National Schools of European Ethnology and the Question of "Latent Ethnicity"

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In 1984, French and German ethnologists convened in Bad Homburg, to discuss the specificities of their research traditions. They came to the insight that beneath the level of differences in the scientific discourse, there are wast domains of cultural differences, diverging habits and emotional dispositions. These are summed up by the author as "latent ethnicity".

We might point out differences among national ethnologies on the level of "intellectual style" (different ways of theory-formation and argumentation, diverse routines and ethics of scientific discourse etc.) fand on the level of conceptualization and terminology. For the latter, Norbert Elias' explication of the different social background and significance of French *civilisation* and German *Kultur* is a classic example. A third kind of differences are caused by different pasts, and the diverging working up of the past.

To avoid misunderstanding among ethnologists, a careful examination of cultural backgrounds, positions and intentions is suggested. European ethnology of the future can be imagined as a "network of perspectives", in which every national or regional group can make conscious use of its cultural specificity.

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The problem

Recent analyses of ethnographic description and fieldwork stressed the immense role of the researcher's own cultural background, personality, autobiographical position etc. in his/her understanding of a foreign culture. Less stress was laid on the impact of the more or less similar "ethnic" or "national" cultural baggages in the case of ethnographers coming from the same national society. Europe, with its many national societies distinct languages and cultural traditions, is an excellent testing ground to explore the impact of individual home-societies on groups of "European ethnologists" who mostly study their compatriots. What is the effect of the membership in French or German society on a French or German ethnologist – in this case without consideration of differences in their scholarly traditions and scientific conditioning? Are there differences at all?

The question is a real one. In 1984 French and German ethnologists convened in Bad Homburg to discuss the specificities of their research traditions and practices. The two organisers, Isac Chiva and Utz Jeggle published the papers in parallel French and German editions (Chiva & Jeggle eds 1987a, 1987b). In the German volume, Utz Jeggle summed up the lessons of the meeting in retrospect in the following way: "Two strangers met. They did not remove their veil (cover, wrapping = Hülle), they remained strangers, but now they are aware of their mutual strangeness and that is the beginning of trust" (Chiva & Jeggle 1987a:11). Jeggle's statement indicates that beneath the level of scientific discourse, he noticed the existence of a vast domain of cultural differences, diverging habits and emotional dispositions. During the debates, these "rear territories" or deep layers could have been only partially explored. For example French and German ethnologists established that the line between "rational" and "irrational", conscious and subconscious, is drawn differently in France and in Germany – but they could not go further. Jeggle seems to

assume the existence of two disparate "subconscious" in the French and German ethnological thinking. This allusion is expressed on the cover of the German book by a reproduction of a painting by Magritte (Les amants), clearly a projection of a childhood trauma of the artist.

What Jeggle calls mutual strangeness in French and German scholars is labelled by me as "latent ethnicity". I used the term in the sense of Michael Fischer: "Ethnicity is a part of the self that is often quite puzzling to the individual, something over which he or she is not in control" (Fischer 1986:173).

On the French side, it was Britta Rupp-Eisenreich, an ethnologist born in Austria and living in Paris, who compared the German and French lectures (Rupp-Eisenreich 1988). She observed that the lecturers had chosen their subject matter in different ways; French scholars pointed at the crucial theoretical issues of current ethnographic studies, whereas their German colleagues presented certain domains of study and constructed their well-documented argumentation carefully considering the pre-history of the discipline as well. The French

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author was impressed by the fact that Germans should see the past of their own discipline so differently from the way it would appear to be from Paris. Germans perceived certain endeavours to be leading towards a fatal misdeed (national socialism) of the recent past, while the analogous initiatives in France had developed into productive approaches of the social sciences.

There is no doubt that the Bad Homburg conference was a big step forward, perhaps a break-through toward systematic intercultural communication and cooperation in European ethnology. The conference helped to conceptualize the tasks and difficulties of an intercultural scientific dialogue. In the following, I take the French-German meeting as a starting point in my search for the hidden ethnic aspects of current ethnological research in Europe.

Intellectual styles, languages, words and concepts

The Bad Homburg conference offers at least three levels on which disparity between French and German opinions and attitudes could be assessed. One level is given (using a felicitous expression of Johan Galtung) in the dissimilar "intellectual style" of the two groups. Further differences can be revealed in the conceptualization of social and cultural reality, in other words, on the level of language, terminology, concepts. As a third level, we might point to the imprint of different historic pasts on the scholars, belonging to two societies.

Johan Galtung contrasted the "intellectual styles" of Americans and British, Germans, French and Japanese back in 1981. He also observed "how little awareness the members of one intellectual community seem to have of the peculiarities of their community" (Galtung 1981:817). The four styles, which he calls Saxonic, Teutonic, Gallic and Nipponic, have different structures of scientific argumentation, different ways of theory-formation and discussion, diverse routines and ethics of scientific discourse. For example, he compared German scientific works to pyramids, because they present the results of the research on the top of carefully arranged data. He used the simile of the ham-

mock to describe French scientific argumentation on account of it creating a relationship between two theoretical positions (two poles) in an elegant and graceful way. Galtung presented his observations slightly ironically and he also noted that not every individual fits the general pattern of his or her linguistic-cultural community, although this pattern usually prevails. The same intellectual styles appeared in the culturally dominated territories of these countries as well. If you drive along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, you pass through alternating territories of the Saxonic and Gallic intellectual styles (Galtung 1981:820). Perhaps you can make a similar observation travelling along the Danube, concerning the alternation of territories exposed to the influence of Teutonic or Gallic ways of thinking.

For diverging French and German conceptualizations, Norbert Elias presented the classical example in 1939, in the case of French *civilization* and German *Kultur*. Elias shows that the diverging intellectual tendencies are linked to different structures and histories of the two societies. At the same time, he draws our attention to the immense significance of language: there are thoughts you can express in one language and not in the other. "A peculiar phenomenon: Words like the English and French 'civilization' or the German 'Kultur' appear completely clear in the internal usage of the society to which they belong. But the way in which a piece of the world is bound up in them, the manner in which they include certain areas and exclude others as a matter of course, the hidden evaluations which they implicitly bring with them, all this makes them difficult to define for any outsider" (Elias 1978:4).

The divergent historical development of French and German societies underlies this phenomenon. The special role of the word "civilization" in France was connected to the careful elaboration of the forms of social intercourse and behaviour. The royal court exerted its influence not only on the aristocracy but on the middle layers of society as well. "Both the courtly bourgeoisie and the courtly aristocracy spoke the same language, read the same books, and had, with particular gradations, the same manners. And when the social and economic dispro-portionalities burst the institutional framework of the ancien régime, when the bourgeoisie became a nation, much of what had been the specific and distinctive social character of the courtly aristocracy and then also of the courtly-bourgeois groups, in an ever-widening movement and doubtless with some modification, became the national character. Stylistic conventions, the forms of social intercourse, affect-molding, esteem for courtesy, the importance of good speech and conversation, articulateness of language and much else – all this is first formed in France within courtly society, then slowly changed, in a continuous diffusion, from a social into a national character" (Elias 1978:36–37).

The situation was different in Germany. The middle layers of society had no opportunity to learn courtly manners or to get close to power. In Germany there was no aristocracy and court cultivating the domestic German culture: the courts of kings, princes and aristocrats followed French models. This is how German anti-French national feelings, which referred to German virtues as against foreign "artificiality" and "superficiality", may have developed. In Germany the attributes and moral values of the "inner person" were stressed as opposed to sophisticated outward-oriented politesse.

According to Elias, it was the middle layers aspiring to ascend, the bourgeoisie, that elaborated the notion of *civilization* in France and the concept of *Kultur* in Germany. The initial social overtone of the *Kultur*-concept in Germany was intended against the courtly aristocracy living in a French-style civilization, and later it got a more and more national significance. In Elias's words, the real difference in the ways of thinking about society and culture was due to the fact that the French and British had no trouble with their own identities – they lived in expanding cultures, in colonizing countries (in the 18th and 19th centuries) – while Germans did have problems in creating a German identity and self-esteem. This circumstance endowed the German concepts of *Kultur* and *Volk* with a strong emotional content.

Understanding and misunderstanding

These words are still in use and can still be misunderstood. In the interwar period and earlier, German national ethnographers wrote about *Volkskultur*, with *Kultur* being the ethnically defined culture mentioned above (cf. Bleicher 1990) and *Volk*, apart from referring to peasants, carried the connotation that peasants embodied the national substance. After World War II, German ethnographers in a prolonged battle exterminated this term from scientific discourse (cf. Bausinger n.d., Kaschuba 1988). In England and France the subject (i.e. the cultural manifestations of the "common people") was called *popular culture*. In this expression culture was not ethnically defined and popular did not refer to a specific social group, but it denoted the vulgar or vernacular variants of texts, objects, behaviour patterns as opposed to the variants classified as belonging to the elite culture, high culture (cf. Burke 1978, Williams 1983:87–93, 236–238, Bourdieu 1991). The two terms entailed dissimilar research strategies. In the case of *Volkskultur* (a similar term was used in Hungary as well), social boundaries were taken for granted and the subject of research was to identify how certain elements of culture "descended" to the peasants or "ascended" to the bourgeoisie and the nobles. Much research was invested in tracing the spread and the genealogy of individual cultural traits. On the other hand, the study of *popular culture* was based on the concept of a stable, enduring stratification of culture and the leading narrative was the story of how members of the upper social strata to reform or eliminate vulgar cultural forms, how the common people resisted the reforms and defended their old manners and beliefs. Much later, the educated people returned to the villagers to explore their folklore (Hofer 1994). In the 1970's, German publishers took over the successful English and French books about *popular culture*, but they translated the term as *Volkskultur* (cf. Bausinger 1985). This changed the old meaning of the German term and caused misunderstanding among scholars. Later the meaning of the two terms started to converge.[1]

In every case of translating a text from one language into another, there is a danger of "A structural misunderstanding". We might have the impression that this danger is especially great in the case of some authors whose texts are firmly embedded into their linguistic and cultural background. This seems to be the case with Pierre Bourdieu. He is acutely aware of his Frenchness and tries to avoid with exceptional care any misunderstanding when he is speaking or presenting a text to a foreign audience (e.g. Bourdieu 1990:VII–IX, 106–119, Wacquant 1993). "Texts, as we know, circulate without their contexts, that is, without the benefit of being accompanied by everything they owe to the social space within which they have been produced or, more precisely, to the space of possibilities (in this case, scientific) in relation to which they constructed themselves. It follows that the categories of perception and interpretation that readers apply to them, being themselves linked to a field of production subject to different traditions, have every chance of being more or less inadequate" (Bourdieu 1993:263).

The attempt to protect a text from being misunderstood, or in Bourdieu's case, from being "peculiarly French" may have the effect that "the desire to 'twist the stick in the other direction' " drives one into exaggerations, and the text "can be negatively 'influenced', influenced *a contrario*, if we may say, and bear the marks of what one fights against" (Bourdieu 1990:106). Bourdieu mentions elsewhere (Bourdieu 1993:269) that he took over the metaphor "twist the stick in the other direction" from Mao. Conserving a disposition in a reversed form does not appear to be exceptional. Its occurrence is a strong proof of the tenacity of some national (ethnic) dispositions in scientific research.

Johannes Fabian has recently warned against the dangers of misunderstanding or non-understanding during fieldwork (Fabian 1995). He cited an example from his own African research of the difficulties that can arise from misunderstanding metalanguage. This mistake is similar to the situation when one does not recognize irony or parody. This type of misunderstanding (instances of assuming intentions or metatexts which do not exist in

reality or of not understanding the ones which are there) cannot be excluded in the case of interaction between different academic traditions, either. Think of the culturally determined differences in the conventions of style or in the sense of humour, which may interfere with understanding scientific texts as well.

We might raise the question, however: are misunderstandings necessarily harmful? Do we have to prevent the modification of a scientific result when transferred into the context of another academic community, into a foreign way of thinking, into another language? Pierre Bourdieu mentions that Heidegger transferred into French is different from the original German Heidegger. And another example from the States: "the transatlantic mutation of Foucault demonstrates this even better ... the Foucault constructed by American scholars ... is virtually a different author from the French (or European) Foucault" (Wacquant 1993:254). However, we might ask the question whether it is really so bad that there are two Foucaults? Maybe it is possible to regard diverging interpretations which originate from the various academic communities as commentaries on the original one.

History and ethnology: the German case

In 1993, Isac Chiva in the introduction to the French edition of Hermann Bausinger's *Volkskunde* wrote about the "epistemological rupture" and "conceptual difficulties" involved in the passage over the German-French linguistic border (Chiva 1993:VII–VIII). This observation is valid for other borders between other languages, too. Nevertheless it is conspicuous that the crossing of the German border in ethnology was somehow more difficult than other crossings. The original, innovative books of the new Tübingen school of Hermann Bausinger remained for long without any translation into non-German languages. Bausinger announced a total break with the old ethnocentric, epistemologically ill-founded German ethnology and with its nationalist ideology (which easily could have been integrated into national socialism). The work in Tübingen maintained consequently its critical stand against the nationalist heritage. Researchers avoided any sign of identification with the old German ethnology, but just this steadiness might have produced sometimes the "twisting the stick in the other direction" effect described by Bourdieu.[2]

Recently, Jonathan Benthall and John Knight were surprised to find that German conservative historians who, in arguing (in the debate about the Holocaust) that "the new generation should not have to bear the guilt of earlier generations", were in effect repudiating the nation as a continuous historical entity. It was those on the left (such as Jürgen Habermas) who found themselves defending 'the nation', by arguing that historical responsibility should not be so easily renounced. Here the nation as an historically continuous entity is seen to play a progressive role as a unit of social accountability, and nationalist dangers are associated with the denial of this sense of the nation" (Benthall and Knight, 1993:2). Expressed in a simplified way, the British authors found that the "sense" of the nation in Germany (among progressive intellectuals) differs considerably from the sense of the nation in Britain or in international usage. The difference reflects the impact of differing pasts, more precisely, especially in the German case, of stratified sediments from a sequence of pasts. The continuity through history was assured partly *a contrario* by negation of the previous period. The historians' demand for retaining the guilt-feeling about the nation recompenses a period of exessive, unrestained nationalism.

Perhaps it is justified to cite here Louis Dumont's observation about continuities in German ideology. From the second half of the 18th century on, he saw a continuous process "of *Steigerung*, intensification, or outbidding-the-last-bidder" among German philosophers, in the sphere of ideology, that is to say according to his terminology, in the "core" of the culture (Dumont 1989, 1994). The philosophers competed in intellectual excellence. In an era when demystification and criticism are the main trends, the same spirit of competition and *Steigerung* might stimulate German thinkers to stress self-criticism and guilt-feeling.

Praise of diversity

What is then the lesson of the diversity of European ethnological and anthropological traditions and the problems of interpretation? One lesson could be that just as we (or at least some of us) are aware of there being separate Swedish, Danish or Hungarian literatures, or Czech and Polish film-making, we should be aware of the existence of the national varieties of anthropology/ethnography. Another lesson is that the discussions between scholars belonging to different national societies and academic communities do not take place on a neutral, international, theoretical level, but they are examples of culture contact. *Mutatis mutandis*, these discussions require techniques of interpretation similar to those applied when anthropologists are trying to understand their exotic or European informants. We are back to Pierre Bourdieu's suggestion mentioned earlier, that scientific statements made in another language, in another social and academic context require sociogenetic interpretation (Bourdieu 1993). I would add that it would be a great help in solving this task if there were comprehensive and comparative works on the history of European ethnography and anthropology similar to the volumes published by George W. Stocking Jr., on the history of anthropology.[3]

In what social units can we search for ethnic colouring in the work of anthropologists or ethnologists? Michael Fischer calls to our attention the role of ethnic/cultural/religious subgroups and minorities in society. "Among the most sensitive and best anthropological works are those that bring personal engagements of this sort into play, usually however only as a subtext, never highlighted or explicitly acknowledged". – "Lévi-Strauss' work on American Indian mythologies might be understood as an act of atonement for a world destroyed" – it might be put into relation to his Jewish origin (Fischer 1986:175–176, cf. Damrosch 1995). According to Fischer, there is an advantage on the side of researchers in a minority position (or with the memory of ancestors in minority status). "It has been noted that many of the nineteenth-century Western scholars of Islam were Jews using Islam as a proxy in working out their own dilemmas vis-a-vis Christianity" (Fischer 1986:175).

On the other hand, from a global perspective, Europe appears as a limited segment of the world. We might take into account the emergence of new, non-Western native anthropologies in Asia, Africa, in former Third World countries. How is it possible to construct alternative theories of society, of human behaviour, based on Indian or African systems of thinking? (cf. Mudimbe 1988, Chatterjee 1993.) What will be the place of Western social science in a really global world of learning? In 1978, the publication of Edward Said's book *Orientalism* caused a real shock among social scientists. Said argued that European scholars elaborated their own images about Arab peoples, based on Western presuppositions, and hindered the development of the self-esteem and real self-knowledge of these nations by projecting Western-made conceptions on them.

James G. Carrier called attention to the other side of the coin, in a collection of essays on "Occidentalism" (Carrier 1995). The book deals with the self-perception of Western scholars, with their (sometimes unconscious) "Western essentialism" – on the other hand, with the non-European (sometimes mythical) "Images of the West". From a Hungarian point of view it is easy to see the relativity of these summary categorizations. Hungarians consider themselves to be Europeans, Westerners. Nevertheless, they have often doubts about their full-fledged membership in the "Western World". They can identify themselves with Carrier's Occident and also with Said's Orient – like the Greek, described by Michael Herzfeld (Herzfeld 1995, Hofer 1991).

Orientalism and Occidentalism are reflections of international, intercontinental distribution of power. Differences in size, political and economic power create hierarchical relations between Western societies as well, and the differences exert influence on a mutual understanding. The size and wealth of national societies is in correlation to the size and differentiation of the native community of scientists. "It seems that the map of ... anthropology shows a prosperous mainland of British, American and French anthropologies, and outside it an archipelago of large and small islands – some of them

connected to the mainland by sturdy bridges or frequent ferry traffic, others rather isolated" (Gerholm and Hannerz 1982:6). Size and weight influence mutual perception and understanding. "On the mainland, people can go through their professional lives more or less unaware of what happens on the islands."

As an illustration Loic J.D. Wacquant called attention to a peculiar American danger of misinterpretation: "American intellectual myopia functions in a fashion opposite to that of smaller national sociologies, such as Scandinavian or Dutch sociology; for whereas the latter cannot ignore American Social Science and can even be blinded by it to the point where they cannot see themselves, U. S. Sociology typically experiences difficulty seeing others due to its propensity to project itself everywhere it looks" (Wacquant 1993:251).

The aim of this paper was to call attention to a relatively neglected problem-area. Through systematic exploration of the "ethnic" or "national" differences of European ethnologies it seems to be possible to proceed toward a new comparative history of science and toward a kind of comparative epistemology, comparative hermeneutics. European ethnology of the future can perhaps be imagined as a "network of perspectives" (cf. Hannerz 1992:62–99) in which every national, regional group can make conscious use of its cultural specificity. The French and the German ethnologists wanted to use each other's "strangeness" as a mirror for a better self-understanding. Of course, this is not a specifically German and French issue. Rather, members of other "ethnic" scientific communities can also use comparison with foreign communities to improve their self-understanding.

Notes

1. It is appropriate to call to mind here that the Ethnologia Europaea Conference in 1983, in Mátrafüred discussed the conceptual problems related to *popular culture* as well as the relation between historical anthropology and ethnology (cf. Burke 1984, Brückner 1984, Köstlin 1984, further: Hofer 1994).

2. There is no place here to enter into details about the recent history of German ethnology. The school associated with Tübingen developped a new field of research called "empirical cultural studies" (empirische Kulturforschung). Many brilliant critical studies were published, and a host of phenomena of contempory social and cultural life were newly thematized. When in the 1970's traditional ethnology in many parts of Europe moved closer to the social sciences and established new contacts with (mostly English speaking) anthropologists, the German ethnologists were already immersed into their own critical revolution and were constructing their own new theoretical research frame, mostly of home-made materials. The original impetus for the German reform (or revolution) in ethnology came from a negation of German nationalism. Because of the succes of the reform-movement, however, contemporary "new ethnology" in Germany is making less use of "international" anthropological inspirations than most other European countries.
(In 1991, an international conference was held in Hohentübingen castle, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the publication of Bausinger's "Volkskultur in der technischen Welt" in 1961, an important manifesto of the new trend in German ethnology. I lectured on the specific "Germanness" of the work of Hermann Bausinger. My text acknowledged the moral and scientific courage manifest in the critical break with the German past – on the other hand, it pointed out difficulties of non-Germans in following Bausinger's trains of thought.)

3. The most recent addition to the series (Stocking 1996) is especially close to our theme: it analyses the upbringing and personality of Franz Boas, including the influence of his German family, and the role of the *Kultur* and *Volksgeist* ideology of Bismarckian Germany.

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