

Tracking Knowledge: On the History of Changing Disciplinary Identities after 1945. Introductory Remarks

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In June 1947, the scientific journal “Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde” (founded in 1897 by Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer), then edited by the folklorist Paul Geiger, published several texts by European folklorists who had been asked by Geiger for a “brief overview (...) of the work of the last few years and of the plans, and about the plans that are being nurtured in their country for the future”. With this initiative, he hoped to strengthen the communication that had been interrupted by the Second World War and was convinced that, as a “neutral country,” Switzerland could help to “re-establish former links and promote ties and promote international cooperation” (Geiger 1947, 145). Between 1947 and 1949, representatives of the discipline responded to the request and published short national overviews of current research in Italy, Romania, Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Latvia, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Great Britain and finally Germany (which, for obvious reasons, was one of the most difficult texts to write). Switzerland willingly served here as a relief agency for German-speaking, Central and Western European folklore, much as Sweden did for Northern Europe and the Baltic States. With this Swiss initiative in the years after 1947, various dimensions of the field in which we are interested in the context of this issue become visible:

We ask about the processes and dynamics of forming and transforming knowledge within certain structures of politics and policies, of society and “culture,” of economy and administration, focussing on scientific knowledge as well as looking at the practical knowledge of applied and/or public folklore. Furthermore, (just as Geiger also intended) we take on a reflexive position on the scientific work of folklore studies. The fact that disciplinary identity is always negotiated in the process is evident: We construct its specific history, formation, transformation and positioning within national and international contexts and scientific fields. When looking at these interdependencies, the various shapes of power of a discipline become visible, a discipline that explores, explains and popularizes knowledge and images of the “own”, of specific communities, within certain people, often organized as a national state.

Of course, 1945 was not at all a zero hour for folklore studies, but the total moral and scientific breakdown of “*Volkskunde*” in Germany and Austria, the two political blocs that arose after World War II, as well as the entirely different power situation within the Soviet sphere made it necessary to re-start cooperation and scientific endeavours, to re-orient the discipline within the landscape of ethnology and folklore studies, and to re-connect to previous colleagues and their findings. Thus, ethnological disciplines in Europe faced multiple challenges after 1945.

This special issue asks about the different ways of new orientations in scientific work of ethnological disciplines in Europe after 1945, about leaving “old epistemological tracks” behind and about taking new routes in the form of innovative methods and of “relevant” themes to a disciplinary future in the years until the 1980s. We do so in taking a reflexive perspective on scientific work within ethnology and folklore studies, building on the existing but somewhat dispersed and scattered literature published in recent years (see e.g. Fenske & Davidovic-Walther 2010; Moser, Götz & Ege 2015; Eggmann et al. 2019; Bula & Laime 2017). These works show the interconnectedness of national, institutional, personal networks and political ideological, societal and state systems: The war not only had cutting effects on scientific cooperation and international scientific institutions, the discipline of German-speaking “*Volkskunde*” for instance was also discredited due to collaboration with the fascist regimes (Bendix 2012; Jöhler & Puchberger 2016; Kuhn & Larl 2020). Furthermore, the Cold War brought new political affordances for the discipline and its broader societal contexts in European countries and thus split the discipline into specific national contexts. The years after 1945 were therefore a time of searching for new tracks in epistemology, of leaving behind old paths of scientific work, of (re-)defining content and of searching for a new disciplinary identity.

We took the 2019 SIEF-Conference “Track Changes: Reflecting on a Transforming World” in Santiago de Compostela as a chance to reflect on track changes in the history of our discipline—concerning historical changes and transformations as well as theoretical and methodological changes in investigating and reflecting the past of our disciplines. Our panel gathered colleagues from various national backgrounds with a shared interest in a reflexive perspective on anthropological knowledge and on the intertwining of disciplinary conditions, societal contexts and political opportunities and usages (Ash 2002; Barth 2002). This issue collects revised and expanded contributions of the panel and combines them with three texts responding to them.

The contributions in this special issue emphasise the reflection of different ways of new orientations in scientific and societal as well as political work, and they ask about new perspectives to a disciplinary future in the years between 1945 and 1980s. The aim of this issue is not directed at specific institutional or biographical histories; rather, the authors look at three dimensions of tracking knowledge: First, there are new epistemological perspectives, e. g. with the influence of sociological questions or with the new focus on urban contexts. Second, the authors focus on the complex relations of disciplinary developments with political conditions, with science and university politics and with ongoing transformations and dynamics in European societies. And

the third aspect deals with the existence of a cognitive disciplinary identity after 1945 and reflects on the logic behind writing knowledge and disciplinary history in our field from today's perspective.

When looking at the various empirical examples within specific contexts gathered in this issue from a comparative perspective, both general findings and stimuli for further thought arise. Once again, the importance of different institutions in the field of ethnology and folklore studies becomes apparent: The authors work with empirical material and various methodological approaches from academic and non-academic institutions, from university departments, research institutes, archives, museums and—although not too prominent—from both academic folkloristic associations as well as from those that are oriented more towards practical usage of their material. We follow their tracks of disciplinary and institutional as well as political and societal usage in the fields of building, re-building and/or transforming nations, systems and values. Both the diverse and multi-faceted actors as well as the political systems play a crucial role in stabilizing and promoting the discipline after 1945 - and we find resistance and resilience at the same time. We find detailed and source-based contextualizations that point to the micro level and concrete scientific practices—and see—the necessity of keeping the macro level in mind. These ambiguities we do not only have to bear, but make them comprehensible and traceable.

Contributions in this Volume

In the first essay, **Kaisa Langer** takes a close look at the fluid adjustments in the field of university education in folklore studies facing the new political system of Soviet socialism in Estonia after 1944. While these profound shifts were changing the “rhetoric” and adapting the organisation of science and the university system, choices of topics and research interests by folklore students remained relatively constant compared to the ones studied in independent Estonia. Langer convincingly calls this Sovietization of Estonian folklore studies a “balancing act”, which she traces in detail in research plans, curricula and teaching documents—archival sources unfortunately rarely used in writing the history of knowledge of folklore studies to date.

In her essay, **Rita Grīnvalde** focuses on the Latvian scholars that were forced into exile due to the Soviet occupation. Her article looks at how this international scientific community worked in editing Latvian folklore texts and thus took part in an endeavour that mingled scientific motivation, economic interests, as well as national urgency with Latvian independence as a long-term goal.

Eija Stark follows the special situation of Finland in the Cold War period in her contribution. She insightfully presents the rather successful disciplinary history connected to processes and practices of Finlandization, to domestic and foreign policy and to international scientific and societal movements.

Related to this article—geographically as well as in content—is **Indrek Jääts'** study of the revival of the Finno-Ugric Studies in Soviet Estonian ethnography in the 1960s. Using the example of the ethnographic expeditions to the “isolated and archaic” Veps areas, he provides detailed insight into the interests and the special conditions of these expeditions as well as into scientific and museological strategies and outcomes.

Folklore knowledge and its production in Turkey is at the centre of **Hande Birkalan-Gedik's** text. Guided by international theoretical and methodological considerations, she examines transformations of the political, social, societal and economic contexts in Turkey, especially from the 1950s onwards, and their interactions and influences on producing folklore knowledge, applied and public folklore.

In the sixth essay, **Ingrid Slavec Gradišnik** asks about the position of “theory” in the disciplinary transformations of ethnology and folklore studies starting in the 1950s. Using the case of Slovenian ethnology, she focuses on the dichotomy of “theory” and “practice” while showing that these discussions ultimately revolve around the indefinite epistemologies of folklore and ethnological research. Her “re-reading of disciplinary legacy” using the little-known Slovenian example points to the theoretical lack of ethnographic research at the time, as well as to the massive shifts brought on by the deconstruction of the discipline’s subject.

The special issue concludes with three responses that do not only draw conclusions but point to shifts in perspectives and unresolved issues.

The first response comes from **Jiří Woitsch**. Based on his research in the archives of the Communist Party and especially of the secret police and intelligence services in the Czech Republic after the year 2000, he pleads for not emphasizing the contribution of prominent personalities too much. He advocates for research into the history of ethnology and anthropology in totalitarian regimes to take into account both scientific and non-scientific interests as well as competences and the “power of the system.”

In his response, **Simon J. Bronner** points to the highly important influence of nationalism on the development of folklore studies. When he argues that the state has always been an eminent actor for folkloristic and ethnographic work, whether authoritarian or democratic, he reminds us to look more into the details of the complex connections between politics and science when writing our histories of ethnographic and folkloristic knowledge, especially in cases where ethnic-linguistic “minorities” play an important role, which seems to be the case in almost any nation state.

Karin Bürkert responds to the articles in this issue by highlighting the “nonlinear” transformation processes that led to and were aroused by Hermann Bausinger and the Tübinger Schule in Germany. She shows not only their influence for German speaking Folklore Studies/Volkskunde but also remarkable parallels and connections to other national institutions, persons and processes. She underlines the importance of archival material, especially of first-person-documents and correspondence, for the (historical) ethnography of academic practices and their impact on society.

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