

## Some New Trends within European Ethnology in Sweden

*Abstract.* Der Beitrag beschreibt einige neue Tendenzen in der Europäischen Ethnologie in Schweden und vergleicht damit die Situation in anderen nordischen Ländern.

Seit dem Ende des zweiten Weltkrieges und besonders im letzten Jahrzehnt gab es eine deutliche Verschiebung der Gewichte von der deutschen zur angelsächsischen Wissenschaftstradition. Die deutsche ist durch das Studium der materiellen Kultur, vor allem der historischen Quellen charakterisiert und geographisch ausgerichtet — sowohl in der Volkskunde wie in der Völkerkunde. Die angelsächsische Richtung legt demgegenüber Nachdruck auf lokale Studien des kulturellen Geschehens und ist soziologisch orientiert — sowohl in der Sozial- wie in der Kultur-Anthropologie.

REGIONALLY RESTRICTED TO SWEDEN, European ethnology has been strongly influenced by the theories and approaches used in the study of non-western cultures. The evolutionist and diffusionist schools, as well as the branch of small community studies, for example, have had their representatives in research on Swedish ground. This close relationship between European ethnology and studies of non-western cultures has been formally underlined from time to time. In 1952, for example, professor Sigurd Erixon pointed out that nordic and comparative folk life research (i. e. European ethnology) constitutes a regionally specialized branch of general ethnology, i. e., "the discipline which exists under the names of cultural or social anthropology in England and America". Erixon stated that the main object of folk life research was the culture of the nordic countries and that, in combination with these studies, comparisons with the cultures of the other European countries should be made when possible. Erixon characterized folk life research as the comparative study of culture with a historical, sociological and psychological orientation. He further noted the necessity of having some knowledge of primitive culture (Erixon 1952:136).

John Granlund, Erixon's successor as professor, stated that nordic and comparative folk life research is a regionally specialized branch of general ethnology. "In England and America this subject is called social and cultural anthropology, in France *éthnographie métropolitaine*, in Germany commonly *Volkskunde*" (See also Erixon 1967:5)<sup>1</sup>.

If we look at the general orientation of the studies of non-western cultures, we find that the research work at the universities on the Continent differs a great deal from the corresponding studies at British and American universities. On the Continent, the main interest is in "material culture", and in what are usually termed "customs". In England and the United States, however, the interest is more sociologically orientated and is concerned with social organization, economic life, political structure, as well as ritual behavior. One implication of this difference in orientation is that Continental research has been based on studies of specific items, the diffusion of these over vast geographical regions, the incentives for and restrictions of such diffusions. Explanations have been made in terms of "cultural loans", "survivals" etc. The Anglo-Saxon studies, on the other hand, are more concerned with the complex whole of community life, i. e., the inter-

1. Studieplaner för examensämnet nordisk och jämförande folklivsforskning, fastställda 1959 och 1962.



relationships of many items or variables within the same limited geographical area. The method developed by social anthropologists is that of participant observation, while the Continental general ethnologists have preferred to rely upon, to a large extent, data from literary sources. General ethnology at Swedish universities has long been an integral part of the Continental tradition in the above respects. This has also been the case with European ethnology in Sweden, although field work has been carried out very much in conjunction with the collection of information from literary sources.

After the end of World War II, the above picture changed. Anglo-Saxon culture and science took over the leading role in Europe. The German language, which had earlier been taught as the first foreign language in Swedish schools, was replaced by English. This change is evident in other areas of Swedish society as well. In the field of general ethnology in Sweden, however, the German tradition has continued to play an important role even after the war. In the mid sixties, two of the three professors of general ethnology represented the "arm chair approach", while the third, Karl Gustav Izikowitz, professor at the university of Gothenburg from 1955 to 1970, was the first representative of the social anthropological school.

BRITISH INFLUENCE ON EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY IN SWEDEN first manifested itself in the doctoral thesis, *Årets äring* (*The Year's Crop*), by Albert Eskeröd. This study of traditions at harvest-time and at Christmas was inspired by the work of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. Eskeröd emphasized the social and functional aspects of customs and beliefs, in contrast to much that was earlier written in the folklore field in Scandinavia. Eskeröd notes: "I find it necessary to pay due respect to each locality. I hold that it is unscientific to unite fragments from different localities, even when striking resemblances exist, in order to complete some theoretical pattern" (Eskeröd, 1947:354).

While British anthropology had earlier referred to a great deal of European ethnology, especially the study of folk beliefs and oral traditions as "conjectural history", the research work was, as a whole, empirically well founded. Its emphasis was on material products and economic organization, as well on verbal cultural products, among the peasantry of the preindustrial society. Professor Erixon, however, more than anyone else in Scandinavia, contributed to a widening of the scope to include urban life and industrialization. He was influenced by sociology, which was introduced as an academic discipline in Sweden after the second world war. In fact, Erixon characterized European ethnology as a type of sociology. With reference to sociological theory, however, this stands merely as an expression of interest which scarcely corresponds to the investigations he actually carried out.

Erixon's studies, as well as those of many of his colleagues, were connected with the aims of ethnological museums: i.e., the collection of material things and other kinds of cultural information. Only a small part of this data has been subjected to analysis. The main purpose of the museums is still to "save" the dis-



appearing culture and record information which may be used later for research purposes. The connection between museums and research work explains the descriptive character of much of the research within European ethnology. However, if we do not take the theoretical orientation of sociology as a criterion, but define sociology as the empirical study of social life, it seems appropriate to regard ethnology as a type of sociology as Erixon has done.

The historical aspects of European ethnology have not excluded studies of "living cultures". Much of what Erixon and his predecessors did was documentation of contemporary conditions (Cf. Erixon, 1971). Moreover, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the pioneer Swedish ethnologists, studied the old peasant society that was still alive. They crisscrossed the country observing and recording oral traditions, customs and economic arrangements. They collected material products and made drawings of houses and tools.

Granlund, with his very broad field of interest, carried on the research tradition of Erixon. Furthermore, in his academic capacity, he made important contributions to the development of European ethnology. In 1961, for example, he engaged as a member of his staff a sociologist with an anthropological orientation, in order to promote the adaptation of relevant anthropological theory and method to the study of Swedish culture (Cf. Hanssen 1951/1952, 1956, 1963).

In 1966, a research group was formed in order to maintain the anthropological orientation initiated by Granlund (Daun, 1968:2—8). The work of the research group resulted in two publications. The first was produced in 1967, when an inter-nordic field seminar was organized by the research group together with the Nordic Work Group of Ethnology and Folklore (Nordisk Etnologisk-Folkloristisk Arbejdsgruppe, NEFA). Held in a community in the far north of Sweden, the seminar's task was to analyze the dependence of the depopulation of the area upon the economic life there (Blehr et alii, 1968). The other publication was concerned with ethnological aspects of political studies (Brück et alii, 1969). Here some concepts borrowed from political anthropology were presented as instruments for studying the distribution of power in the old peasant society. The usefulness of these instruments was dramatized in three case studies. The first concerns political leaders in a Lapp community, the second discusses the dependence of rural economic life on conditions of political leadership, and the third is about a village "council" in a small rural community, and the recruitment of members to it.

Two members of the research group have also edited a book dealing with ecology in European ethnology. This book constitutes an attempt to use social anthropological theory to deal with problems within the Swedish ethnological field (Daun and Löfgren, 1971). The book presents a more systematic model for studying the interrelationship between man and his natural environment than has been earlier used in European ethnology<sup>2</sup>.

2. Systematic here means a study which takes into account all relevant classes of determining factors. The key concept of the model is "ecological niche", which Barth has utilized from the field of biology (Barth, 1956).



**NORDIC WORK GROUP OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE.** At the ethnological congress held in Norway 1963, the association mentioned above, was founded for students and young scholars. The purpose of this association was the furtherment of contact between young ethnologists in the nordic countries, as well as the vitalization of discussion concerning theory and method. At this meeting a periodical, *Nord-Nytt*, was founded. This periodical deals with new trends within ethnology. Another part of the program of this association is the organizing of field seminars, where students and young scholars meet to do field work in common. Since 1967, the seminars have dealt with phenomena within modern society. They have focused on the consequences, on the micro level, of such changes as depopulation, community growth and migration from abroad, i.e., the effect of macro level process of society upon patterns of life on the micro level.

#### *TRENDS IN RESEARCH WORK AT THE INSTITUTE OF EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY IN STOCKHOLM DURING THE SIXTIES*

WHAT CHARACTERIZES SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY compared with *Völkerkunde* is, among other things, its emphasis on the social structure of a limited geographical area, often a small community. The anthropological approach is holistic and, hence, the difficulties incurred when dealing with a large area are prohibitive if the researcher is working alone (Projects with many scholars working together are a recent phenomenon and are still unusual). As the number of variables is increased, the size of the field under study must be decreased. In Swedish ethnological research, such small community studies have a very long tradition, and the social anthropological influence during the sixties has further fostered this approach. What is new, however, is the introduction of the participant observation method in the analysis of social life and the process analysis approach which derives from Barth (Cf. Barth, 1966 a and 1966 b). New also is a more systematic approach on the methodological and theoretical level as a whole.

Participant observation should not be confused with field work in general. Recording in the field by the ethnologist has been common in European ethnology throughout its history, i. e., the ethnologist collects information by making interviews, by observing the ways of using old tools in the household work and so on. Participant observation on the other hand, consists of the gathering of information in "natural" social situations by living in the community. This approach has not been utilized until recently in nordic ethnology. An example of this approach can be found in a study of a small saw mill community in Northern Sweden, carried out in 1966 (Daun, 1969). In this small community the state-owned company decided to close the mill. Almost every household, however, obtained its living through the saw mill. The workers, half communists and half social democrats, had been previously unable to cooperate with each other in any situation. They now supported each other to oppose the company's



decision to close the mill, as well as the regional policy of the social democratic government. An excellent comparison with the situation in the north has been made in a study of the dissolution of a paper mill in a small community in southern Sweden (Ehn, 1970). Also in this study the participant observation method was used.

Other community studies analyse the rise of a modern fishing fleet out of a situation of overpopulation in a farming district near the Swedish west coast in the late 19th century (Löfgren, 1967, 1969, 1970). Another study documents the economic development after the World War II of a small rural community in the Finnish speaking area of northern Sweden (Hellspong, 1968, 1969). Still another study, the result of ethnological team work in a rural community in mid-Sweden, deals with the urbanization process during the last 60—70 years and its manifestations in social organization, cultural values and material products. The household economy of this community, which was earlier based on farming combined with handicraft and seasonal small industrial operation and seasonal labor migration, was transformed into year-round employment with farm labor reduced to a minimum. Such a change in the economic base of the community, however, had consequences for its social life. The frequent interaction between the households which in earlier times was mainly caused by work cooperation but also with many informal implications in the interactional pattern, also disappeared to a great extent. This change corresponded to changes on the cultural value level. The early urbanization process also effected the attitudes of the peasant population towards the urban subculture, the urban style of life. Name giving, also brought under study, is a clear indicator of this kind of urban influence, as well as the type of furniture and household equipment (Daun, 1971).

In 1969, Knut Weibust presented his doctoral thesis on *Deep Sea Sailors*. He studied the regular behavior of sailors on the old windjammers as a function of *constraint choices*, where actors seek to maximize certain values, while conditions limit their freedom of choice. Weibust based his study primarily on literary sources and also on interviews with old sailors (Weibust, 1969).

A study, in progress, deals with a new suburban community in Stockholm. The life patterns of families and teenagers is studied, along with their activities and the forms of their interaction with neighbors, friends and relatives. The material collected on this suburb is compared with corresponding material from another suburb in Stockholm, but from a period fifty years ago. The reconstruction of this older suburb is achieved principally through interviews with old inhabitants. The differences described between the two suburbs reflect important changes in Sweden on the macro level, i.e., economic growth, technological development, political changes and social planning (Daun, 1972 a).

Another ongoing project in the urban field concerns life in an expanding town of mid-Sweden. The economic growth and population development of this town are traced back to the late 19th century (Hellspong, 1970). This kind of perspective, the focusing on the historical chains which have lead up to our own time,



is a characterizing trait in all of the research works mentioned above. The analysis of the industrialization period and the study of modern society is another trend in research work at the Institute of European ethnology in Stockholm. The latter perspective has to a great extent been influenced by the work of Mats Rehnberg, professor of European ethnology in Stockholm.

#### *OTHER STUDIES IN SWEDEN AND NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES*

SOME VERY INTERESTING PROJECTS have been initiated at the Gothenburg Institute of European ethnology. Many of the studies are carried out in the city of Gothenburg and they largely deal with community life in the older areas of the city. Ethnologists cooperate with architects, engineers and others in order to obtain better knowledge for rebuilding plans of the areas (Cf. Daun, 1972 b; 35—37). Studies of urban areas and of urbanization problems are going on at the present time at all institutes of European ethnology in Sweden.

In Denmark, a detailed study of a small type of community called "colony garden", within the city of Copenhagen, has been carried out. The study was based on participant observation and was influenced, in that respect, by the social anthropological method (Therkildsen, 1970). Also in Copenhagen, a suburban study was carried out by a team of ethnologists. They studied the period from the beginning of this century until the present (Haahr Carlsen et alii, 1970). This diachronical approach was also favored, for example, by Bjarne Stoklund, professor of European ethnology in Copenhagen, in his local study on personality patterns as expressions of economic organization (Stoklund, 1968).

A detailed historical study by two Danish ethnologists concerns *one* family in Copenhagen and the middle-class home where this family lived for three generations. The documentation of the social and physical milieu was undertaken with special reference to the period from c. 1855 to c. 1900, "in an endeavor to add to our knowledge of Danish middle-class culture at that time, when it was the prosperous middle-class which set the fashion" (Damgaard and Moustgaard, 1970:140).

The earliest Scandinavian ethnologist to be strongly influenced by social anthropology was the Norwegian researcher Otto Blehr, well known for his work on social life and oral traditions, collected in Norway and in the Faroe Islands (Blehr, 1963, 1967).

In Finland, the Anglo-Saxon anthropological influence has been stronger within verbal tradition and folk belief studies, as compared to the rest of the ethnological field. To be mentioned as representatives here are Lauri Honko and Juha Pentikäinen in Turku, and Matti Sarmela in Helsinki (See for example Pentikäinen, 1968, 1970).



*FROM GENERAL ETHNOLOGY TO SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY*

AS HAS BEEN OUTLINED ABOVE, the German school of ethnology represented a strong tradition in the Swedish research of non-western cultures. An early exception to this tradition was the research done by Karl Gustav Izikowitz in Gothenburg. Although most of his work concerns artifacts, these are analyzed with reference to their social context. Far more than any other colleagues of his generation, he was influenced by sociological thinking. In Stockholm, an orientation towards Anglo-Saxon anthropology began to occur in the late 50's. This trend, to some extent, existed in opposition to the official line. At the University of Uppsala, a corresponding interest grew up in the late 60's, also contrary to prevailing opinion. This conflict reached its culmination in 1968, when a group of students and teachers in Uppsala left the institute and formed a "free" institute of social anthropology outside the university. The university authorities of Sweden appointed a committee, whose findings resulted in, among other things, a change in the name general ethnology (*allmän och jämförande etnografi*) to social anthropology, both in Gothenburg and Stockholm. This change represented an official sanction of the orientation towards Anglo-Saxon anthropology, which had long since prevailed in Gothenburg and had been a dominant trend in Stockholm during the last decade. In Uppsala, the discipline of general ethnology was divided into two disciplines, one with the same name and approach as earlier and one social anthropological, administrated by the sociological institute at the university.

The study of non-western cultures in Sweden has approached the status of a social science. The ambition now is to contribute to the general understanding of social organization and of such universal institutions as the economy, politics and ritual life. This new development also includes a marxist trend with reference to theory. It can undoubtedly be stated that social anthropology is, to a great extent, a nomothetic subject, certainly more than was the case with the German school of general ethnology.

A recent trend in European ethnology in Sweden is the movement towards social anthropology in the analysis of Swedish material, whether present day or even historical (Cf. Lewis, 1968). This trend is connected with what has been termed "the social anthropology of complex societies" in Great Britain, which involves, for example, urbanization studies of black Africa, as well as research work in rural Britain (Cf. Banton, 1966, and Frankenberg, 1966). A Swedish scholar recently wrote his doctoral thesis on field material collected during a two year stay in the black ghetto of Washington D.C. (Hannerz, 1971).

Although European ethnology and the study of non-western cultures have always constituted parallel branches in the field of human studies, it is apparent that recent interest among social anthropologists in Swedish culture and in the historical aspects thereof has brought the two subjects still closer together.



### THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE TRENDS IN EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY which have been outlined above are approaching the theoretical and methodological orientation which characterizes the Anglo-Saxon school of social anthropology. This means, above all, a greater interest in complex wholes and, as a consequence, in theoretical frameworks which permit more systematic studies of culture than were earlier attempted. Earlier studies focused for example, on "material folk culture", "folk customs" and "folk narratives". Present studies, conducted under the new approach, treat the "technologies of economic systems", "institutionalized behavior" and "cultural communications". The peasant culture, in fact, constitutes a rather unploughed field of investigation. There is still a lack of basic knowledge in this field. We know a lot about wedding ceremonies, but very little about family structure and sex roles. We know a great deal concerning feasts, but little about everyday rituals. We have knowledge about clothes, but we do not know very much about ritual communication. We have information about house and home, but little information concerning child rearing in the old society. We have, very often, spoken about "traditions", but we have not said very much about the social mechanisms which carry the "traditions" from one generation to the next, for we know too little about the problem of *cultural maintenance*. We have gathered a mass of data concerning materials and behavioral products of culture, but little knowledge about the underlying structures which have produced these things.

The present trend in European ethnology in Sweden, however, is to concentrate more effort on a description of these underlying structures, and to interpret the cultural items with reference to them. In this anthropological perspective, a study of community life would refer to the ecological basis of the community, and the actions of its inhabitants would be viewed with reference to the economic and general social structure, developed as a function of the cultural systems — values and cognitions — on one hand, and the variety of assets of the population and the situational or external factors on the other. The analysis of human life on this *micro* level, compared to the *macro* analysis, which characterizes general history and which is also dominant in the field of social science, may be the most important contribution of European ethnology to the general understanding of culture.

### THE BROAD SCOPE OF EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY

ALTHOUGH THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY on European ethnology in the nordic countries will be of great importance for the theoretical development of the latter field, European ethnology will undoubtedly retain the broad scope which has always characterized it. This "broadness" may be described under three headings:

#### 1. Past and Present

It has now and then been asked whether European ethnology ought also to study modern society and its culture. It has been supposed that this orientation



could negatively influence historical studies. Personally, I am convinced that the investigations of the present time will develop alongside the historical studies, and I feel that there is no reason to fear that one will develop at the expense of the other. The difference between so called historical studies and the study of modern society, is, in fact, only a matter of relationship between the scholar and the time. The study of the present and the study of the past do not demand different theories. What is present today is history tomorrow, and history can very well be said to consist of accumulated "todays". From a scientific point of view, the difference is only technical: the sources of information are richer when the objects of study still exist within their social context. It would, therefore, be an arbitrary limitation of the possibilities to develop understanding of history if we limit the study to sources of less richness.

If one takes the opposite point of view and asks "why history?" — an objection which has also been raised — it is not only relevant to mention the deeper understanding of the present that one obtains through knowing the historical background of it, but it is also important to note that the past gives one a variety of comparative material. Historical sources then, provide a degree of heterogeneity for the European ethnologist, restricted as he is to the relatively homogeneous culture of Europe, often his own country. The cultural variations are, in fact, much greater if the ethnologist looks back than if he looks out over the modern european field.

## *2. Local studies and studies of specific items*

Nor is there any reason to fear that the growing interest in community studies, influenced by social anthropology, will exceed the studies of specific items (such as material products, customs, folk tales etc.), as has to a great extent been the case in the field of social anthropology itself. The detailed analysis of such things shows all the possibility of developing into a fruitful branch of European ethnology. This is related to the abundance of written information concerning the broader cultural and social context which, in general, does not exist in those parts of the world where social anthropologists are accustomed to working. The advantage of limiting the scope to one (small) country, like Sweden, is that a mass of written information about the country has been accumulated within the ethnological field. Furthermore, very rich sources of historical information have been stored in the official archives, and, consequently, the study of historical processes in the subject of ethnology need not be "conjectural history".

A weakness of some of the earlier studies of specific items was the lack of knowledge about their social context. With such a knowledge, these analyses need not be less reliable than the analyses of the complex whole of small communities. In a way, this has been demonstrated by social anthropologists in their examination of specific phenomena within the small community. Interpretations are then made with reference to the information concerning the social context, information which is not readily available in any archives or previous studies, but rather, which the antropologist has gathered himself. It is probable that the con-



cepts and theories developed by social anthropologists will offer new and fruitful instruments as well to those European ethnologists working with problems of innovation, diffusion and regression (Cf. Bringéus, 1971). This will in turn, contribute to a desirable integration of two types of theoretical approaches: the one mainly related to the study of specific cultural manifestations; the other mainly related to the study of local patterns of life.

### 3. *Studies of all social classes*

With reference to the social dimension, it is apparent that European ethnology will continue to have a very broad scope, and it is probable that it will be broadened to an even greater extent. Already in 1918, when the chair of folk life research in Stockholm was founded, the inclination towards a wide social scope was established. Although, for a long time, the stress has been on peasant culture, other categories (such as craftsmen and industrial workers) have also been studied a great deal. The fundamental problems of the middle-class culture, however, have not been tackled at all. The book by Damgaard and Moustgaard, mentioned previously, represents an interesting first step into a virtually untouched field of investigation. While the physical milieu of the middle-class in prior times has heretofore been thoroughly described from an aesthetic point of view, the patterns of life, the norms of living, the everyday ideas, and the interaction structures of this class, has remained uninvestigated.

It is doubtful whether social anthropology, with its less idiographic aims will regard it as meaningful to study the thin stratum of the middle-class during the 18th or 19th century. Research findings in such an area, however, will provide an understanding of the content of working class culture, because the middle-class has been, to such a great extent, the model for the working class in its ritual and symbolic behavior.

Compared to the nomothetic ambition of social anthropology, the purpose of European ethnology is idiographic, which implies a description of the varieties of cultural life in Sweden, with only secondary interest in the explanation of local culture and sub-culture. For these reasons, theoretical concerns in the Ethnological field will probably remain of secondary importance. It is also clear, however, that the rich historical sources offer good possibilities to make cross-cultural comparisons along the time axis and then, in turn, may be fruitful for general theory building within human studies.

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