.S.A., for instance in archaeological taxonomy, but this regionalism has no national premises, it is more akin to the European formation of schools.

(2) Whereas general anthropologists have concentrated their attention on "primitive" peoples, regional ethnologists in Europe have focussed their interest on the "folk", the peasantry within the higher civilizations. This attitude clearly reflects the difference between the fields of investigation, on one side underdeveloped areas like sub-Saharan Africa and South America, on the other side our own highly developed continent. Concepts like folk, folk culture, folk life, folk tradition have been central in European regional ethnology. German "Volkskunde" has probably been the most active ethnological discipline to further the discussion of different "folk"-terms (such as "Volkheit", "Volksgut", "Volkstum" and "volkstümlich").

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12. For instance, valuable contributions to the concept of survival have been made by Erixon, Eskeröd, Müller and Nylén, and the concept of culture has been commented upon by, e.g., Erixon, Kolsrud, Möller, Moser, Peuckert and Ränk.

13. The national premises and tendencies in European ethnology have recently been illuminated in G. de Rohan-Csermak, *Les Ecoles ethnographiques nationales et l'ethnologie européenne* (Actes du VI<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des Sciences Anthropologiques et Ethnologiques, Paris, 1960, tome II), pp. 237 ff.

(3) Since the folk stratum is mostly represented by the peasantry much attention has been paid to such concepts as rural society, "Agrarethnographie" and peasant psychology (Van Gennep). They correspond to concepts like primitive society, economic anthropology and primitive mentality in general ethnology but convey of course a different meaning.

(4) The relation of the folk to the other groups of society called for clarification. European social structure is involved in the distinction between "Oberschicht" and "Unterschicht", Haberlandt's and Hoffman-Krayer's much-debated concepts. Naumann's "gesunkenes Kulturkut" is closely associated with this distinction. Local and temporal conditions no doubt coloured the idea that the creative cultural contents passed from the upper, ruling strata to common man, to the folk. This idea was, as we know, later abolished. Arthur Haberlandt and Saintyves embraced both strata in their concepts "Lebenskreis" and "vie civilisée", and both strata were eventually considered active agents in the spreading of culture. Nevertheless, the mechanisms of exchange of cultural materials remained to be revealed, and in order to satisfy the needs of an explanation, Erixon formed the concepts of mobile culture, official culture and professional culture, as well as certain concepts of social action (central direction, central inspiration).

(5) Since the folk typically does not carry an independent cultural form, earlier studies of folklore and regional ethnology often dealt with customs and habits, folkways and usages, folk activities, which show a strong persistence within the frame of a larger cultural whole. Folk culture has in later times been interpreted as a part-culture<sup>14</sup>, and nowadays European ethnologists do not hesitate to treat the materials of their science in terms of culture (cf. Weiss, Erixon). In this respect they come close to the general ethnologists. Above all in American anthropology the concept of culture has developed into the key-concept of the discipline, due largely to the initiatives of A.L. Kroeber.

(6) The study of the folk sometimes reveals an ethnocentric or even nationalistic bias, the scholar identifying himself with the small community, the province or the whole nation. The concepts which illustrate this tendency show a wide range from homestead movement and traditionalism to "Volksseele" and national character. (Of course, this does not exclude the fact that these concepts also have been the object of neutral, detached studies.)

(7) The European folk culture as formed by the peasantry is largely a thing of the past, except in some few areas. Research on phenomena which pass over into history usually requires historical methods, and regional European ethnology has—with some notable exceptions (cf. concepts like "cadre", "volume", "néo-folklorisme")—been a culture-historical discipline. It must not of course be

14. Or a half-culture: see G.M. Foster, What is Folk Culture? (Amer. Anthropol., vol. 55:2, 1953), pp. 159 ff.

overlooked that historical methods were for a long time domineering in general anthropology, and the influence of Ratzel, Graebner and Frobenius also found its way to European regional ethnology. Many concepts of import to historical methods were shared by both disciplines and also worked on by their representatives: cf. cultural morphology, cultural stage, historical stratification, "Kulturkreis", and similar concepts. Characteristically enough, however, European regional ethnologists paid particular attention to concepts related to phenomena of the past, or covering methods by which such phenomena could be investigated. Here are some of these concepts: archaeocivilization and "civilisation traditionnelle", "Kulturgeologie" and ethnogeology, cultural or ethnographical fixation, palaeosociology, regression, relic, relic area and relic culture (also survival), secondary artistic centre, stored culture, traditional culture, tradition (and traditional circle, traditional continuity, traditional regression, etc.). On the whole, both the number of concepts included and the intensity of their application give the impression that, at least in the past, this type of conceptual category has meant very much to the discipline.

(8) The urbanization of European culture and society and the dying out of country traditions and country customs has provoked a new trend in European regional ethnology: the investigation of urban culture, and the study of new cultural forms. In recent European research we therefore meet terms like civil (or urban) society, "Gegenwartsvolkskunde" and "Großstadtvölkskunde", or innovation (also novation) and area of innovation. This modern trend aligns regional ethnology with modern cultural anthropology and sociology, and it is difficult to know if in this disguise it will make a prophyte of its own. Whatever the outcome, one is impressed by the contributions which have recently been made.

THIS SHORT SURVEY of some European ethnological concepts seen against their local and temporal background ought to have demonstrated convincingly that these concepts have emerged in close correspondence with the European cultural, social and political setting. Precisely because of this dependence they have been indispensable to the students who have tried to grasp the essence and structure of European culture. They have been better adjusted to the specific problems in European regional ethnology than, for instance, American anthropological concepts. The Americans have been pioneers in the discussion of general cultural problems; but their achievements in the particular field of folk culture were until recently rather insignificant. However, the post-war American anthropology has developed a keen interest also in this sphere, stimulated by Redfield's research among Mexican peasants, and the contributions made by such students as Arensberg, Robert Anderson, Cancian, Foster, Lewis and Wolf have rendered concepts like community studies, folk society, folk stratum and rural

society well-known among European ethnologists<sup>15</sup>. It is regrettable, though, that the Americans in general have refrained from taking cognizance with the similar concepts which have been formed by their colleagues in Europe.

Incidentally, also folkloristic circles in America have demonstrated an interest for a broadening of their discipline to include folk-culture studies<sup>16</sup>; but they have so far contributed nothing to the conceptual framework.

The importance of the concepts created by European regional ethnologists may be summarized this way: they ameliorate the access to the understanding of European culture, in particular the folk culture, and thereby may be used internationally wherever similar folk cultures have developed. This means a widening of the scope not only to European folk cultures in the New World, but to Asiatic (for instance, Japanese, Indian) folk cultures as well. As a student of religion I have been able to observe how primitive religions around the world have dwindled into folk beliefs and folk customs, as European idea patterns and urbanization have spread. We may therefore expect an expansion of the utility of the concepts which have been created in European regional ethnology.

The presupposition is, of course, that these concepts are logical and consistent and have been refined into workable, adequate tools. As pointed out in the foregoing, much remains to be done to achieve this result, many concepts must be discarded, others remade or supplemented. It is a great satisfaction to know that much energy is at present being devoted to this task. Besides the work on normative definitions in the International Dictionary of Regional European Ethnology and Folklore (of which volume III is now in progress) the following contributions could be mentioned: Kolsrud's and Ränk's analyses of the culture concept, Hävernicks elucidation of the concept of custom (Sitte), Nylén's discussion of the concept of cultural fixation, Eskeröd's fixation of the concept of dominant interest, Leser's investigation of the concept "Kulturkreis", and de Rohan-Csermak's study of the concept of ethnos<sup>17</sup>.

With this fruitful start, let us hope that an arsenal of useful concepts will appear to make regional European ethnology an authoritative theoretical science within the frame of world anthropology.

15. Their knowledge of European regional ethnology is indeed sometimes superficial. Leslie White for instance states, "as for the literate culture of Europe, George A. Dorsey's *Man's Own Show: Civilization* (1931) is about the only anthropological work I can think of, and its influence upon our science, as far as I can see, has been virtually nil" (L.A. White, *Anthropology 1964: Retrospect and Prospect*, in *Amer. Anthropol.*, vol. 67:3, 1965, p. 631).

16. See Hultkrantz, *General Ethnological Concepts*, p. 138.

17. K. Kolsrud, *Kulturbegrep og arbeidsmåte* (Folk-liv 1960-61, vol. 24-25), pp. 5 ff.; G. Ränk, *Några faser i kulturbegreppets utveckling* (*ibid.*), pp. 20 ff.; W. Hävernicks, *Sitte, Gebräuchliches und Gruppenbrauchtum* (Beiträge zur Deutschen Volks- und Altertumskunde, vol. 7, 1963), pp. 7 ff.; A.M. Nylén and W. Hävernicks, "Kulturfixierung" und "Innovation" (Beiträge zur Deutschen Volks- und Altertumskunde, vol. 9, 1965), pp. 7 ff.; A. Eskeröd, *Needs, Interests, Values, and the Supernatural* (Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia, vol. 21, 1964), pp. 81 ff.; P. Leser, *Zur Geschichte des Wortes Kulturkreis* (Anthropos, vol. 58, 1963), pp. 1 ff.; G. de Rohan-Csermak, *Le problème de l'"ethnie" et la notion de "complex ethnique européen"* (mimeographed Ms., 1965).