European anthropology

Transnationality and reflexivity within a shared horizon of meaning

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Abstract: Why is European anthropology still a controversial concept? In this commentary, I propose to locate European anthropology in its epistemology, by which is primarily meant the discipline's reflexivity, and in its transnational setting which requires not only communication across national borders but also equality in exchanges among European anthropologists. Also, I argue that European anthropology is to be found in the common horizon of meaning that is shared by European anthropologists. Along these lines, I conclude that dealing with the "controversy" of European anthropology entails engaging with further controversies.

My first reaction to the invitation to contribute to this issue was puzzlement. Why is European anthropology still a controversial concept, as suggested by Francisco Martínez in the introduction? How is the controversy to be understood: as an *intra*-European opposition between ethnologies dealing with the own society and culture and comparative and/or cosmopolitan anthropology dealing with other societies and cultures and resulting in general insights about human condition? Is the controversy located in the disputes over hierarchies of power among these strands of European anthropology? Is it related to complementary yet separate professional associations of European ethnologists, anthropologists and folklore specialists, the SIEF (Société internationale d'ethnologie et de folklore) and the EASA (The European Association of Social Anthropologists)? Does it revolve around an epistemic uncertainty about the status of Europe as the relatively new terrain of Otherness which attracted classical anthropology only in the post-colonial era? Or, are we perhaps to discuss the position and distinctiveness of European anthropology as a regional area of research toward general anthropology? These questions have already engaged many anthropologists over the years. While revisiting some of them, the present set of articles and commentaries contributes to further the discussions about European anthropology as well as to "locate where it might be" and discuss the "conditions of possibility for the discipline" in relation to several topics (see the Introduction).

These issues are sketched from a position of someone originally trained in Zagreb, in what used to be labelled ethnology (which included learning about own folk traditions and indigenous cultures of the world[1]) and later, in anthropology and demography at UC Berkeley. This is, I suggest, a special position not because of my parallelly national and international education but also because Croatian ethnology has always strived to be transnational in its outlook while doing research on the national terrain.

Though it is usually assessed as a "national ethnology" (cf. Hofer 1968), Croatian ethnology has been "national" only insofar as it has been dealing with own folk[2] and since the 1970s with urban and everyday culture. Within this nationally bounded subject matter, it has been transnationalising and

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1. At the time of my studies, in the 1980s, ethnology was taught from a diffusionist, Kroeberian viewpoint.

2. As such, Croatian ethnology participated in the transnationalising European project of establishing European Ethnology in the 1950s (via the journal *Ethnologia Europaea*, European Atlas, the foundation of an association – *La commission internationale des arts populaires*/CIAP, which later on became SIEF; cf. Rogan 2014).

has creatively adopted, indeed *glocalised*, diverse theoretical perspectives and intellectual traditions: American culture area research of the 1940s, German critical ethnology of the 1970s, French structuralism, Italian studies on ideology, the Scandinavian turn toward studies of ethnicity and historical anthropology, post-structuralism, Geertzian symbolic anthropology, Bourdieu's social theory, feminist anthropology, post-modern turn etc. Since the 1990s and the tumultuous societal changes (the dissolution of Yugoslavia) it has been discussing the issues of representation, positionality of the researcher, ethics of research and critically revisiting research in the socialist period as well as the nation-building project of the 1990s (Čapo Žmegač 2002, Čapo, Gulin Zrnić 2014; 2017)[3]. Within Croatian ethnology, transnationalisation and eclectic outlook ensued from the study of own culture and society[4]. To denote the result of that process, a well-known Croatian ethnologist, Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin (2004) coined the term "ethno-anthropology". I argue that such a transnationalised ethnology studying the own, can be inspirational for the discipline discussed here, European anthropology.

From mutual acquaintance to transnationalisation

The question marks that were popping up with regard to the present volume have to do with the fact that the various facets of the "controversy" of European anthropology have been in the focus of reflexion in much of recent ethnological/anthropological debates in Europe (see also Eriksen, this volume). They have been dealing with the issues of diversity of European anthropologies, and consequently with the question of what unites them, as well as with the issue of power inequality among disciplines practiced in different countries.

In the different national ideas of anthropologies in Europe, the concept of the discipline – and its practice – has been closely evolving in relation to social usages, political and social history of respective nation-states and their national and/or colonial projects and institutional arrangements. Since the 1960s two broad strands are identified and contrasted: a "national" and a "cosmopolitan" style of the discipline (Hofer 1968). The first, usually named ethnology, ethnography or folklore studies (*Volkskunde* in German) was

3. This is a position shared by some other Central European anthropologies, i.e. the Slovenian one (Godina 2002).
4. Research was carried out on the national territory and among Croatians outside of the national territory. Some of that research was geared toward the national project, some of it pertained to general social theory. The national territorial purview of Croatian ethnology is nowadays explicable more by scarce resources than any other reason.

supposedly studying folk culture (the culture of the peasantry), in the context of nationalising political projects. It deployed a specific ethnographic method with short-term visits to field sites. Geographically speaking it could be found across Europe (e.g. in Germany, Austria, Poland, Eastern Europe, France, Italy, the Scandinavian countries), but the term eventually got stuck to ethnologies in Central-Eastern Europe, mainly those that, for a good portion of the 20th century, evolved under socialism. Practiced in the context of empire-building overseas, the "cosmopolitan"-style anthropology was differentiated as comparatist and striving towards universalism; it dealt with other societies and cultures utilising long-term fieldwork and participant observation as the main ethnographic method. It started to study European sites rather late, as sites of Otherness e.g. in the Mediterranean. Several connotations were subsequently added to that grand opposition originally proposed by Tamás Hofer and mainly attributed to the discipline practiced in Central and East-European countries. Those ethnologies were said to lack theoretical thinking and exhibit positivism and empiricism (Buchowski 2004), they connoted smallness and marginality (Prica 1995; Baskar 2008), their practitioners were frequently labelled "native ethnographers" (Hann 2013) and alike.

Contestations of that opposition became stronger in the 1990s and 2000s and resulted in rather vehement debates, with most vociferous deconstructions of the Western hegemony and claim to "proper anthropology" as well as "defence" of local traditions of doing research coming from Poland and Croatia (Prica 1995, Buchowski 2004; 2012a; 2012b). The debates between practitioners of the discipline in what used to be the socialist bloc (Central and Eastern Europe) and those outside of it lasted for over two decades. Those debates, very briefly, were over the nature of ethnologies practiced in the first, and whether they can aspire to be included into (social/cultural) anthropology as defined by the Western practice of the discipline. In the debates, ethnological and folkloristic enquiries in the former socialist bloc were relegated by some Western anthropologists to second-class anthropology and bracketed out as relevant knowledge. The Easterners "stroke back", proclaiming that the debate displayed power hierarchies in knowledge production that reflected political and economic power differentials in the academic arena. Such critical voices geared against what was perceived as the Western academic hegemony have become more concerted recently and eventually backed by anthropologists coming from the West. All voices required "fairness and equality" of dialogue among diverse traditions of doing ethnology/anthropology in Europe (cf. Ruegg 2014).

I have argued elsewhere that that debate has become somewhat sterile, for it over-generalised the two styles without discriminating between different national contexts (Čapo 2014). In the 1960s, when it was first stated, the distinction between "national ethnologies" (later on confined to Eastern Europe for political rather than any other reasons) and "cosmopolitan anthropology" may have pointed to certain differences, but later on, it was ossified and over-burdened by a series of power-related attributes. Those who insisted on it did not pay attention to inner dynamics of the discipline in different national contexts and therefore did not provide an adequate account of diversity in ethnologies/anthropologies across Europe. In addition to hierarchies of power, the ossified distinction between "national ethnologies" and "cosmopolitan anthropology" can be attributed to the lack of information across linguistic and political (until 1989) divides on the continent.

Since the beginning of the 21st century that lack has started to be rectified. One way of going about it addressed the complicated issue of national languages in which many European ethnologies/anthropologies are written. Here belong in particular the attempts of "small" European ethnologies, or rather, of European ethnologies written in "small" languages, to win readers beyond the nation-state in which they are practiced, by publishing in the hegemonic language of academia, English[5].

On the other side, ethno-anthropologists have been invited to publish in other countries. A most prominent example of this are country-specific issues presenting national ethno-anthropological research in a prominent French journal *Ethnologie française*, in French. This fine idea to make visible diverse European ethnological/anthropological traditions, initiated by the editorial board led by Martine Segalen, has resulted in a series of special volumes on ethnologies/ anthropologies in Norway, Sweden, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, and Albania among others. An early example of a similar attempt, initiated by Reinhard Johler, was a comprehensive volume with studies by Croatian ethnologists translated into German (Čapo Žmegač, Johler, Kalapoš, Nikitsch 2001).

In addition to these presentations of singular European ethno-anthropologies, there are comparative volumes that bring together analyses of several national traditions. An early such volume focused on the then fledging discipline of European Ethnology which had established itself in the German-speaking world against its predecessor, *Volkskunde*. The bilingual volume (German and English) presents several national ethnologies practiced

5. This was, however, not without ambivalence, for translation can be deceptive; also, it involves expenses and may become a problem insofar as publishing in other languages evades establishing disciplinary terminology in the vernacular.

i n Central and Eastern Europe (and Holland), and focused around transformations that our discipline underwent after 1989 (Köstlin, Niedermüller, Nikitsch 2002). Most recent among similar concepts is the volume edited by Andrés Barrera, Monica Heintz and Anna Horolets (2017). It is a somewhat belated product of a long-standing effort by Barrera at establishing a unified European research and teaching area in anthropology (2005; 2008). Here one can also mention a volume with a more restricted, South-Eastern European scope, with reviews of "ethnological sciences" in that region (Roth 2014).

The above-mentioned volumes give visibility to until then mutually little known national usages of ethnology/anthropology. They were conceived of as fora for thinking across national divides and they have paved the way toward transnationalisation of ethno-anthropologies in Europe. Others are taking up this challenge. A prominent example is the work of Ullrich Kockel (2012). Also, Sarah Green and Patrick Laviolette have brought that project a step further by initiating a debate about "the diversity that is European Anthropology and the directions in which it is travelling" (2015a: 330). Others have empirically shown that transnationalisation of different traditions has occurred. For instance, *The Companion to the Anthropology of Europe* (Kockel, Nic Craith, Frykman 2012) makes a conscious attempt to bridge the gap between separate ethno-anthropological traditions in Europe, reconcile the divide between what are thought to have been ethnologies studying own society and cultural and social anthropology of the other and overcome the still ambivalent position of European ethnology as "not quite" cultural anthropology (Frykman 2012). The chapters support the opinion of the editors that European ethnologies, in their many guises, have been thematically, theoretically and methodologically brought in alignment with cultural and social anthropology, an assessment made also by one of the advocates of the divide between "national ethnologies" and comparative anthropology, Chris Hann (2012, 2014). I believe therefore that the controversy that F. Martínez is mentioning is not about whether there is European anthropology. Rather, it might be about what characterises it, as the contributions in *Social Anthropology* (Green, Laviolette 2015a; 2015b; Martínez 2016) started to debate.

Bottom lines of a transnational European anthropology

I propose that European anthropology is a discipline which resulted from the process of transnationalisation of diverse traditions of doing ethnology/ anthropology in Europe. The process itself is grounded in reflexivity, which is the hallmark of our discipline, and in the parity of dialogue among the

practitioners of the discipline across national divides who partake of the unifying horizon of meaning. Transnationalisation does not mean that the anthropology of Europe can remain just "a network of perspectives" acknowledged by each other while "every national, regional group" continues to make "conscious use of its cultural specificity" (Hofer 1996: 95). It means going beyond mere mutual recognition of nationally specific perspectives to creating *a transnational perspective* that goes beyond particular national traditions and their specificities. As in other studies invoking it, the prefix *trans* is here used in the sense of "moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something" (Ong 1999: 4). It requires a change of perspective, a radical shift from methodological nationalism (Wimmer, Glick Schiller 2002) to methodological transnationalism (Nieswand 2008). It means developing a European anthropology that goes beyond nationally preferred topics and concepts and includes issues relevant to Europe and/or the world, or parts thereof, depending on what is studied. The span of topics presented at the conferences organised by EASA, SIEF, and within the regional scope of InASEA (International Association of Southeast European Anthropology) in the past decades points to the creation of relevant common themes.

The process of transnationalisation requires that we rely on our trademark, reflexivity. Reflexivity is at the root of the constant "state of unrest" (Testa 2016) of the discipline. Ever since its establishment, anthropology has been constantly challenging – and by the same token transforming – itself: it has come up with a series of shifting paradigms, it has been discussing the loss of its subject matter at various times and on various terrains, it has questioned its basic episteme on several occasions (e.g. positivism vs subjectivism, comparison vs particularism) and, since the 1980s the issue of representation has forcefully imposed itself on anthropologists, with reverberations until today. I argue that such a constant reflexive stance is a *condition sine qua non* of European anthropology as a transnational discipline which strives to cut across the diverse national traditions of practicing ethnology/anthropology in Europe. Reflexivity facilitates dialogue among diverse European anthropologies; reflexivity from a transnational perspective helps de-naturalise national anthropological concepts and ways of interpreting local meanings and forges new ones, it enables mixing diverse ways of doing fieldwork (see Estalella, Sánchez Criado, this issue), and asking questions of relevance beyond national borders, in the transnational European space which is of relevance to each national society in Europe.

European modernity is the common horizon of meaning that all European anthropologists share. Europe is not just a specific *place* of research but is a

common horizon, a state of knowledge (*Wissenszustand*), which is the product of European (Western) modernity, stated Peter Niedermüller in a programmatic text on European ethnology (2002). This statement pertains well to transnational European anthropology because Europe is a common horizon for all European anthropologists. That commonality enables openness toward and cross-fertilisation of diverse national intellectual strands of the discipline – of their insights, concepts, and methodologies. If that was the empowering feature of Croatian ethno-anthropology (Čapo, Gulin Zrnić 2014), it is an even more empowering characteristic of European anthropology for it allows for radical challenging of all ethnologies/ anthropologies in Europe no matter whether they study own or other cultures, in Europe and elsewhere. Openness should lead to mutual learning and exchange and thus create fertile ground for a multiple-way dialogue among diverse strands of doing anthropology in Europe. If it is to be a multiple-way relationship, the flow of knowledge production should not fail to become a balanced, mutually informed exchange from various sides on the basis of parity and fairness. As I have argued elsewhere (Čapo 2014), that exchange results from openness of all and each strand of ethnology/ anthropology to learn from one another and give shape to a genuine transnational European anthropology. Since the context of knowledge production in European anthropology is inherently transnational, inequality of dialogue is untenable if the transnationalisation of the discipline is genuinely to take place. If this does not happen, European anthropology will not become transnational for it will always exclude some strands of the discipline. Reflexivity is again of utmost importance, for it is with reflexivity that fairness and equality are borne.

There are, however, several rather imposing limitations to the process of transnationalisation: What will be its main language of communication? Who will be interested in it? Will the "big" language traditions (like the French), partake of it? And what about the countries in which there is already a well-established institutional division between "ethnology" (with folklore studies) and "anthropology" (which is, after all, also present in the division of the two pan-European associations, the EASA and the SIEF)? Attempts to deal with these issues might require further discussions, as dealing with the "controversy" of European anthropology entails engaging with further controversies.

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