Linking the Local, the National and the Global

Past and Present Trends in European Ethnology

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The first part of the paper gives a historical overview of some ways in which the interest in the local, the national and the global has shifted European ethnology – mainly in Sweden – during this century, whereas the second part discusses current research strategies for linking these levels, exploring some possible ethnological contributions to the current debate on space, place and identity formations.

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The division of labour in Academia

We are sometimes misled into believing that there is a grand system behind the division of labour among the various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Yet most of these disciplines were created by chance conditions and political and cultural interests in the past. The making of European ethnology is a striking example of these processes. If we look at a map of Europe we will find a most uneven distribution of the discipline, and where it has been established it also has highly varying positions in the field of cultural studies and cultural history. With a grand simplification one can argue that European nations with strong colonial traditions tended to create a global kind of anthropology, whereas late or small colonial nations turned to discover "their primitives within", either in the form of folklore studies or as a more general cultural anthropology of the nation. It is this latter tradition which today is labelled "European ethnology". Folklore studies came to be integrated in this tradition or developed as a special discipline with an international and comparative orientation, but my focus in the following will be on the making and remaking of a European ethnological tradition. The emergence or non-emergence of this tradition in Europe also had to do with highly varying politics of nationalism. Seen in this light it is hardly surprising that a country like the Netherlands ended up with more anthropologists per square metre than any other European nation, but hardly any institutionalized academic tradition of either "European ethnology" or "folklore studies". On the other hand, a country like Finland during the same period acquired more folklorists per square metre than any other nation, but was rather late in developing social anthropology as a formal academic discipline. Here the making of a folkloristic national heritage profoundly shaped the academic landscape, whereas in Denmark archaeology took the position of "the national science" at an early stage. In countries like Sweden and Germany a more general ethnological study of the national heritage produced departments of European ethnology.

Unlike European ethnology, social anthropology emerged rather late in Scandinavia. It lacked the support of a network of both central and regional museums as well as the moral support of cultural nationalism.

Although general anthropology and European ethnology developed within the same traditions of cultural theory, and the early pioneers read much of the same classics, their position in

Academia came to be very different. European ethnology was defined as belonging to the humanities with links to history, literature, art history and languages, whereas anthropology was seen as a natural science, with strong ties to geography and other natural sciences. This division of labour can be seen in the establishment of the national museums during the nineteenth century. In Sweden anthropology belonged to the Natural History Museum, European ethnology to the Nordic Museum, and there was a long fight about who had a right to the Lapps. Were they part of the Swedish national heritage and thus part of the Nordic Museum, or should they be seen as an exotic tribe, which belonged with the other primitives of the zoology collections?

How significant is it that we in the Nordic countries and Central Europe have a division of labour between a general anthropological perspective and a regional specialization (with a historical perspective) in the form of European ethnology? From the end of the nineteenth century and onwards, a new discipline has staked out its territory in these countries, thereby shaping not only its own identity but also the orientation and aims of neighbouring subjects. In countries without this tradition of European ethnology, the field of cultural studies has been divided up in a very different way.

From the global to the local

In 1918 the first Swedish professor of European ethnology, Nils Lithberg, held his inaugural lecture at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. His chair was named "Nordic and comparative folklife research" and his presentation of the new academic discipline was comparative indeed. He discussed how Swedish ethnologists should relate to international research in ethnology and cultural history, and in his discussion he moved quickly between different continents and eras. Why is the mentality of a European different from that of a Hindu? How is the use of burial trees in Dalarna related to similar traditions among Austrian peasants? He ends on a grand note, stating that European ethnology is the study of Man and that our task is to find the answers to mysteries of the human mind.

In Lithberg's generation, and especially among his folklorist colleagues, we find this grand, comparative approach and a close link to the contemporary and general anthropological theories of evolution and diffusion, which made research both comparative and international – but also rather speculative. But if the folklorists kept up their international, comparative approach, the European ethnologists soon came to focus mainly on the local. As in most of disciplines which were born out of the project of national universities, like history, literature, art history and geography, ethnology was a very national science with the task of discovering, collecting, presenting and analysing a national folk culture. History largely became national history, while students of literature focused not only on those authors writing in Swedish but also on those who happened to live inside the present borders of the nation. The national project meant a territorialization of research in much of the humanities, as well as a strong ideological framing of research: the production of a suitable national heritage.

In ethnology, the diffusionist interest often forced scholars outside the national borders, but on the whole the national became a natural and unquestioned frame of research. The national borders were seen as representing a rather unproblematic division of labour. On the other side of the borders there were Danish, Finnish and Norwegian ethnologists waiting, ready to do their national part of the job in order to create a full European picture of folk cultures.

There was a strong ambivalence in this task. Ethnologists could demonstrate that national borders often had little relevance for traditional folk culture, but on the other hand the main *raison d'être* for the discipline was its national task.

Reinventing European ethnology

The grand project of mapping Swedish folk culture kept the discipline on a steady course for decades, from Lithberg over to Sigurd Erixon – the great organizer and European entrepreneur in Swedish ethnology from the 1930s into the 1960s. All ethnologists from old profes-

sors to the young students were united in this common task. In the end, however, it turned into routine. They rarely asked the question: is this massive input of work really producing results worth the effort? In a way the atlas project had turned into a great ocean liner, which kept moving forward even when the engines were burned out.

When I started to read ethnology in the 1960s the ocean liner was still there – but stranded. As young students we moved around in a landscape of ruins from the Sigurd Erixon research industry at the department in Stockholm. On the abandoned desks we found boxes of excerpts, half-finished maps and long protocols of evidence collecting dust. We never had a chance to experience the enthusiasm and the exhilarating feeling which went with the idea of a common project uniting the discipline. For us much of the earlier knowledge was dead. We needed to develop a new utopian project. The same disillusion was found elsewhere on the European scene, but took rather different forms. In Germany the *Abschied vom Volksleben* of the 1960s was a much more dramatic revolt against the old generation. In Sweden the revolt lacked the political edge of the German historical situation with the need to scrutinize the Nazi past of the discipline. (Strikingly enough, there has never been a thorough analysis of the politics of Swedish ethnology, after or before the Second World War.) Secondly, it turned in a totally different direction, when it came to finding new tools for reinventing the discipline.

This also meant a radical shift in the mental world map of Swedish scholars. German-speaking *Volkskunde* all but disappeared, and was replaced by British, American and Norwegian social anthropology and – to some extent qualitative sociology of the American and British brands. (The swiftness of this shift is illustrated in doctoral dissertations from the late 1960s: over a couple of years nearly all German references all but disappeared and Anglo-Saxon titles took over.)

The somewhat negative image of German *Volkskunde* among my own generation was fostered by the fact that most of the German scholars we met as guest lectures were those representing the old, established and traditional school. It was much later that some of us discovered the new generations – and by that time, most Swedish ethnology students had never learned German in school, and had little chance of following the German debate. (Unfortunately, the German-speaking community of ethnologist has been big enough to prevent most German scholars from writing in English.)

Thus we have, in Scandinavia and in Germany, parallel attempts to reinvent European ethnology in the 1960s, but with very different results. Although both of them resulted in the import of new social theory and a marked interest in contemporary culture, the ethnological research practice and theoretical profiles made German and Swedish ethnology of the 1970s more different than they had been in the 1950s. (Today there is a much stronger affinity in the ways in which research is carried out – but that is another story.)

There are many reasons for this different development. In Germany the *Abschied vom Volksleben* coincided with a strong development of critical theory, in the spirit of the Frankfurt school. Inspiration came mainly from within Germany, from social theory and social philosophy. (This Frankfurt influence not only directed the choice of topics and questions, but also the style of research and presentation in a very marked way.)

In Sweden the situation was totally different. The Swedish *Abschied vom Volksleben* was not, as I have discussed elsewhere (see Ehn & Löfgren 1996) a child of 1968, but an earlier disillusionment with ethnological research. There was not much inspiration to be obtained locally from either history or sociology; instead an anthropologization of the discipline took place. The new utopian project was "Discover Sweden", and the rallying cry was "back to fieldwork", and in those days fieldwork mainly meant community studies. This new interest really dates back to the 1950s, when the American anthropologist Robert Redfield had visited Sweden, charismatically pleading for the study of "the little community". Inspired by him, several ethnologists went out in quest of this microcosm. In the 1960s this interest in local communities grew in strength to become a dominant mode of thought. We who received our

education then learned to see Sweden in terms of local communities. If we look at the choice of student essay and dissertation topics in this period, we see the emergence of views of which communities were more community-like than others. This created a new selection principle, which was influenced in large measure by contemporary anthropological theory, both the functionalist and the interactionist variety. This interest focused on the periphery of society rather than the mainstream. It is in this light that we should see the great interest, for example, fishing hamlets; for many of us they represented the perfect cultural form of the little community: isolated, homogeneous, well-integrated, self-sufficient, and so on. (On closer examination, these coastal communities revealed a different reality.) The disproportionate number of studies of such marginal settings was a quest for communities that were as "exotic" or "anthropological" as possible. With this search profile, for instance, the study of working-class settings was chiefly concentrated to small factory towns, and metropolitan studies focused on "urban villages", such as traditional, close-knit neighbourhoods.

There was a paradox in this development: in many ways it felt like a liberating period of internationalization. We were all busy reading international anthropological theory, but on the other hand research became intensively Swedish. We all went out to look for local communities. Compared to the perspective of diffusionist and culture area studies of earlier generations, our geographical space was narrowed down. The prefix "European" of the discipline became more of a rhetorical statement; very few Swedish ethnologists of my generation did their research outside Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s.

The interest in local communities also aspired to let the little community reflect society at large. The English anthropologist Ronald Frankenberg's classic study *Communities in Britain* (1966) was based on this idea. Here a necklace of community types, from the little agricultural village to the city suburb, was threaded together to illustrate English society. The macrocosm became the sum of a number of microcosms. Many of us in Sweden were influenced by this model.

The interest in the little community also came to have a political edge after 1968. The growing social critique of Swedish society focused on the alienation and anonymity of large-scale urban settings, as well as the bureaucratization of life. For the counter-culture movement, small was beautiful, and the search for local community life became a search for cultural alternatives: small-scale, dense and informal cultural settings. This utopia of togetherness fitted very nicely with the interactionist theories used by most of us. Cultural integration was created through face-to-face interaction. This was the kind of social stuff which created "good cultures", rich in shared experiences, everyday rituals and habits. The search for good cultural models was also a way of empowering settings which seemed marginal to the general developments in society. Rural villages, fishing communities and traditional working-class neighbourhoods thus became models for social change. There was a strong emancipatory element in the search for the little community.

Looking for subcultures

The interest in local communities was to dominate ethnological research during the 1960s and part of the 1970s, but by the end of the 1970s it had lost its leading position to the concept of subculture. Interactionist theory had already directed interest towards cultural scenes and social interplay; for the fieldworking ethnologist this was "where the action was". This approach also brought in the concept of cultural communication as a crucial selection principle. Certain phenomena and relations were found more "communicative" than others, and thus more interesting research topics. The search for subcultures grew out of this interest in interaction and communication, but also from a wish to break down stereotypes of Sweden as a homogeneous society (or local communities as well-integrated). The new concept was used to capture other social units and cultural systems than the local study, but here too the result was that some groups and milieux were considered "more subcultural" than others: teenagers, children, women, workers, immigrants. (Middle-

aged, mainstream, middle-class men were consequently the least subcultural category that could be imagined.)

The study of subculture began in an interactionist tradition but went on to follow a semiotic path: from roles and scenes to codes and messages. It began to focus more on the expressive: style, taste, codes, identity markers, and the like.

A central concept in the study of subcultural identities and boundaries was the concept of culture building: the analysis of how different groups continually constructed and transformed a collective image and lifestyle. The Marxist influences, mainly in the form of cultural Marxism developed by British scholars like Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson and their pupils in the so-called "Birmingham school", also created a new interest in processes of cultural domination and subordination. These Marxists influences were often rather eclectically blended with ideas of hegemony taken from such different scholars as Antonio Gramsci, Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault (cf. Ehn & Löfgren 1996).

The linking of class and subcultural studies mainly took the form of two rather different genres: the study of bourgeois culture as a hegemonic process and "the making of Swedish working-class cultures" in the Thompsonian tradition.

There were striking differences in the way these studies were framed and delineated. Working-class culture was mainly studied in the form of community studies, whereas bourgeois culture was analysed through a bricolage of materials on a national level. (This was for example striking in the project "Class and culture" in which I was involved myself, see the discussion in Löfgren 1988). Another effect of this research strategy was that working-class culture much more often was studied through oral history, whereas bourgeois culture was analysed through memoirs, etiquette books, diaries, mass media material, creating a bricolage approach.

Just as the study of peasant culture had previously drifted into a devolutionary search for "a golden age" or classic forms, working-class studies tended to focus on the heroic age of early class formation – often seen as a "purer" form of class culture than, for example, the periods after the Second World War.

Approaches to national culture

The studies of culture and class came to problematize ideas about the typically Swedish and to look at the ways in which mainstream culture was produced and contested.

The renewed interest in the national grew out of three very different approaches. One was the research of Åke Daun which focused on a discussion of a "Swedish mentality" – an attempt to generalize about specific Swedish attitudes and practices (cf. Daun 1989). His research had – by its nature – to become comparative. The Swedish experience and the Swedish data had to be interpreted in comparison with data from other nations. His research was mainly contemporary in its time perspective and drew heavily on interdisciplinary research traditions not very common among other ethnologists: attitude measurements and the social psychology of modal personalities.

Åke Daun's research must also be seen against the background of Sweden's rapid transformation into an immigrant nation in the 1970s and 1980s. At the Stockholm department another new generation of scholars came to be engaged in questions of national culture through the rapidly growing field of ethnicity and cultural confrontations, as immigrants were exposed to Swedish culture and society, and Swedes found themselves reflecting more and more about their Swedish identity and cultural heritage (see for example Daun & Klein 1992). Karl-Olov Arnstberg and Billy Ehn both came from an interactionist tradition, focusing on intensive fieldwork, and their studies among immigrants produced another approach to the discussion of "Swedishness". (In Lund, Gunnar Alsmark also came to develop a similar approach.) Here definitions of ethnic or national identities were strategically constructed in everyday interaction and communication between Swedes, immigrants and refugees. This kind of research also dealt with the growing hostility towards immigrants and the development of a new kind of "Swedish fundamentalism", among

skinheads and other anti-immigration groups.

For decades "the national" had been a non-issue in Sweden, a problem of the past. Now it returned as a contested terrain in identity politics. The battles over what constituted "Swedish culture" also helped to develop a third approach to the study of national identity and culture. It came out of the Lund project on class and culture in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sweden, where the analysis of processes of cultural hegemony in Swedish society fostered an interest rather in the deconstruction of notions of "Swedishness": to see the national as a cultural arena where different groups and generations battled for their version of "true Swedishness" to be naturalized into ideas of normality or modernity (cf. Ehn, Frykman & Löfgren 1993, Frykman 1993, 1995 and Löfgren 1989, 1993).

For outside observers, this new Swedish obsession with the national has been striking in many ways. The fact that the Swedish national self-understanding has been highly ahistorical, apolitical but also rather idyllic must be noted here. Here I think it is important to look at the ways in which different nations choose to narrate their history: there are a number of genres here, as I have discussed elsewhere (Löfgren 1993). The making of the Swedish (and Nordic) welfare state is usually told as a light-hearted success story: the nationalization of modernity without wars and great class conflicts. It is an optimistic tale, as Billy Ehn, Jonas Frykman and Konrad Köstlin among others have pointed out. To a great extent Swedish ethnologists have embraced the basic credo of modernity: life can always be improved and we should keep an optimistic attitude about the future: culture building is a creative and positive process.

The advent of postmodern pessimism and the return of aggressive nationalism has somewhat bridled this optimistic world view, but again I think it is interesting to look at the totally different situation in, say Germany, or some of the former East European countries, where national identity and national culture – for historical and political reasons – became a much more problematic field during the 1980s and the early 1990s.

National and transnational processes

The renewed interest in national identity has in many ways forced Swedish ethnologists back to a comparative, international framework, or rather to develop strategies of research which focus on global, national and local processes alike (cf. Hannerz & Löfgren 1994). Let me outline some perspectives for future research along these lines.

The modern nation state is a striking example of the globalization of a nineteenth-century institution. The interesting paradox in the emergence of nationalism from the end of the eighteenth century onward is, of course, that it is a highly international ideology which is imported for national ends. In this perspective we may view the ideology of nationalism as a gigantic do-it-yourself kit. Gradually a more and more detailed list of ideas is developed as to what elements make up a proper nation. Fixed conceptions emerged in the nineteenth century about how a cultural heritage should be shaped, how a national anthem should sound, and when the flag should be flown. National galleries were founded; national mentalities discovered. In this parallel work of nation building, cultural matrices were freely borrowed across national frontiers.

Nations are busy making themselves different, but in an increasingly contrasting and competitive manner, which creates standards of comparability and symmetry. By trying to be unique they are at another level becoming more similar.

The end-product is the image of the ideal nation, a cultural construction which has emerged step-by-step over the last two centuries, and this normative, transnational image has had great influence on all kinds of nation-building processes: it defines the perfect nation as one with:

- a homogenous population or "folk" – no difference between ethnicity and national identity
- a high degree of integration between the state and "the nation"
- a well-defined territory where physical space should be turned into cultural space

– a distinctive culture with a high degree of sharing between the members of the nation, a common language, a shared past and a common future, high internal/external interaction ratio.

As we all know, it is rather hard to find a nation state which would fit this ideal model, but still it has been exported to different corners of the world. New developing nations have had to conform to existing standards of "what a real nation should look like", both in terms of the organization of a national heritage and in the development of nation state infrastructure, with everything from national museums to national airlines.

The normative strength of the national model of culture is not only seen in its geographical diffusion, but also in the ways in which this national formula has recently been exported to other cultural domains, where we find similar processes of standardization and formalization of cultural difference. We find check-lists emerging with blue prints for how "an immigrant culture" should look within the framework of multiculturalism, or how the cultural profile of a minority group should be structured and communicated in order to make itself visible on the political arena. Similar processes of "micronational" culture building occur in the construction of new regional and local identities. The so-called "new regionalism" in Europe is often carried out with the aid of the cultural grammar of nationalism, as attempts are made to turn economic regions into cultural ones, or economic space into emotional place. As Anders Linde-Laursen (1995) and others have pointed out, we find the same grammar applied in the ideological work of making the European Union a new supranational nation.

The stern father and the warm mother – linking state and nation

The comparative analysis of national projects has also fostered an interest in a hitherto rather underdeveloped field: the ethnography of the state.

The nation state has often been seen as the local mode of cultural production: translating and reworking transnational flows through its economic and cultural infrastructure – a machinery for the nationalization of the international. How has this become possible?

In order to understand why the nation state has been such a successful machine for political mobilization and cultural homogenization, displacing or overruling other traditional loyalties and allegiances, we have to develop a broad approach which includes studies not only of how the national framework is generated and used in political struggles and administrative procedures but of also how the nation state is materialized in the everyday life of the ordinary citizen. How does the state empower the nation and vice versa? Through the nationalization of the state this bureaucratic, anonymous structure is emotionalized in several ways. On the other hand the infrastructure of state has supplied a unique arena for codifying and communicating a national culture. The paternal role of the state has been balanced with the maternal ideology of the nation as a home. Again, we find great differences in the integration between ideas of state and nation. American right-wing patriots defend the nation by attacking what they see as the monstrous state.

Strong nation states have been very successful in reworking transnational imports. In many ways the welfare nationalism of the twentieth century has been such a period of a nationalization of the international – in media and mass consumption, for example.

In Sweden this is very striking for the postwar period from the fifties up to the seventies. As in many other Western nations, this period is usually described as a time of intense internationalization. It seemed as if the sweeping wave of modernization was making the world more and more homogeneous – obliterating old national differences. Sweden in this period was often depicted as "the most Americanized nation in Europe". This grand narrative saw the project of modern mass consumption as an internationalizing or westernizing force drawing backward nations into the modern world system, providing them with paved roads along which modern citizens hastened towards the future, dressed in practical business suits and rational values, worrying about punctuality.

The language of modernity was supposed to become a lingua franca which could be understood in Montevideo as well as in Novosibirsk.

Reality was much more complex. The making of modern Sweden illustrates the ways in which nationalization and internationalization are not polarized processes but parallel and interdependent ones. The decades after the Second World War, when Swedish life was often described as undergoing a rampant Americanization, were also, as I have discussed elsewhere (cf. Löfgren 1994), a period of intense national homogenization on the level of routines, taste, dispositions and habits, when class and regional differences became smaller. The inflow of American icons, ideals and fantasies served primarily as an arena for a discourse on development and modernity. They helped to open up mental spaces for change, but the change itself occurred on the level of experimenting with new, and very Swedish everyday practices. The American imagery in many ways became a vehicle for Swedification (cf. O'Dell 1993).

As ethnologists we should devote more attention to "the nationalization of trivialities" (Linde-Laursen 1993), the ways in which national differences become embedded in the materialities of everyday life, and not only found in the rhetoric of flag-waving and national rituals. We thus need to develop an ethnography of statehood on the level of everyday life: how does the nation state make itself visible and tangible, important or unimportant in the life of its citizens? We have to explore the technologies of integration, belonging and intimacy found in, for example, the media and in the routines of administration.

Much of the current discussion of the crisis of the nation state has to do with the fact that many young or weak states cannot live up to these normative ideals of what a nation state should be like and what kinds of services it should provide for its citizens. Another perspective concerns the ways in which some of the old nations are seen as threatened by the rapid transnational movements of people, ideas and capital across old borders. Are we, as some have argued, entering a post-national era?

Living in transit?

In a recent book the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1995) makes a fascinating but problematic historical analysis of the ways in which the politics of identity and belonging have been transformed over the centuries. He looks at the manner in which identity evolves in modernity as a pilgrimage and a quest for the true self, and then goes on to discuss the way in which contemporary identities are constructed: their fragmentation, their fluidity and lack of grounding. In his attempt to outline the profile of Postmodern Man, he chooses four (and very male) metaphorical roles: the flaneur, the vagabond, the tourist and the gambler.

There are many parallel statements about Postmodern Man. Much of the present debate deals with *loss*, the loss of grounding, of belonging. Identities today are described in terms of de-territorialization, de-localization, de-centring, de-stabilization. Identities no longer take place, territories are less important. Rootlessness and homelessness are other important ways of describing these processes. People are seen as living in transit, or in an age of hypermobility. There is a celebration of borderlands, of border zones, a new kind of poetics of hybridity and bricolage.

This "now" is often polarized against a "then", when identities were clearly delineated, stable over time and firmly located in space. In the old days people knew their place, so to speak. Space or rather place is no longer the dimension around which we organize our lives and construct our identities. In their recent book *Economies of Sign and Space* the sociologists Scott Lash and John Urry try to summarize and synthesize this transformation, using a quotation from the sociologist Luke: we have moved "from place to flow, from spaces to streams, from organized hierarchies to disorganization" (1994:323).

This kind of postmodern scenario also looks at a world where old hierarchies and classes are said to disintegrate and new power structures emerge. The losers are traditional institutions like the nation state and the groups and organizational forms which have depended upon this arena. New transnational economic and intellectual elites emerge – cosmopolitans who are

at home in the world and have fewer loyalties to their old nation or home ground. They travel business class through life. Against this new elite we find an increasingly marginalized working class, trying to defend themselves against globalization by becoming even more national, regional or home-loving. They opt for the seeming safety of place and ritual belonging, and in this nostalgia they become both more inward-looking and more xenophobic. The main point in this scenario is that the world is become de-territorialized. Old regions, borders, places lose their meaning, fade away or disappear, and new forms of allegiances, networks and groups emerge: from neo-tribes to proto-communities.

Scenarios like these may depict some current trends, but they have to be handled with care – they contain elements of utopia and dystopia. Above all they are too sweeping and evolutionary, holding up a complex present against a far too simple image of the past.

The first question must be: when, where, how and for whom is this development a reality? Is it a unilateral development or a more complex process of movements in different directions? We should avoid universalizing statements about the present condition of the world. There is no general Postmodern Man, no unilinear development towards displacement, homelessness or deterritorialization. Rather than trying to generalize the present in terms of devolutionary or evolutionary scenarios, we should scrutinize the different and sometimes contradictory movements occurring at the same time, in the same way that we have begun to analyse the many different national and local paths to modernity, hidden under earlier, generalized ideas of Western modernity.

Secondly, we need to look at the ways in which our lives, our activities and our ideas are changed by different kinds of mobility. Increased mobility does not have to mean increased rootlessness. Mobility can sometimes be a strategy to produce stability and prevent change (cf. the discussion in Eyerman & Löfgren 1995).

Who is actually living in transit? How does the fluidity of the present look from different social perspectives and positions: for the fugitive, who just has thrown his passport away and is waiting to be interrogated by the border police, for the trained cosmopolitan who feels the security of his Visa card in all the transit halls of the world, for the teenager spending his first summer Inter-railing or for the old-age pensioner on his first charter trip abroad? For some people, living in transit is an adventure, for others an enforced ordeal.

Thirdly, we have to analyse the ways in which current statements about the end of modernity get trapped in a traditional, devolutionary genre. There are some clear parallels to the *fin-de-siècle* debate we are having now and the one we had a century ago. Then people loved to talk about the disintegration of the home, the nation and the sense of belonging (cf. Löfgren 1995).

But it is far too easy a rhetorical device to reduce this debate to the recycling of an old genre. The discussion of postmodernity has, in a fruitful way, challenged many of our earlier often rather simplistic notions of cultural identities as being well-bounded, neat and well-integrated, securely rooted in time and space. Our use of concepts like identity, culture and place will never be the same. Furthermore, the postmodern debate on identity formations has been extremely important and creative in historicizing modernity, in creating a critical and reflexive distance, in fighting the taken-for-grantedness of modernity.

Instead of getting trapped in the rather fruitless debate about whether we live in a modern, late-modern, hyper-modern or postmodern age, we should explore the ways in which the cultural processes sometimes labelled postmodern coexist with those called "modern". Some of the new theoretical perspectives can even be used to problematize our notions of "premodern" configurations: what are the postmodern elements in premodern lives?

Research strategies

We need to reflect upon what kinds of contributions European ethnologists can make to the heated interdisciplinary debate on identities and territories. There is a tendency among us to see our discipline as an eternal importer of wisdom, a constant borrower of key concepts and grand theoretical perspectives. Maybe the

time has come for us to focus on what specific ethnological research practices and experiences can contribute to the general debate. Let suggest some of these possibilities.

Ethnologists have devoted a great deal of attention to the ways in which new cultural forms emerge over time, and become institutionalized or naturalized parts of the social landscape. In the current debate there is too much focus on disintegration, too much talk about "post": postnational, postmodern, postlocal, too much "de-focused, de-centred, de-territorialized, de-localized", and also too much "trans", as in transit, transnational, translocal, transcultural. We must balance our use of post-, de-, trans- with a greater focus on pre-, re-, and in-.

In what ways can a deterritorialization be part of a reterritorialization, or transgression be followed by integration, the defocused become refocused – in new forms and combinations? A longer historical perspective may help us to remember that the other side of dissolution and disintegration is remaking, reanchoring and routinization. Are we really facing a future of intense deterritorialization or are we simply not observing the different ways in which people and identities take place on new arenas and in novel forms?

The current debate on homelessness and the post-national needs to be confronted with the ethnological research on how the new ideas of home and nation became such a strong emotional force and locus of identity during the nineteenth century. Here we have two good examples of the cultural and social organization of "taking place": the processes through which abstract ideas or images are turned into lived experience. Both these concepts developed as very abstract, ideological constructs only to become concretized and materialized – grounded in routines of everyday life during the twentieth century. What does it mean to have a home, to belong to a nation or a locality in 1850, 1930, 1995? The experience of homelessness can only exist in cultures obsessed with the necessities of home, and the debate of the post-national above all illustrates the ways in which the nation has become such a powerful reality.

The same comparative approach may be used to look at the processes of uprooting and relocation among migrants, cosmopolitans and people in transit in urban settings of the 1890s and the 1990s. In both settings we find the same worries about disintegration, but what are the similarities and differences between these two contexts? In retrospect we can study how the homeless and uprooted in the cities of the 1890s claimed new spaces and made new places for themselves. It is also important to remember that the great era of hypermobility occurred during the latter part of the nineteenth century and up to the First World War. The waves of migration and displacement taking place then were on a much greater scale than the one we are experiencing today. Somehow these historical experiences and the processes of uprooting and re-rooting occurring then seem strangely absent from the current debate on displacement and mobility. The fact that urban migrants in the 1890s lived in social settings which may have seemed fluid, chaotic and disorganized does not have to mean that their identities were transient, fragmented or disintegrated. How did, for example, the peasants who turned into urbanites learn to cope, to look and overlook, to select and ignore. How were new identities crafted on this seemingly chaotic urban scene? Similar learning processes of coping and crafting are found among today's migrants.

There might be a historical lesson here for our current discussion of identity constructs. Instead of talking about bricolage or fleetingness, we can ask what kinds of cultural competence are needed to handle all the alternatives and possibilities of the present: how do we learn to cope with complex or fragmented settings?

Comparative discussions of identity and rootedness tend to get trapped in measurements of how much, in terms of losses and gains of identity, but there is no cross-cultural or timeless quota of human need for identity. We should be wary of thinking in terms of compensatory identities: the loss of local identity being compensated by emerging national ones, the loss of neighbourhood roots compensated by sub-cultural identities etc.

Instead of asking whether place and identity meant more or less in the past, we should start

by asking more basic questions, such as: what does place mean in different historical and cultural settings? Were identities really stable, secure and integrated in the past, or is this an example of our own cultural projections of nostalgia for identity lost?

Comparative approaches like these also underline the need for good ethnographies and close readings. It is quite plausible that many people today organize their lives, their anchorages and ideas in new ways, but we need more detailed ethnographies of this: looking at the complexities and patterns in habituation, in routines and rhythms, as well as the processes which Allison James (1986) has called "learning to belong".

We should scrutinize the microphysics of movement and of taking place. The experience of place is a very complex thing, and there is a pedagogics of space that is very powerful. What does it mean that you are actually there, not only fantasizing about being there? The concept "placelessness" must be used rather restrictively. What is the difference between living in a media-scape and in a social landscape: different forms of presence, how does culture take place, take up place, how are experiences and fantasies materialized, made concrete, tangible, multi-sensual, and so on? There is an elaboration, massivity and redundancy in actually being there. On the other hand we should be aware of the fact that identity and place are never linked in a simple way. We are always travelling in a constant dialogue between mindscapes and landscapes, which for example makes the underdeveloped ethnography of day-dreaming an important topic: the art of being in several places at the same time.

The postmodern debate provokes us to find new strategies both for comparison and for ethnography, experimenting with new combinations of approaches and materials. This calls for a strategy of research constantly linking theorizing and ethnography, choosing back doors to big issues sometimes. Again, I think that the tradition of doing fieldwork in the archives as well as in the present has given ethnologists a certain knack for finding surprising combinations of materials, methods and perspectives. The bricolage tradition is important here.

This competence should be furthered in studies of the ways in which the local, the national and the global interact, constitute each other, blend, mix or are kept apart.

Sometimes the global makes the local stand out more clearly. I was reminded of this once, as I was walking down Eerste van Swinden Straat, near the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam. There you pass Autoshop West End, Garden City Snackbar, Super Photo, Mega Pool, Pizzeria Santa Maria, Credit du Maroc (just opposite The European Exploitation Company – an anarchist bookshop), King David's Grill Rooms, Milano World Cosmetics and finally JangTse Chinese–Indian Specialities. And do you know what struck me? How extremely Dutch this street seemed, the global mix was turned into a Dutch Gesamtkunstwerk.

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