

Foreword

It is obvious today that, on its way of integration to the EU orbit of social sciences and humanities, the discipline of Lithuanian Ethnology would gain from its openness towards sister disciplines. But such openness could also be uncomfortable in terms of melting into the other fields. It was close to that condition during the Soviet period when ethnology had its status reduced to that of a sub-discipline of history. The situation in quite a few Western European and North American countries, where anthropology and folklore studies cover almost the whole field of ethnological competence, is comparable. Ethnology is rooted differently in Central, Northern and Eastern Europe, and has its own scope of expertise here. Nevertheless, it needs modern social theory as well as modern reflexive ethnography. What it needs most is, first of all, the avoidance of generalized cultural historical reconstructions.

In this respect, Wolfgang Kaschuba's (Humboldt University, Berlin) article "Historizing the Present", which opens this issue of our journal, is outstanding. The author puts forward the most sensitive question of European Ethnology: how to deal with the history horizon. And he gives a clear answer: instead of creating a positivist reconstruction of certain cultural-histories, construct it as answer to the questions put to history by the present. According to Kaschuba, the ethnologists, vis-a-vis history, are as foreigners in a strange land. They have to reflect on their methodologies if they dare tackle upon issues of history. There is no doubt, that we are used to building our projects of historical images and sociocultural representations on vivid manifestations of the present: like foreigners who conceive a foreign country from the perceptual framework of their own. Kaschuba also argues for the deconstruction of certain well established concepts, such as *nation*, *folk culture*, *tradition* as well as warns us to reflect upon new paradigms appearing in the present, like *regionalism* and *multiculturalism*. In this case, we can expand Kaschuba's trope "Abschied von Volksleben" by saying farewell both to the old Volkskunde as well as to the "old" historical reconstructions in order to start a firm ethnological dialogue with the past.

The utility of such an approach could be well proven by the article of Carole Lemée-Gonçalves, the French anthropologist from Bordeaux University, published in this issue. Like Kaschuba she also deals with the past, but her point of departure is different. She draws upon social memory as inscribed in distinct memories of certain groups rather than organized as a total pattern of the past. Social memory of displaced groups of European Jews is taken for exemplification of the distinct way of transmission and inscription of certain traumatic events of the past. Lemée-Gonçalves splendidly proves how complicated is the work of "consumption" of history in terms of forgetting and remembrance of the Holocaust among different generations of Jewish descendants.

Irma Šidiškienė, an ethnologist at the Lithuanian Institute of History, in her article on traditional Lithuanian wedding rituals, seems to have no problem in "travelling into the past". She does apply a well established (in ethnology, in particular) approach on culture change and argues that symbolic behavior is rooted in local tradition and its chronological correlation by area, extensively proven by the cartographic method as crucial for the understanding of culture change. Even the regularities of its dynamics

could be proven by such correlation. Šidiškienė comes to the conclusion that the understanding of symbolic behavior goes through the scrutiny of sequences of ritual symbolic acts and eventually is culturally contextualized. In this respect, further investigation urges for a holistic – which is primarily anthropological – perspective to be employed. The holistic perspective promises being fruitful, in particular, if applied for delineation of cultural identity processes.

Vida Savoniakaitė, also from the Lithuanian Institute of History, is a pioneer of electronic publications in the field. In 2002 she released a CD version of her research on traditional Lithuanian textiles. In her article included in the current issue, she shares her experience on multimedia challenges to and impacts on the contemporary information society as well as ethnological scholarship. Savoniakaitė stresses the importance of the application of multimedia in wide areas of scholarship. Even more, she argues for an urgent need to take into consideration the new social networks, identities, and values created by multimedia and World Wide Web. Her thrust is that all these new domains should be studied as much as traditional fields of ethnological research.

At least three new initiatives, which recently appeared in the field of Lithuanian Ethnology are worth mention.

First is the founding of the Lithuanian Anthropological Association in the summer of 2003. The fact of establishing a professional organization whose membership includes a number of ethnologists speaks for itself and proves that the interdisciplinary direction taken by the journal *Lietuvos etnologija*, in combining fields of regional ethnology and social anthropology, is productive. Equally important was the inaugural conference of the Association held in Vilnius in the fall of 2003 and titled “Defining Ourselves: Establishing Anthropology in the Baltic States”. More than twenty participants came from nine countries, including keynote speakers Jonathan Friedman, Chris Hann, Finn Nielsen and Steven Sampson. They all spoke in unison for the field of anthropology to be established in the Baltic States. It was emphasized that Lithuania, like the other post-Communist countries ongoing rapid social change, is facing distinct sociocultural problems and these could be well challenged by the new anthropological approaches, never previously employed in these countries. Many such problems could be very well scrutinized by the qualitative analysis method, central to anthropology.

Kristina Šliavaitė (PhD student at Lund University and at the Institute of Social Research in Vilnius) in her presentation at the conference and also in the article published in the current issue provides us with an excellent example of the application of modern anthropological methodology. She does this by dealing with the urgent social problems – huge unemployment in particular – that the inhabitants of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Station settlement are about to face. Her extensive ethnographic fieldwork material is used to prove the importance and persistence of social identity patterns inherited from the Communist past. Such patterns still guide the *habitus* and conceptualization of existential threats. Nuclear accidents in the plant are considered impossible and social risks to the population of unemployment after the closure of the plant are seen as neglected by the Lithuanian state.

Secondly, an important initiative has been taken by Auksuolė Čepaitienė, an ethnologist at the Lithuanian Institute of History. She has become the leader of a local research team sponsored by the European Commission of the project “Public Understanding of Genetics: A Cross-cultural and Ethnographic Study of the ‘New Genetics’ and Social Identity”. The project, started in 2002, in seven European countries, is led by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manchester. It aims to

investigate the way in which different communities across Europe identify the social implications of new genetic technologies. It will provide new empirical data that will inform the investigation of the relationship between genetics and kinship, race and governance. It is of particular importance that Lithuanian ethnologists are given recognition as partners in the project. Čepaitienė herself takes opportunity to introduce the project to the readers of this issue.

Lastly, of importance to the national field of ethnology, was the interdisciplinary discussion, "Text as a Source", held in the fall of 2003 at the Lithuanian Institute of History, moderated by Auksuolė Čepaitienė. For the first time ethnologists took initiative to attract colleagues from other fields such as history, archaeology, and museology by offering to exchange ideas on textualization. The latter phenomenon is central in contemporary European Ethnology. Ample insights were given by large number of participants in the discussion recognizing the importance of the problem, as well as validity of the interdisciplinary approach for local researches. The transcript of the discussion, edited by Čepaitienė is included in this issue.

David Sutton, from the Department of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University, opens the review chapter of the current issue with a review of Jane Fishburne Collier's *From Duty to Desire: Remaking Families in a Spanish Village* (1997). With special permission from *Taylor & Francis*, the publisher of the *Identities* journal, where the review first appeared, and courtesy of the author, a Lithuanian translation is presented to our readers. It suits perfectly the current research situation in the field of Lithuanian Ethnology, which is in urgent need of new explanations of the sociocultural changes in Lithuania's countryside after the Second World War. Of particular importance is the point made by the reviewer, that without the ethnographic understanding of small communities and the ethnographic methodology in general, it would not be possible to deconstruct the most influential ideologies of modernization.

Let us hope that the new initiatives in the field of national ethnology, as well as inspiration coming out of sharing academic and analytic experience from inside and outside of the country, will be of interest and use to the readers of this issue.

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