

RESPONSES

Feeling at Home

The Everyday Life of a Non-Discipline, or How to Celebrate Daily Routines of a Society

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Usually, the response section of a journal is dedicated to one article. It allows the author of the response to compare and contrast the research presented with the latest investigations in that field; to find problematic aspects that need to be pointed out; or to suggest alternatives and possible extensions. The narrative genre of a “response” often tries to turn the text upside down while ending in a lament and a critique. The task asked of me in this case is quite different because my response has to cover four different articles with one common focal point: they are all lectures delivered at the 2014 SIEF 50th jubilee hosted by the University of Amsterdam. Reviewing these four articles is not a simple task, as they provide neither a comparable analytical perspective nor a unifying thematic relation to each other. Does it mean that these “outside-the-box,” creative contributions lack coherence? On the contrary, this collection makes sense, and I felt very much “at home” while reading them. As ethnographers know, the moments of feeling that “this really makes sense” are crucial in order to understand the structuring logics of our societies. In this particular case, the four articles make sense because of the feeling of belonging that they provide: the emotional and narrative consolidation of a dislocated place called SIEF.

My response presents an emotional approach to the assemblage and entanglement of the ethnological, folkloristic, and anthropological perspectives presented in these articles. I completely agree with the introduction of the volume that the problem is no longer about defining ethnology and folklore—and I would add that neither is it about defining anthropological studies of the vernacular expressive culture, cultural studies, heritage studies, ethnomusicology, cultural history, or ethnographic approaches to cultural geography, among many others. There is room for all of us, regardless of whether we consider folklore and ethnology one or two disciplines, whether we consider them disciplines at all, or whether we consider them “non-disciplines.” As explained

by Valdimar Hafstein and Peter Jan Margry in the introduction, there are key concerns which have stayed with SIEF over the years and which prove to be resilient. I will take this idea further: SIEF has maintained these concerns because it is the academic-professional home that many of us have chosen.

I will expand on the concept of “home” presented by Orvar Löfgren in response to the articles while developing the idea of SIEF as an academic home. According to Löfgren “home is a site of negotiation, with constant wheeling and dealing, trying to make different priorities and interests co-habit” (Löfgren, this issue, p. 93). I am writing my response as I navigate through the repertoire of emotions that the articles triggered in my affective self. I read all the articles with great pleasure, relating to them and immersing myself in them—an “ethnological sensation” that, I admit, is getting more and more difficult to obtain from a collection of articles. Probably, they had this effect on me because the articles do not try to follow the rules of academic writing, or maybe because of the “outside the box thinking” that they convey. In a sense, if they came out of the box, I have come out of the closet, emotionally speaking.

Sometimes the texts brought a smile to my face, because I related personally to them, for instance when Orvar Löfgren focuses on how people cope with “too much” in their daily lives; an excellent illustration of the type of research ethnologists do. My smile turned into a giggle when he describes the decorative empty white ceramic bowl on a coffee table, “there it is, simple, beautiful, and above all seductively empty. All of a sudden there is an empty matchbox in it, next to a couple of coins. The ice has been broken, and through a magic force, new objects are attracted: a cellphone charger, an old lottery ticket, an unpaid electricity bill, and some used batteries. Step by step a mountain is growing on the table, until one day someone gives the living room a searching look: ‘We can’t have all this mess!’” (Löfgren, this issue, p. 84). Löfgren offers the reader a fresh prose that establishes emotional links with research about daily-life practices. This article provides one of the most important arguments to prove the homelike quality of SIEF: the type of articles produced by SIEFians. Reading Löfgren I can recognize a sense of belonging in this type of empirical detailed research on daily-life.

A different type of smile is provoked by Konrad Köstlin and his insightful and ironic analysis of anniversaries. Köstlin questions the self-evident nature of anniversaries and criticizes the obsessive cult of remembrance linked to consumerism. As he explains, “the circle of life has been replaced by a linear metaphor” (Köstlin, this issue, p. 14) producing a decimalism in the conception of time. A problematic mythical beginning was established in 1964 for SIEF, and it initiates time measurement, “as a chronometry based on a secular, but seeming-

ly also sacred, decimalism" (Köstlin, this issue, p. 14). The jubilee performance that took place in Amsterdam in September 2014 was, of course, an occasion to celebrate and guarantee the continuity and the consistency of SIEF. A good ending for Köstlin's article would be a narrative piece in which the Mad Hatter from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* sings "Happy un-anniversary" to SIEF to celebrate every year that is not an anniversary. Köstlin's article shows another angle of SIEF: its members' reflective tone and open-minded ability to accept criticism.

In addition to the smiles triggered by the above-mentioned articles, I reacted with empathy to the ideas presented by Jasna Čapo. I read the straightforward meta-narrative style of Čapo with a feeling of relief. Her subjects of study are scholars and she deals with one of the most difficult questions SIEF needs to handle: its relationship with anthropology and the discipline(s) power structure. Jasna Čapo focuses on the tensions between Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) ethnologists/anthropologists and Western, mainly British-style anthropology to critically analyse the patronizing attitudes towards CEE scholarship. Words such as "stereotyping," "patronising," "orientalising/exoticising," "neglecting," "nativising," and "colonizing" are some of the terms which CEE scholars use to describe Western perceptions towards them. CEE ethnologists/anthropologists found that their studies were thought of as "native/indigenous" ethnographies, as data rather than as scientific analyses, and themselves as informants rather than as colleagues. Jasna Čapo's article shows that the rationale behind the division of disciplines is linked to reasons outside the disciplines themselves. In addition, it shows that SIEF provides a home for many scholars regardless of the discussions about disciplinary limits. I feel at home with Čapo's uneasy reading of the state of the disciplines and her attempt to counteract the hegemonic academic power. I also feel at home with the need to think transnationally.

Finally, the emotions triggered by Bjarne Rogan's article are different in terms of their quality and intensity. I relate very deeply to the issue of how to handle the term "folklore": on the one hand I was trained in a department dedicated to the study of folklore in the USA and I fully understand the need of folklore studies; on the other hand, I am from a country where the term folklore has been largely abandoned and is often perceived as a term that describes an old-fashioned, non-academic and amateurish approach. The first time I encountered a discussion about the "F-word" was at the 1996 AFS annual meeting in Pittsburg. Regina Bendix and Dan Ben-Amos were part of a heated debate—I might say a battle—in a plenary called "What's in a name?" Both came to be my professors, and back then I really did not fully grasp the emotions

that the term folklore was capable of raising. Years later, in 2001, I witnessed a similar discussion in Budapest related to a proposal for a SIEF name change.

Former SIEF president Regina Bendix, various SIEF board members and individual members, have requested for over a decade that the society change its name. SIEF itself has a long history of name changes. In 1928-29 it included "arts populaires" or "folk art" in its name: "la Commission des Arts Populaires" (CIAP). In 1936 the term "traditions" was added, resulting in "la Commission des Arts et Traditions Populaires," and in the late 1930s the name "European Ethnology" was proposed for the whole field of study. In the 1950s the name "European Ethnology" was proposed once again. In 1964, as analyzed in detail by Bjarne Rogan, there was a heated debate concerning the issue and the name "Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore" (SIEF) was adopted. Since then, the name issue has been brought to the foreground on several occasions by presidents and in general assemblies, such as in 2001 in Budapest. At the 2011 SIEF conference in Lisbon, Bjarne Rogan gave a plenary lecture in which he touched on the need to decide on the name as a commitment for the future of the association. That suggestion was also included in Ullrich Kockel's presidential address. Some of us wanted to raise the question in Lisbon at the General Assembly from the ground and the president responded by commissioning the board to prepare a proposal for an on-line ballot on this issue. According to SIEF president Ullrich Kockel, "ever since I joined SIEF, I have been aware of the tension this issue has created on occasion, and therefore, realizing the importance of bringing the matter to a conclusion that can be 'owned' by our members, whatever their preferred approach and traditional context, I suggested that an appropriate set of proposals, based on wide-ranging consultation with the membership" (Kockel, *SIEF Newsletter* 10/2012 (1), 5). As a member of the SIEF board, I coordinated the working group to prepare the ballot (see *SIEF Newsletter* 10/2012 (1), 2012, which includes the working group documents).

In the end, the ballot did not take place and the issue is still open. If the ballot does take place, I don't know if I would vote for a name change as there are many good reasons to keep the name SIEF, but I think that having an on-line ballot on the topic is a good way to deal with this open discussion that has gone on for too long. Bjarne Rogan's dichotomous analysis presented in his article is a sign of the ongoing debate. I do not agree with the metaphor of losing and winning battles that Rogan presents in his piece because it fossilizes the relationship between those folklorists that participated in the 1964 General Assembly and Sigurd Erixon's position regarding European Ethnology. The differences between them cannot be so neatly established and the stress

on “losing a war” only reinforces these differences, while SIEF now faces new concerns. The “F-Word” in the society’s name used to be a cause of heated debate, but now it doesn’t seem to provoke strong emotional responses. Precisely because of the serenity of the debate, it is time to ask membership for their opinion.

However, I feel uncomfortable promoting a name change for SIEF because I think that trying to reach a consensus about the various definitions of ethnology, folklore and other disciplines is not a productive issue. I prefer to ask why it is that many researchers, academics and professionals feel at home in SIEF. SIEF represents the arena where creative approaches and experimental styles can be brought together and combined—why not?—with old-fashioned approaches in an integrative manner; a place where innovative and traditional scholars observe the vernacular, daily-life, heritage, tourism, expressive culture, and many other interests. In a sense, paraphrasing Orvar Löfgren, SIEF develops strategies to cope with “too much” in relation to daily life.

SIEF is facing—has faced—and is creating—has already created—the conditions to enter an exciting moment: a place called home for many of us who are not interested in boxing up and constructing fences around how to define a discipline. SIEF is not an association that embraces practitioners of “a” discipline or “various” disciplines, but a place called home. And a home is built around those who live in it and their emotional links: its members, their affective selves, what members do, and what SIEF—as a society—does. All four articles provoked a lot of smiles, empathy, uncomfortable questions... all very good reasons to be part of SIEF.

