

Reconstructing, Understanding and Inventing Past Cultures

The Complex Dialogue between French Ethnology and History

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The purpose of this paper is to present a short account of the inter-disciplinary relationships between history and the ethnology of France. This account is set within the larger framework of anthropology and tries to show, at the light of recent French research, what separates and what unites both views when tackling the same topics, such as death or kinship and inheritance practices. While the present-day situation in France is characterized again by the drifting apart of both disciplines, the paper, to conclude, examines briefly the situation in other European anthropologies and shows some striking discrepancies, notably between the German and the French traditions.

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Many recent books deal with the identities of Europe, European ethnologies and the possibilities and conditions for a real ethnology of Europe, with Europe treated as a unit (Goddard, Llobera and Shore 1994; MacDonald 1993; Vermeulen and Roldán 1995). Different stories of European ethnologies are only starting to be told, the consequences of which can be found in the variety of topics studied and their various theoretical orientations: local-regional versus national, structure versus culture etc. (Schipper 1995). Among these discrepant features, one must set first and foremost the relationships between history and ethnology which explain in particular some of the difficulties of an international dialogue, carrying unconsciously the weight of different traditions and institutional positions. This latter dimension has to be taken seriously to understand the ambiguous relationships between the discipline of history and that of ethnology whose main interests rest here and now.

For a history of the relationships between history and ethnology

History against ethnology¹

History is at once the unrolling of time and the science of this unrolling. Before it even began as a scientific discipline, history had a major influence in the constitution of our nationstate, as the historian was the scribe of the political power. It emerged as an established discipline officially taught in schools and at universities at the start of the XVIIIth century. In comparison, of course, European ethnology (mainly meaning French ethnology) seems to be a new born; there never were Folklore chairs in France before the Second World War and if social anthropology chairs were opened in the university chairs in the sixties² (where professors are mostly specialists of some distant tribes), professors in European ethnology can be counted on the fingers of one hand, when they don't belong to Sociology departments. We must be constantly aware of this crucial institutional lack of balance when evaluating the cross impact of disciplines. This situation has not been corrected

nowadays as historians are probably today ten times more numerous than ethnologists. This explains in part why ethnology in general, and European ethnology, in particular, in its efforts to establish itself as a scientific discipline, claimed it was a-historical.

Let us set briefly the situation of European ethnology within the larger frame of Social anthropology. Founding fathers of modern social anthropology were a-historicists as the societies they studied seemed to be motionless, compared with the rapid changes of the western world. For instance, African societies, which were the research laboratory of English social anthropology and the French school of Africanism lacked historical sources, and gave an image of a-temporality.

At the end of the 19th century and during the 1930s, folklorists, for their part, often adopted a regressive position, looking for traces of a (glorious) Celtic past in customs and monuments. In his effort to establish folklore as a scientific discipline, Van Gennep rejected these historical quests for the origins. Besides the historical method of those times consisted often of a search for consecutive facts. Van Gennep, throughout his works and mainly the *Manuel de folklore français contemporain*, constantly opposed ethnology (folklore then) and history as two opposed methods, one dealing with live and contemporary social facts, the other with dead facts. If in the 1930s, Van Gennep did admit that ethnology needs some historical dimension, it is only because it helps to shed light on contemporary social facts. In opposition with history and in dialogue with the school of human geography, Van Gennep developed the method of localized facts which led him to the specific concept of "pays" substituting an anchoring in space to an anchoring of facts in history. However, at the same time, in the 1930s, historical approaches and methods greatly changed with Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel and the development of l'Ecole des Annales.

Later in the century, Lévi-Strauss, studying amazonian societies, emphasized the a-historical arguments of his English colleagues. A second period of distancing between history and ethnology then took place in the 1970s, with the

ephemeral quarrel opposing structure and history. It would be more accurate to say here "social anthropology" as these arguments, revolving mainly around Claude Lévi-Strauss' works, dealt with non-European ways and myths. His views of treating "cold" and "warm" societies as opposite are well-known. Structure is a-historical inasmuch as it is inspired by the methods of Linguistics. The structure the social anthropologist will discover is a configuration revealed by analysis and serving mainly as an intellectual tool. Paradoxically, if structural analysis has had little effect on French ethnology as dealing with French society, it was imported by history, mainly medieval history. The Middle Ages was a major field for French structural history, as this period offered a model of society comparable to primitive ones, where time unrolled slowly, and under the influence of religious beliefs. The other field was the study of Ancient worlds.

But it should be noted also that the a-historicism of social anthropology, whether it be linked to functionalism or structuralism always went together with an interest in past societies. Evolutionism was an attempt to organize the diversity of societies on a historical scale, and Morgan, and Maine discussed for instance the Roman social organization as comparative materials.

Ethnology inspires history

What was new in the 1960s was that historians abandoned their traditional fields of interest for the very themes ethnology seemed to specialize in: many concepts and tools used by the ethnologist have greatly influenced the branch of the Annales school known as *Histoire des mentalités*.

The Annales school opens the way for a history caught by bulimia: all facets of the social become historical. Turning away from the study of major national events (battles, political regimes), of the State and its rulers, history, through statistical analysis, discovered the common people, everyday life, material culture, but also cultural and cognitive categories. When Lévy-Bruhl dealt with "la mentalité primitive dans les sociétés inférieures", "mentalités" then meant something like "worldviews", and was

always attached to primitive people, whereas, we, as developed nations, enjoyed a civilization. When Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre used this word, it carried quite a different meaning: it referred to the bulk of cultural meanings that participate in the complex and moving network of social facts, in constant interaction. Bloch's goal was evidently to reconstruct a social process from the emic perspective and to add a sociological twist as he was interested in the various social strata of a group. Besides "mentalité", Lucien Febvre will use the term "outil-lage mental" of a certain time period, meaning the bulk of cognitive categories that shape individual and collective experiences. Both scholars have thus paved the way for a historical anthropology or rather an anthropological history that attempts to unite the individual and the collective, a history bringing together various fields of interests, social, cultural, economic etc., around a group or a period of time.

From these revolutionary views evolved the great works of Marc Bloch dealing with the variety of French agrarian systems (in dialogue with the well-famed French school of human geography between the two World Wars) which he links with social factors: for instance the opposition between Northern communal mentality associated with collective crop rotation and the Southern open and irregular fields associated with a more individualistic view of life. Marc Bloch's other major work, devoted to the healing power of kings, sweeps history into the realms of rituals, magic, beliefs and superstitions, where he makes wide use of Sir James Frazer's works. Not only are the themes anthropological, but so are the materials used, as Marc Bloch has recourse to the folklorists' sources, popular legends and beliefs related to popular saints.

In the 1970s and 80s, a triumphant "histoire des mentalités" developed whose success resided precisely in its vagueness. Discovering new archival sources, historians built new research objects: religion, death, fear, violence, cognitive attitudes etc. But French historians have endeavoured less to reconstruct the interrelations in a social, regional, local community than to deal with a particular theme in a specific area.

The cross fertilization between history and

ethnology has been most effective and well balanced in the field of rituals and kinship. Let us recall the important conferences that took place in the 70s on the charivari, on kinship etc..where confrontations between historians and anthropologists allowed the changes of forms and meanings to be followed over vast territories and long periods of time.

Ethnology and history: the field proof?

In his 1961 Manchester lecture, Evans-Pritchard asserted that the fact that the social anthropologist brings first-hand facts from his field-work, while the historian gathers his material through his archival sources, is a technical, not a methodological difference.

Since then, a double movement has been observed; one acknowledges that beyond Western societies, social anthropology also deals with complex societies structured around State, with centralized and hierarchical institutions, sometimes displaying a very elaborate written culture, carrying the weight of a rich past. History, for its part, as we have seen, has departed from the chronological study of Kingdoms and political power to turn to mentalities and symbols. Instead of the biography of a sovereign, or the study of elites, historical research encompasses masses, popular cultures and aspects of collective life. First, research themes are now bringing history and ethnology together, whereas they used to separate them. Second, interpretative models do not differ significantly: history now imports comparative or structural approaches, whereas ethnologists now have recourse to a synchronic dimension. On the other hand, no social anthropologist or ethnologist would deprive himself of the historical dimension which helps shed light on the contemporary situation.

The basic difference would thus seem to lie in the differences in the sources, – archival sources for the historian, field-work for the anthropologist. On the one hand we would have written sources against oral ones, a closed series of documents as against an infinite possibility of observation, a mediated approach to beliefs and behaviours, always read through the prism of the source's nature and origin as opposed to the

illusion of the direct contact with the informant and direct access to the social things.

At the times of the Evans-Pritchard's statement, Lévi-Strauss was also attenuating the strong division between disciplines as he remarked that "the social anthropologist is especially interested in what is not written, not because the people he studies are unable to write, but, because what he is interested in differs from all that men usually think to record on stone or paper" (1958).

Following Evans-Pritchard's position, Gérard Lenclud (1994) also questions the different nature of historical and ethnological data. What is the epistemological difference between information retrieved from archival data, which is an image produced by a society of the past, and the image, captured by our observation or enquiries, of a present-day society. In the latter case, we have long forsaken the illusion of objectivity and totality. In the same way, archival data come to life and take on a meaning only after we address them with the right questions. Ethnographers, for their part, know that they see only what they choose to see, and even then, do not always achieve their goal. One must therefore abandon the idea that archives screen reality, whereas fieldwork opens an immediate access to the other.

If history and ethnology are one and the same, then what should be the place assigned to "oral history"? The idea is that those surveys would help build the memory of facts that have not been registered in official documents, – such as revolts and resistances –, the memory of persecuted groups who left no written traces; that it is a way to give people deprived of this right an opportunity to speak. Yet, the oral history movement is rather ambiguous, and no better does it attain some kind of truth; it leads to scrutinizing the conditions under which the written document stemming from the oral procedure has been produced.

Whatever their convergence, a historical work always differs from an ethnological one. Even though historians are anxious to borrow their theoretical references from social anthropology, not only do spatial and temporal dimensions differ widely, but also the way questions are addressed. Let us take some characteristic ex-

amples of what appears to be rather irreducible domains, in spite of the interdisciplinary dialogue they must entertain. In the 1980s a host of works on social aspects of death was published. This is where the theme of "mentalités" was put to use by Philippe Ariès (1977) when he observed that attitudes towards death were marked by very slow changes; after toying with all kinds of explanations, he ascribed them to "something situated in the collective unconscious", and referred to "sensibility changes", when discussing the transition from closeness with death (early centuries) to distance with and horror of death (18th, 19th, 20th centuries). Michel Vovelle, another eminent specialist of these questions, will criticize the use of the concept of collective unconscious, which, he argues, is used by Ariès neither in a psychoanalytic sense, nor as an anthropologist would, precisely because of the nature of the sources Ariès uses, and because he takes into consideration neither the social and demographical aspects of death nor the ideological discourse, stemming from religious prescriptions (1983). Thus the historical concept of collective unconscious seems to be detached, imaginary and floating, autonomous. Vovelle – in a more anthropological way – seeks connections between changes both in the imaginary and in the material conditions, scrutinizes how world views are rooted in wars, plagues, socio-economic changes in society etc., endeavours to understand the interconnections of various elements producing attitudes and beliefs towards death, and differentiating these attitudes and beliefs according to social groups.

If I now refer to the study of death in an area which has been identified by its specific attitudes towards death, Lower Brittany, the anthropological historian will reveal the system of death, with the Church at the parish center, and at the heart of social practices: belonging to a specific parish structures the identity process, the "pays" landscape is marked by signs of religious affiliations, such as chapels and crosses, the sonorous space is also structured by the ringing of church bells. Priests speak Breton and preach in Breton. Death is quite familiar, constantly present with the devil and the ghost souls. Religious monuments, reliquaries and

ossuaries testify to this rich culture of death which mixes pre-Christian and Christian beliefs and attitudes (Alain Croix, 1981).

The ethnologist nowadays studying death in Brittany must first question the construction of the image of Lower Brittany as the land where a specific culture of death is supposed to prevail. Ellen Badone (1989) shows that this image participates, – together with the “petit breton” of Quimper crockeries –, in the process of elaboration by local elites, in the 1880s, of a specific identity, at the very same time Brittany was opening to the outside world, through industry and tourism. Contrary to Ariès who offers an evolutionist scheme, she claims that various attitudes can nowadays be encountered vis-à-vis death, and that these differences stand as answers to various social and cultural changes in Brittany; for instance she evaluates to what extent supernatural and secular practices are separated by a form of disenchantment of the world. The ethnological query is to understand death here and now, by confronting it with past practices and past representations, and to try to build the local system of practices and representations. Ethnologists often depart from the themes historians are obsessed with (changes occurring over such or such period of time which are assessed to a vague change in sensibilities), but rather explore specific topics like the role of fluids in death: in Brittany, for instance the corpse is considered dry, as opposed to alcohol which unites the living, and the holy water which is a reminder of death and baptism.

To summarize our argument, the fundamental contrast between historical and anthropological analysis rests in the queries addressed to the material gathered (but of course, entails the collecting of the “proper” material to answer them). For instance Jack Goody and Cesare Poppi (1994) start from an obvious, minute observation: why so many fresh flowers in Italian cemeteries, why so few in Anglo-Saxon ones, and their analysis lead them to shun the grand historical categories of secularization, mentalities or cultures. Interpreting the differences in flowering practices induces the analysis of a number of inter-related factors, ideology, material constraints and legal regulations regarding cemeteries, vaults, burying practices etc.

Between history and ethnology

*Symbolic anthropology*¹

Since Van Gennep’s grand scheme of the rites of passage, ethnologists have tried to understand, next to large, complex and spectacular rituals, a mass of minor rituals in vary many aspects of life. The anthropologist will begin with an observation of this kind – why is it said that if the bells don’t ring at baptism the Christened child will remain dumb? (Giordana Charuty, 1985) – and then explore all the objects, gestures, beliefs, rituals, myths and legends etc. that relate either to baptism, bell ringing, tongue, language. In this research process, the ethnologist makes use of historical data in a very specific way, selected in various spatial and time dimensions, his goal being to help the meaning emerge.

Yvonne Verdier (1979) paved the way towards this new direction, when she remarked the semantic proximity of the word “marquer” that designates both the first needle-work apprenticeship and the way women refer to their monthly period; she also remarked that the “marquette” (sampler) was the name given to the canvas very subtly embroidered by young girls as they matured and became more expert at their needle-work. The lexical proximity that might sound preposterous is explained by the sociological fact that young girls were sent to the dress-maker where together with embroidery and needle-work, they would learn about sexuality and marriage. Thus the time spent in the burgh or the near-by small town stands for some kind of popular finishing school for rural young girls, the process of maturation ending when the young bride is dressed by the “couturière” on the morning of her wedding.

But whereas Yvonne Verdier kept her analysis within the limits of 19th century Burgundy, some daring researchers do not hesitate, in their pursuit of meaning, to place side by side folkloric facts, beliefs, customs or words that took place or were used in different times and spaces, thus rendering more fragile their construction. One could say that their use of history runs against all the rules of history, the basic one being the consecutive character of facts. The analysis put forth by Claudine Fabre-Vas-

sas (1994), a brilliant representative of this theoretical strand, takes us through time and space, from one ritual to another; for instance dealing with the testicle hernia treatment among young boys which call upon the blacksmith to proceed to a symbolical hammering, Fabre-Vassas embarks on a voyage towards other rituals (passing the ailing child through a cloven tree whose branches are tied together afterwards: when the tree is cured, so is the child), historical evidence of testicle surgery in the 17th and 18th centuries, etc. The pieces of this puzzle are brought together under the hypothesis of the symbolical proximity between young children and piglets, and is consonant with Lévi-Strauss' statement, that when dealing with rituals, "formalism annihilates the object": much greater attention should be devoted to ritual contents in their concrete aspects (1994, p. 71–72).

Kinship between history and ethnology

In the French tradition, because of Claude Lévi-Strauss' dominance, kinship studies have been the passport to establishing oneself as an ethnologist. This is strange enough if we refer to the lack of interest of the French school of ethnology before the Second World War, as compared to the English school of social anthropology whose structuro-functionalist positions focussed mainly on the study of (African) kinship systems. It was the everlasting influence of "Systèmes élémentaires de la parenté", – hinting however briefly at the possibility of discovering some regularities in European marriage patterns – that oriented researchers towards this topic.

This interest cohered and met with the development of historical demography. Seeking the causes for the babyboom of the 1950s and 60s, demographers realized they knew little about the vital patterns of the past, and looking for fertility, nuptiality and mortality trends, they discovered the family and the household. This brought them to investigate popular attitudes and beliefs related to sexuality, breastfeeding, gender roles, infant breeding and child-care etc., topics which were often dealt with in non-European societies.

Linked to marriage, a second major theme

emerged, initiated by the great divide drawn by John Hajnal regarding the difference between age at marriage and freedom in the choice of a mate in various societies of the world: roughly, it was only in European rural societies that people married late (as far as data could be provided, from the 16th or 17th centuries) and where the choice of a mate was, officially at least, free. In all other societies, males and females were married at very young ages, and married by their parents, clans, lineages etc. according to rules Lévi-Strauss had delineated. This is the "late European marriage pattern" which was investigated through the invention of new sources: religious and civil records, inventories, marriage contracts etc., but also new archival sources related to the Catholic church which, for centuries, regulated marriage practices¹ and forbade intermarriage between cousins, within various degrees of kin proximity.

A third interrelated theme appeared with the discussion of families versus households, and the diversity of property devolution systems throughout rural Europe. The most fruitful and inspiring international discussion involving social historians like Peter Laslett, a historian of the Annales school like Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and social anthropologists like Jack Goody paved the way for new researches at the cross-roads between history and ethnology. Under these cross-influences, the traditional village monograph, in which all topics of the "community" were dealt with (habitat, techniques, social life, festivals and beliefs etc.) disappeared, and a host of studies, in a comparative framework, was produced.

At last, this was a domain where European ethnologists were on par with social anthropologists. They could use the Rivers genealogical method, and with much better sources, since, beyond the oral genealogies that could be collected, they also had access to vital sources drawn, – at the price of strenuous efforts –, from archives. These genealogies could be informed by notarial records allowing the inheritance and devolution practices to be scrutinized. Cross-cutting very grossly Hajnal's geography, Jack Goody offers a dual pattern of devolution modes, one linked to non European societies where lineal devolution is the rule, another pertaining

to European rural societies which is called diverging devolution. But within this large framework, the variety of patterns (egalitarian/partible or inegalitarian/impartible) observed in rural Europe is quite striking.

Here is a field where history and ethnology have most successfully influenced one another. Should he belong to a history or anthropology department, the researcher produces a locally entrenched study, encompassing two or three centuries at the most, since he is limited by the range of vital and notarial records. Thus, contrary to symbolical anthropology, he makes legitimate use of historical data and produces a systematic description of kinship, property, agrarian systems, giving more or less space to socio-demographic constraints according to his specific interests and formation. Next to history and ethnology, other disciplines also joined on the topic of property devolution, such as social and historical demography (had they not appeared already much earlier, such as the juridical sciences). Most of them endeavour to organize the diversity of European devolution practices, by taking ground on the host of publications reconstructing the past cultures of kinship and family. On the one hand, historians and demographers such as Bernard Derouet (1989) or Pier Paolo Viazzo (1988) have emphasized the importance of the diachronic dimension in understanding the possible changes in inheritance patterns (for instance from multi-devolution to uni-devolution in Southern areas of France, from the 16th century to the 18th, from partible to impartible etc.), and consider the importance of exogenous factors such as migration in the continuation of impartible regimes (Martine Segalen and Georges Ravis-Giordani, 1994).

On the other hand and by contrast the work of an ethnologist like Georges Augustins (1990) is synchronic; he chooses his examples through time and space and dismisses the possible changes implied by technical innovation, or agrarian changes. His goal is to establish the few everlasting principles of devolutionary practices and he opposes the "house" principle to the "kindred" principle.

Whatever the kind of synthesis emerging from the diversity of these patterns, it is clear

that nowadays this is a firmly established topic, perhaps because, better than any other, it bridges anthropology and history. It is harnessed with such a legitimacy that the younger ethnologies of Southern European countries which have developed vigorously over the past twenty years have often used this path to enter the field.

The achieved example of inter-disciplinary mutual benefit is provided here again by Jack Goody (1983) in his work on the evolution of marriage and family in Europe. The field is deliberately historical since it deals with the first centuries of our European past, but the questions are anthropological: how did the Christian church manage to change the kinship rules of populations it came to convert? And what were the consequences of such a dramatic change?

Reconstructing the past: ethnology and "patrimoine" servicing local identities

As long as "patrimoine" can be defined as goods and assets, transmitted through generations, we are on the secure ground of family and kinship, in this legitimate field of research which has been very successful in French ethnology. But over the past fifteen years, another meaning of "patrimoine" has been prevailing, married with "ethnologique". This is part of a complex institutional power game between various ministries (a story which will not be told here), but it is clear that both French history and ethnology are now maintaining a complex and ambiguous relationship with the idea of "patrimoine ethnologique". Patrimony or better yet heritage was a qualificative used only to designate the monuments of our civilisation, testifying to the grandeur of the Nation, cathedrals, palaces and castles. In the 1980s, it extended to encompass all traces of social groups, whether material (vernacular architecture) or immaterial (beliefs, know-how etc.) (Isac Chiva, 1990). The course of its success is associated with that of museums and eco-museums (or so-called eco-museums) which opened by the hundreds all over France, and threatened to open wherever a workshop, a mine, a plant was closing down. The great novelty is that research is not the incentive for the work carried around

the closing site whose existence rather stems from a local will to keep alive, if not through economic activity, through something considered as pertaining to its identity as a testimony of the past. Thus those "patrimoine" objects stand first and foremost as symbols; those relics have been elevated to the honorable position of embodying past times, of showing the specific identity of such or such group, and of using the past they are laden with as a sign of continuity. This is the French version of the German development called by Wolfgang Kaschuba (this issue) the "historicization of the present" or the "processes of ethnification".

Ethnologists stand here in an ambiguous position, since, as professionals on the one hand, they are required to provide help to investigate the new monuments of this selected past, and on the other hand, to study the patrimony movement, scrutinize these specific views regarding the past, and the things of the past. As Appadurai (1981) has shown, some societies live in a world where there is no place for the past, where the present carries the past, whereas our contemporary (a better word than modern or post-modern) societies elaborate a complex discourse vis-à-vis the past: this past is not a whole, but a space for selection and competition, according to rules fixed as the outcome of political fights. As a result what bears the honour of being defined as "patrimoine" (whether it is a house, fountain, mine, object, song, even a landscape) is, so to speak, torn out of its context, detached from it, and constructed as an object that will embody the identity of a group. We definitely are conservative societies, but what changes is the historical references we are attached to. Instead of building our identities on the idea of nation or of fatherland ("patrie"), we prefer to use more local references rooted in the invented identity of a region.⁵

This is where the ethnologist, provided he is institutionally free to do it, has to understand the construction of the image of the past put forward by local authorities, from museums to politicians. For instance, Bernadette Bucher (1995) has recently shown that the Vendée area works hard at putting forth the image of a traditional backward country, catholic, right wing, for ever marked by its denial and fierce

rebellion against the Revolutionary Republic. This historical past is at best sketchy, if not totally inaccurate, the Vendée appearing as a versatile area which, prior to catholicism, embraced the reformed religion. The present, however, testifies to its dynamism where agriculture has been modernized and where the percentage of blue collar workers is superior to the number of hands engaged in farming. Yet the Vendée plays on its fake image of the past as it carries with it a specificity within Europe where the local is confronting the global.

This seems to be one of the relevant tasks of present day ethnology in France, where the "here and now" remain the key words through participant observation. One can only be in accordance with Kaschuba's conventions – though I would not claim it to be "history" – that we have shifted our focus from groups to individuals as builders of their culture, that these researches have to be set in a comparative perspective, and that we must use our imagination when dealing with our topics, not limiting ourselves to single sources or datas, and putting the inter-disciplinary approach within our research. At the end of the 20th century, French ethnology appears as a very dynamic discipline, dealing with a wide range of different topics.

As European ethnology asserts itself, history which was triumphantly declaring itself anthropological only twenty years ago, is again shifting its interests beyond the typical ethnological themes. So much with anthropological history, masses and mentalities. In the same way that ethnologists have moved from the group to the individual (Anthony Cohen, 1993), historians have moved towards single cases finely observed, notably through micro-history. The 18th congress of historical sciences held in Montreal⁶ in 1995 shows the renewed importance of political history, cultural studies and minority studies, the two latter fields being of course topics to be discussed between disciplines, on a rather equal par. If European ethnology and history now seem more separated than they have been over the past twenty years, at the risk of seeing one being engulfed by the other, the new themes of interest will necessarily re-unite them. Historians discuss the concepts of state and nation, a topic which they had

largely abandoned until the unfortunate contemporary events brought them back to the fore. They now seem to more or less shun the ethnological interpretation put forth by Eric Hobsbawm (1992) that the Nation belongs to the catalog of invented traditions and think that its study has to be reset within the frame of each specific ... history: nations building themselves as federations (Switzerland or Belgium), building themselves on a par with the natives (French monarchy in former Canada and native American Indians) together with the more centralized British or French versions.

These topics are consistent with the European ethnological quest of the “other” among ourselves, which has been dealt with very differently within our different countries, France being represented with a tradition of humanism and universalism which has difficulties dealing with the question of assimilation, the right to be different as opposed to the nationalization of the “other”.

Conclusion

However schematic, this exploration of the French relationships between history and ethnology appear to contrast sharply with a similar diachronic German presentation (Bock 1995, Kaschuba, this issue). It is clear that, beyond the question of language, since German and French often speak to one another through the mediation of English, the chronology of these relationships and the interpretations of their contents differ widely. To summarize, one can say that at the time when Germany was trying to build a historically coherent culture and put *Volkskunde* to use for this aim, French folklore developed in a very centralized country where regionalist movements were directed against French jacobinism; instead of searching for a French soul, folklorists were at pains to invent local or regional identities. When, in Germany, folklore was called upon as a science of legitimization of conservative values, in France, it was the “popular” aspect of culture that was set forth with the movement and the establishment of the Musée des “arts et traditions populaires” – founded under the Front populaire in 1937. Again the *Abschied von Volksleben* starts at the

onset of the Annales school, which is so present by contrast at the beginnings of a scientific ethnology in France and initiates an ever-going dialogue with ethnology. By contrast, in Germany, since historical anthropology is understood as a subjectivist or irrational approach, it was rejected as reminiscent of the misuse of *Volkskunde* – constantly referring to the irrational soul of the people – by National Socialism. Thus, there was a lack of interest in cultural anthropology among both ethnologists and social historians until ten years ago, when it was then booming in France (Bock: 202–205). And now that historical anthropology seems to recede in France, with a return to politics and narratives and that ethnology is – willy nilly – involved in the “patrimoine” movement, it seems to be growing in importance in Germany. Sweden presents another history of these complex relationships where influent scholars like Sigurd Erixon set the tone at the European level during decades, after which, ethnologists abandoned the study of material culture, and became interested in the cultural changes of their society, and produced influent works pertaining both to history and ethnology (Löfgren and Frykman 1987).

Nowadays, among French ethnologists, the use of historical data and the incorporation of historical perspectives do not raise any question, but the focus is still on the “here and now” of an ever-changing present; hence some of the misunderstandings in our European dialogue when the past seems to be the core of the material. The building of a European ethnology rests on the necessity of knowing one another better.

Notes

1. If everyone agrees on the definition of history, it is useful to remark that such is not the case for ethnology. It suffices to glance at the list of the participants’ affiliations to the Pécs conference and more generally to the authors of *Ethnologia Europaea* to be convinced of the diversities or even discrepancies housed by the word “Ethnology”. Conversely the same discipline or research techniques can be referred to as Study of folk culture, social anthropology etc.
2. Except for Marcel Griaule’s chair in 1943.

3. "Anthropologie symbolique" is currently used to refer to this specific strand of research, though of course, there are few topics that would be deprived of any symbolic dimension (as well as a technological one).
4. For instance, the "fonds d'officialités" or diocesan ecclesiastical courts which could regulate the request for marriage dispensations. In those archives, the researcher can find the reasons evoked by the fiancés considering a kin-tied marriage, the official reasons put forth (absence of dowry, smallness of the place) and sometimes guess the unofficial ones.
5. At least these trends are widely debated in France, where critics of the "patrimoine" movement are very vocal.
6. Nicolas Weill, "L'histoire s'est arrêtée à Montréal", *Le Monde*, 8 septembre 1995.

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