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OBSERVING SOCIALIST AND POST-SOCIALIST EVERYDAY CULTURE: INSIDE AND OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVES

Klaus Roth, Munich

“Contradictions and collisions occur when a Western author writes about a people who can also write about themselves”

Dan Rose (1990)

The subject of this article is not socialist or post-socialist everyday culture itself, but the ways in which it has been and continues to be studied by ethnographers, folklorists, ethnologists, and anthropologists from both inside and outside the region. More than scholars of other disciplines, ethnologists¹ are asked to reflect on what they are doing: who they are (as researchers), who they are studying from what perspective and, most of all, why and what interests guide them to study people's everyday behaviors and ways. Since the terms 'everyday' and 'everyday culture' entered the ethnological discourse and replaced the term 'folk culture' (cf. Greverus 1978, Rihtman-Auguštin 1988, Lipp 1993, Roth 2001), it has become ever clearer that studying everyday life and culture is not an easy matter. Whilst in traditional ethnography, folklore, and anthropology the study of well-defined genres of 'folk culture' — such as folk housing, costumes, kinship patterns, ritual, dance or narratives — provided clear-cut categories for research, the study of the all-embracing 'everyday culture' of ordinary people has turned out to be much more complex and

¹ In this paper, 'ethnology' will often be used as a general term referring to the disciplines of ethnography, folkloristics, ethnology, and social or cultural anthropology.

challenging. This begins with the term 'everyday' ('*Alltag*') itself, for which Norbert Elias (1978: 26) found at least eight different meanings in common usage. The most useful one for ethnology, also used the widest, is its definition as the sphere of everyday experience and interaction, — the 'normal' and unquestioned daily life-world ('*Lebenswelt*' as defined by Alfred Schütz). From this follows that 'everyday life' and 'everyday culture', too, are very complex and encompassing concepts. But it is not only their complexity which makes ethnological research more demanding today: it is also the very nature of everyday life and culture itself, their unquestioned 'normality' and 'naturalness' that puts high demands on the ethnologist studying his own life-world.

If this is true for the study of everyday life and culture in 'normal' societies, it is even more so for societies shaped by a totalitarian ideology such as communism or socialism. The goal of this ideology was indeed totalitarian: to create a 'new socialist society', a 'new socialist man', and a new 'socialist way of life'. In other words: the everyday life and culture of people was to be transformed fundamentally and in every aspect. For millions of people this was indeed the case, and this lasted for many decades.

It seems evident that the study of everyday culture in the 'capitalist' and the 'socialist' life-worlds poses different research problems and demands different approaches. It therefore makes sense to distinguish between the study of everyday culture (1) in socialist countries and (2) in capitalist or post-socialist countries in which democracy, pluralism, and market economy are the guiding principles.

It has meanwhile become an ethnological truism that the perception and interpretation of a given culture is strongly influenced by the researcher's position as a cultural 'insider' or 'outsider'. It was the linguist Kenneth Pike, who in 1954 coined the two terms *emics* and *etics* for this fundamental distinction. As early as 1962 they were introduced by Alan Dundes (1962) into folkloristic discourse, and in 1964, Marvin Harris made them the key concepts in anthropological terminology. *Emic* and *etic* soon crossed disciplinary

boundaries, and in the early 1980s had already become household words in many disciplines (cf. Headland et al. 1990: 15). Today it is generally accepted that *emic* denotes the inner view or perspective of a group or society, its culture specific interpretation and worldview, whereas *etic* denotes the outside view or perspective on a group or society, or a general, universalist interpretation. Whilst the first case deals with particularistic insider knowledge, the perception, description, and interpretation of a culture with its own categories and concepts, the second case concerns its perception, description, and interpretation with the help of general theoretical categories and concepts from outside the given culture. A comparative approach to cultures is possible only from the *etic* or outside perspective. For Headland, the *emics/etics* distinction is “one of the most important ideas in social science” (Headland 1990: 24). As fundamental and important as it is, it puts higher demands on the ethnologist’s reflexivity — and it raises the stress of research.

The socialist state put ethnologists under further pressure by exerting powerful and autocratic control over them: it controlled not only the research activities of native ethnologists, but also the way they represented social reality — and participated in the socialist transformation. As a consequence, in most socialist countries, unbiased research on ‘real’ everyday life and culture became very difficult or even impossible to conduct. Usually only outsiders, i.e., Western ethnologists or anthropologists, could study it, but often their work was also restricted by the authorities. Under these conditions, the native-foreigner dichotomy produced two different sets of knowledge about socio-cultural reality that existed side by side, two discourses usually without relation and reference to each other.

As a consequence, we have to further differentiate between research on everyday culture (a) by native and (b) by foreign ethnologists, i.e. in the socialist period, between ‘socialist’ and ‘capitalist’ researchers. This means, that all ethnographic research on the formerly socialist countries thus falls, by necessity, into one

of the four categories produced by the two oppositions '*socialist*' — '*post-socialist*' and '*emic*' — '*etic*' — and the findings in each category have to be interpreted accordingly. In view of the fact that generations of young students and scholars are less and less aware of the conditions of the socialist past and of the role of scholarship in it, I think that it is the job of all those who have experienced this period to bring these conditions to light, to come to terms with the recent past of our discipline, and to discuss its relevance for future ethnological work. I take this as a starting point for my reflections (as an outsider with almost forty years of experience with the socialist and post-socialist countries) on the impact of the observer's vantage point on everyday culture. My present essay is based on the extant research literature both by insiders and outsiders.

1. The study of socialist everyday culture before 1990

For ethnography and folkloristics, the impact of socialism on research went far beyond its influence on what subjects could be studied and which others were taboo, or on what opinions were publishable or not. The socialist regime did more than change the conditions of research. It radically transformed the object of study itself, and affected the researcher in this transformation. Peter Niedermüller has pointed out (1996: 144f.), that socialism created a life-world of its own. "It established rules of a cultural world, created the stages of social life, worked out the dramaturgy ... and the various repertoires of behavior," he writes, insisting that ordinary people had no other choice than to accept this world, because no one can live in a society and permanently ignore its socio-cultural order. In fact, the entire order of everyday life became an integral part of the lives of millions of individuals — including scholars. For the ethnologists, this deep involvement created a number of epistemological and above all ethical problems into which, however, I cannot delve here.

One of the prominent features of the socialist system was that by its inner logic and its desire to protect its 'achievements' from the 'class enemy', it created societies that were very *closed* in almost every respect, i.e., in politics, law, economics, social relations, culture, contacts and communication. The socialist societies were *insider societies*, which were, among other things, characterized by such features as:

- * an *ideological system* with a strong normative basis and goal orientation.

- * a highly centralized, hierarchical and *totalitarian* political and administrative system that extended far into the everyday lives of everyone,

- * social relations based on distrust in the state and Party authorities, and on a prevalence of *personalized trust* and informal social networks,

- * a deliberate *insulation* from, and distrust in, all kinds of *official* communication and influences which were perceived as threatening by most people,

- * very strong *ingroup-outgroup boundaries* and boundary maintenance of in-groups (trusted friends, relatives, colleagues, neighbors, etc., cf. Smollett 1989, Roth 2000, Benovska-Säbkova 2001),

- * very dense and intimate *insider communication* ('high-context' in the sense of Edward Hall (1959)),

- * a forced *isolation from outside influences*, contacts and communication,

- * a very high concern of most individuals with the *management of everyday life*, particularly with the hardships resulting from the deficit economy and state control,

- * and a strong internalized *collective experience* and *awareness* of being part of the socialist life-world. From this awareness arose a widespread feeling of *collective suffering*, which created the notion of a 'community of suffering' and of one's nation being a 'community of destiny'. These feelings were augmented by feelings of guilt among many intellectuals that they did not resist

or oppose the system enough, or had become too much part of that system and life-world.

The fact is that the people in the socialist countries became an integral part of the social order of the socialist life-world, and together with the fading memory of the pre-socialist past, the vast majority were gradually and mostly unwittingly absorbed into the 'socialist normality'. Many people became unaware of the specificity of this 'normality' and of the degree of their own entanglement in the shared life-world. This shared experience produced a 'cultural intimacy' from which outsiders were by necessity excluded. The relevant outsiders were Westerners, mostly tourists or visitors, but also a few professionals, students — and visiting scholars.

To a degree unprecedented in history, everyday life became a function of central planning, of social engineering, and cultural management by the Party and the state. Ethnography and folkloristics (along with other disciplines such as history and sociology) had to play an active role in these efforts. Their function was not to describe and analyze social reality as it was, but to promote the ideological goals, either directly or indirectly, and to provide the scientific legitimation for the state's cultural policy. This instrumentalization had far-reaching consequences for the discipline: analytical contemporary research of real everyday life was rendered almost impossible (if we disregard secret studies undertaken by some elite institutions for the Communist Party or the secret police). Unbiased and objective research could be published almost only outside the country, but research by foreigners in socialist countries was rarely, if ever, encouraged by the authorities. In some countries it was tolerated, in others it was restricted or even prohibited.

The deep divide between the *inside* and the *outside* perspectives on socialist everyday life and culture resulted both from the inner nature of the socialist system and life-world, and from the East-West antagonism with the ensuing political restrictions. Under

these conditions, the study of everyday culture was inevitably 'political', both for the native and the Western researcher.

a. The inside view

For political and financial reasons, ethnological research *abroad* was a very rare exception in the socialist countries; it was occasionally permitted in "socialist brother countries"² and extremely seldom outside the "socialist camp"³. Therefore, almost all ethnographers and folklorists were limited in their research to their *native* countries. For this 'anthropology at home' they were, in principle, well- equipped. Their closeness to, and their intimate knowledge of, their own culture created a deep understanding of contexts and historical backgrounds; they knew the language and were familiar with local dialects. Their access to informants and their intimate understanding was facilitated by the fact that they "were all in the same boat", i.e., they suffered from the same hardships of 'real socialism'⁴. In addition, their field expeditions were usually well-financed by the state; in most countries the human and financial resources of their institutes were (by Western standards) plenty.

The advantages of the researchers were balanced, however, by a number of disadvantages and obstacles. In the academic institutions, research was rigidly planned and controlled, and the

² For example, the Czech ethnologist Vacláv Frolec (1966) studied folk architecture in Bulgaria and the (East) German folklorists Doris and Erich Stockmann (1965) studied the folk music of Albania.

³ The Polish ethnologist Leszek Dzięgiel, for example, was able to do short-time research in the Near East. He later turned to Polish everyday culture (Dzięgiel 1998).

⁴ There was another divide that could jeopardize ethnographic research in southeast European countries — the strong urban-rural dichotomy; the researchers were in most cases urban intellectuals who felt that they were much more 'civilized' than their rural informants.

individual scholars had clearly defined tasks. The financial resources were available only for research that was approved by the Party superiors; many subjects were taboo⁵, and sometimes the 'findings' were predetermined from the outset. Access to foreign literature and to the international academic discourse (on symposia or conferences abroad) was in most countries heavily restricted. The lack of international cooperation and of comparison with other countries often encouraged nationalist views⁶. Because of the great relevance of ethnographic and folkloristic findings for the establishment of the 'socialist way of life', particularly for the 'system of socialist holidays and rituals' (cf. Hadžinikolov 1979, Roth 1990, Petrov 1998), there was a high degree of political influence and instrumentalization of research and teaching.

Under these conditions, the native ethnologists had only few alternative roads of action at their disposal. Depending on the actual conditions in their countries and institutions and on their own attitudes towards communism and the state, they could choose between *active cooperation*, *ostensible cooperation*, (*clandestine*) *opposition*, or *withdrawal*.

Active cooperation in the socialist transformation of everyday reality and in the creation of the 'socialist way of life', both theoretically and practically, was a strategy that quite a few ethnographers and folklorists adopted. Convinced of the ideals and goals of socialism or communism, some of them were even directly involved in politics⁷, while others took an active part in various commissions for the elaboration of the 'system of socialist

⁵ For example, the study of ethnic minorities was taboo in most socialist countries.

⁶ I will never forget a talk with a leading Bulgarian folklorist in 1967 who told me that Bulgarian folklore was so superbly unique that there was absolutely no need for international comparison and cooperation. Such views were by no means exceptional.

⁷ For example, Gyula Ortutay was Hungarian minister of culture, Wolfgang Steinitz member of the Politburo, Paul Nedo director of the *Amt für Sorbische Volksbildung* of the GDR; other folklorists or ethnographers were advisers of their governments. On the political use of the discipline cf. Oinas 1978.

holidays and rites', in juries for all kinds of 'competitions' or festivals, or in other activities initiated by the Party; many of them wrote books and articles praising, defending or supporting the 'Party line'. But not everyone who wrote such books or articles was a true believer: many of them cooperated only ostensibly, paid lip service by quoting Marx, Engels, Lenin or — for that matter — the leading Soviet ethnologist Yulian Bromley in the beginning of their publications and applied inner censorship. If there was opposition, it was usually clandestine, although at some academic institutions, dissent was tolerated. The more common strategy, however, appears to have been escape or withdrawal, an "inner emigration", usually in the form of a retreat into harmless historical, marginal or politically irrelevant fields of study⁸. The consequence of this strategy was — in most cases — a merely descriptive approach, a timid positivistic ethnography and folklore of the traditional peasant folk culture in its regional variations. Shying away from anything that could provoke criticism from 'above' or would not be approved by the various editorial boards or 'scientific committees' led to a lack of analytical approach to social reality. This tendency prevailed in most socialist countries, sometimes even after the political changes of 1989. Some scholars claimed that they had actually done critical research on topical problems and had put the findings in their drawers — but after 1990 it turned out that most drawers were empty.

The history of the political involvement of native ethnographers and folklorists has yet to be written, and its consequences for the discipline have yet to be discussed. For such a critical analysis, the large number of extant publications from that period offers an excellent basis, which would have to be broadened by interviews with eye witnesses and by archive sources.

⁸ Doing research in 'harmless' niches was, for example, very popular in the former GDR; a colleague at the academy of sciences, for example, chose to work on 18th century fire brigades.

b. The outside view

The number of foreign ethnologists, anthropologists and folklorists who actually did research in the socialist countries was quite limited; before 1970 there were actually only a few (see Halpern/Kideckel 1983). Western ethnologists or anthropologists who wanted to do research in a socialist country were usually subjected to strict rules and guidelines; their mobility was often limited, and in many cases they were closely watched by the authorities.

There were, however, large differences in the degree of control depending on

* the *country of origin* of the researcher and its exchange agreement with the host country; US researchers came almost exclusively with IREX⁹ or Fulbright grants, while West European scholars used exchange agreements of their research and exchange institutions (such as DFG¹⁰, DAAD¹¹, CNRS) with the east and southeast European academies of sciences; the latter seem to have been controlled less than the first;

* on their *host country* and its national and local authorities. Independent of the bilateral agreements, the local authorities could

⁹ The *International Research & Exchange Board* (IREX) is located in Washington D.C. It was established in 1968 "as the first American organization to conduct bilateral educational programs with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe ... Its primary objective was 'to insulate intellectual exchange from the exigencies of international politics, and to establish its independence from any sources of influence other than those devoted to the advancement of knowledge'. "Exchange agreements were signed in the late 1960s with Russia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, and in the 1970s with Bulgaria and Romania (www.irex.org).

¹⁰ The state-funded *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (German Research Association), Bonn, is the largest institution of its kind in the German-speaking countries.

¹¹ The *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (German Academic Exchange Service), Bonn, is the largest institution for funding academic exchange in Germany.

either be more restrictive or more liberal than the national ones (or the academy of sciences). In southeast Europe, American anthropologists usually went to Romania and Yugoslavia (cf. Halpern/Kideckel 1983, Halpern 1967, Verdery 1996), and less frequently to Bulgaria (cf. Whitaker 1979, Creed 1998);

* on the '*political climate*' of the period in which the research was carried out. In the Stalinist period, research was impossible. It became possible in many socialist countries in the 1960s, but only in the 1970s the conditions became more favorable;

* on the *topic* and the goal of the investigation. 'Folk music', 'folk dance' or 'folk architecture', for example, never posed real problems, while the study of contemporary everyday life or minority groups was risky or forbidden;

* on the researcher's own *political convictions* and sympathies. Whilst most Western scholars did independent and unbiased research in the socialist countries, some of them had their own agenda. Those with a leftist orientation were sympathetic to socialism, others had a critical distance, and still others cooperated with their own government agencies or even delivered information to their secret services. But if "of all the State secrets in the keeping of communist regimes, one of the closest guarded was ... the nature of everyday life" (Bertaux/Malysheva 1994: 238), then every empirical research into everyday life could be perceived as spying and every presentation or publication of findings as a threat to socialism or the regime. Some of the reports and books by anthropologists and ethnologists of that time reflect this paranoia of socialist regimes. The history of ethnological research under these conditions has yet to be written.

Being a foreign researcher, an outsider in a socialist country had it serious *drawbacks*, but certainly had a larger number of *advantages*. Concerning the disadvantages and obstacles (as described by the researchers), there were practical limitations and restrictions, such as limited freedom of action and surveillance in the host country. In order to prevent unfavorable research findings, some national institutions sent foreign anthropologists

only into 'reliable communities'; some villages (such as Bistrica near Sofia, Bulgaria) even became standard locales for this kind of research. In other cases the researcher was confronted with 'politically reliable informants', i.e., selected trusted Party members, and sometimes the informants were instructed what to say, sometimes they were harassed or threatened. In other cases, researchers were used by politicians, local officials, or even colleagues for personal or political goals.

Another important obstacle was the lack of intimate inside knowledge of the culture and often also of the language or local dialect. The most difficult and sensitive issue, however, was the fact that the foreign researcher was a social *outsider*, that he was not "in the same boat" as his informants and was not part of their "real life". He could always leave the country at his own will, while they could not. So the distance between them could be small, but it was always there. But while the foreign researchers were often suspiciously watched and controlled by the authorities, their presence was hailed by most colleagues as a link to the West. The situation of the few emigrants doing research in their native country was sometimes more complicated than that of 'pure' Westerners: because of their intimate knowledge of the language and the culture the authorities regarded them with suspicion, and many looked upon them as traitors who had left their flock.

Being a stranger had, on the other hand, considerable *advantages*. Apart from the fact that the socialist countries were 'under-researched', the etic perspective and distanced view allowed the unbiased observation of 'socialist normality'. Not being part of the socialist life-world and its system of relations, interests, and networks, and not being a threat to somebody else's interests and resources, plus one's eventual return to safety after the end of research and one's freedom of expression and publication — all this afforded the Western researcher a privileged position. In addition, the financial means and other resources as part of the research grant made his position even easier, particularly if he knew how to please his local informants with little gifts such

as much desired Western products and necessities of life. With the local population, 'being a Westerner' was usually an asset; the informants usually shared their knowledge quite willingly, sometimes even as an act of opposition against the regime. Many people, among them native ethnographers, welcomed the research and wanted the researcher to "let the world know about our lot".

Since the mid-1960s, "a growing number of American anthropologists are coming to Europe to study European peasant or post-peasant villages," Tamás Hofer (1968: 311) observed. The increase in their number in eastern and southeastern Europe was, however, not always due to a genuine research interest, but to the above mentioned liberalization and the fact that "the borders of Africa, Asia, and South America closed and ... even the Indians in the reservations of North America developed a hostile attitude towards anthropologists" (Cole 1979: 17). Anthropologists targeted southeast European countries in rising numbers, but in spite of their interest in contemporary everyday (or 'folk') culture and the many outstanding studies they presented¹², Halpern and Kideckel (1983: 378) complained that "Eastern Europe has been of restricted interest to an anthropology focused on the 'other', the non-European world". This orientation is palpable in many anthropological studies. West European ethnologists¹³, on the other

¹² For the socialist countries I want to mention Sam Beck, Peter D. Bell, Christopher Boehm, John Cole, Gerald Creed, Bette Denich, Joel M. Halpern, Eugene Hammel, Chris Hann, Barbara Kerewski-Halpern, David A. Kideckel, Gail Kligman, William Lockwood, Steve Sampson, Irwin Sanders, Carol Silverman, Eleanor Smollett, Charles Stewart, Katherine Verdery, and Roger Whitaker; John K. Campbell, Loring Danforth, and Michael Herzfeld did research in Greece.

¹³ Let me mention Maximilian Braun, Dagmar Burkhart, George Drettas, Christian Giordano, Thomas Hauschild, Felix Karlinger, Karl Kaser, Ulrike Krasberg, Leopold Kretzenbacher, Walter Puchner, Klaus Roth, Dorothea Schell, Annemie Schenk, Werner Schiffauer, Alois Schmaus, Edmund Schneeweis, Claudia Schöning-Kalender, Gabriella Schubert, Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, Gabriele Wolf and Walter Wünsch (cf. Roth/Wolf 1993).

hand, had a different approach: they studied southeast European cultures mostly as neighboring or related cultures and had closer ties to and a more intensive exchange with their southeast European colleagues.

As early as in 1968, Tamás Hofer noted that “both anthropologists and [native] ethnographers have their own tasks in the exploration of Europe” (Hofer 1968: 315) and that both approaches are “basically different but complementary” (ibid., 313). What was needed was, in his view, interdisciplinary and international cooperation between Western ethnologists or anthropologists and native ethnographers or folklorists. The opportunities for such a cooperation differed largely between countries; in Hungary they were greater than in other socialist countries. But cooperation was seldom sought by anthropologists. In fact, in the following decades there was little scholarly cooperation and exchange of views, so that in 1993 the Polish ethnologist Longina Jakubowska could state that “indigenous ethnographic texts exist parallel to anthropological ones” (Jakubowska 1993: 144). Her view is supported by a look at pertinent publications: anthropological texts rarely cite the works of native ethnologists, and publications of the latter (before 1990) rarely, if ever, cite their Western colleagues, but this may be due to political restrictions and the inaccessibility to foreign literature.

Let me summarize: In the socialist period, the basic ethnological distinction between the inside and the outside view, between the emic and the etic perspective, gained a significance that was much stronger than usual. The totalitarian system set up a very specific stage both for the native and the foreign researchers — and both of them did little or were then unable to bridge this divide and to relate the two discourses to each other. There can be little doubt that a comparative analysis of the writings of native and foreign researchers on the everyday life in the socialist period would still be of great value for the understanding of the inner workings of that period. The analysis will have to acknowledge the very specific political conditions of that time.

2. The study of everyday culture since 1990

With the collapse of the socialist regimes, political restrictions on academic teaching and research were lifted. Supported by various Western organizations, foundations, and exchange programs, southeast European scholars and institutions were soon integrated into the international academic community and again reached some degree of academic normality. These positive developments were, however, accompanied by material losses in many institutes such as redundancies and drastic cuts of resources. Yet more importantly, after decades of isolation researchers were now confronted with the tough rules and high standards of critical scholarship of the international academic community while at the same time their societies underwent fundamental political, economic, and socio-cultural changes and faced new demands. Under the impact of this transformation, the post-socialist societies did not open up in the way that the West had expected; on the contrary, people kept even closer together in their post-socialist 'community of suffering' and in some countries fell back on nativist impulses. In-group relations and strong ingroup-outgroup boundaries continued to be very strong, while the image of the 'West' changed from positive to ambivalent.

What were the consequences for ethnology in southeast Europe? Many institutions changed their paradigms of research, new institutes were founded, the disciplines of 'social anthropology' or 'cultural anthropology' were introduced, and journals changed their names and orientations (cf. Ivanova 2000). But with regard to (either socialist or post-socialist) everyday culture, research activities remained the exception rather than the rule¹⁴; the reasons for the lack of interest in everyday culture have been discussed elsewhere (Roth 2001: 11f.). Moreover, contrary to expectations,

¹⁴ In Bulgaria, for example, the studies of Radost Ivanova (1999), Milena Benovska-Säbkova (2001) and a few others deserve mentioning as remarkable exceptions to this rule.

the new freedom of travel and contact and the possibility of international cooperation and joint research did not produce a breakthrough. There are very encouraging developments in international cooperation such as joint projects and conferences, associations¹⁵ and journals¹⁶, and the “confrontation of Western and indigenous views” has been discussed critically on various occasions (cf. Driessen 1993, Gefou-Madianou 1993, Kassabova-Dinčeva 2000), but the dichotomy between native and Western views largely persisted, and occasionally even increased. The reasons however, were different: whilst in the socialist period, foreign research was limited by the state and hailed by most colleagues, it was now considered by many as an intrusion and a disturbance. The image of Western scholars changed: they were no longer tacit allies against a totalitarian regime, but were (and are) often felt to be arrogant, with hegemonial attitudes. This perception is not surprising: it is well-known to Western ethnologists and anthropologists working in countries like Greece or Turkey. The post-socialist countries appear to have returned to their traditional paradigm of a strict insider-outsider division.

One of the reasons why there are ambivalent feelings about research by outsiders may be the fact that southeast Europe has a long experience with it. The Balkans are unique in Europe insofar as both the inside and the outside approaches co-existed and competed with each other right from the early 19th century: ethnography and folklore held a prominent place in the Balkan liberation movements and in the nation building processes, whilst at the same time the “exotic Balkans” became and remained an object of Western ethnological and anthropological curiosity.

¹⁵ The *International Association for Southeast European Anthropology* (InASEA) was founded in Bucharest in 1999, its predecessor, the Association for Balkan Anthropology, in 1996. InASEA is an association that unites native and Western ethnologists, social and cultural anthropologists, folklorists, and ethnographers doing research on the Balkan Peninsula.

¹⁶ One of these journals is *Ethnologia Balkanica* (1997 ff.), the journal of InASEA.

Although no other European region has simultaneously been an object of native and foreign ethnographic investigation for such a long period, “to be an object of research is never pleasing” (Maquet 1986). In view of the high quality of native ethnographic research, “contradictions and collisions” between Western and native scholars were inevitable. Feelings of being studied “like aborigines” surged in this time of crisis and rising nativism. Western anthropologists were blamed for their focus on the exotic and marginal and for their construction of myths and stereotypical images of the Balkans as the “significant other” of Western Europe (Todorova 1997) — not only in the 19th century, but also in the socialist period and today. The very harsh criticism at times (cf. Gefou-Madianou 1993: 172) went beyond accusations of exoticism: Western researchers were accused of ignorance, rash generalizations, superficiality, bias, and disregard of historical backgrounds; some critics vented their frustration with the marginalization of their ‘small’ countries and ‘small ethnologies’ (cf. Prica 2001), while others grumbled that Western rationality can never grasp the essence of an ‘eastern culture’.

A further criticism was that the foreign researcher’s relationship to his host country was abstract and detached, and that this analytic distance often produced a lack of sensitivity towards the countries delicate themes and taboos, for example towards its interpretations of history¹⁷. But it is precisely this distance, Chris Hann (1987) argues, that allows the anthropologist (or historian) to reveal dangerous ideologemes, to demythologize national myths, and to conduct research that is politically inopportune or prohibited for native scholars¹⁸.

In view of the massive Western influence on the transforming countries and the establishment of entire universities and disciplines based on Western models, misgivings about “Western

¹⁷ Such accusations are often also leveled against Western historians.

¹⁸ Thus the American folklorist Alan Dundes collected political jokes in the Romania of Ceaușescu and published them in the USA (Banc/Dundes 1986).

intellectual hegemony”¹⁹ are understandable. This is particularly the case when the existing native institutions and disciplines are simultaneously denounced as irrelevant and old-fashioned. Jakubowska (1993: 148–150) is certainly right in arguing that the training of native ethnographers in the socialist countries was not all bad.

3. The need for a dual perspective on everyday culture

As ethnologists we know that ethnological research needs both the inside and the outside perspectives. Each of them renders very different insights, which complement each other and produce a fuller understanding of social reality. Contrary to views that “we are the only ones who can understand our own culture”, the people in post-socialist societies can undoubtedly benefit from being studied also from an etic perspective, just as foreign ethnologists can profit largely from the emic knowledge of their southeast European colleagues.

This rather general observation has very practical consequences. Many southeast European university or academic institutes today embrace social (or cultural) anthropology-disciplines founded in colonial Britain or in the US aiming at the study of (‘primitive’) *foreign* cultures. But neither the teachers nor the students at these institutes have a real opportunity to apply their new knowledge to foreign cultures, as even research in

¹⁹ cf. Gefou-Madianou 1993: 172. Todor Iv. Živkov (1999: 105–122) heavily attacked the present author for forcing the paradigm “M” (for “Munich”) on Bulgarian ethnology to replace the old paradigm “M” (for “Moscow”), disregarding the fact that the new paradigm stands not for any one university or school, but for an analytical and critical ethnology of the past and present, an ethnology (or social anthropology) that is practiced by a large and growing number of colleagues throughout southeast Europe (see e.g. Čapo-Žmegač 2001 for Croatia).

neighboring countries is very rare. Instead, they study their native cultures, but are asked to look at it with the eyes of the 'professional stranger', i.e., from an analytical outside perspective. The ability to adopt an etic perspective is a fundamental prerequisite for an "anthropology at home", but it is very difficult to achieve— particularly if the object of study is one's own 'normal' and unquestioned everyday culture. The best way to train this ability to apply the outside view, is through cooperation with foreign colleagues. This inevitably leads to a call for close international cooperation and exchange.

Practical experience has indeed shown that the combination of inside and outside views contributes to a much deeper understanding of social and cultural processes; and that the outside perspective provides insights which the native ethnologist cannot reach — and vice versa. This was at least the case in two joint ethnological research projects of the institute for European Ethnology at Munich University and the institutes of Ethnography and Folklore at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences²⁰. In the study of socialist everyday culture, intensive cooperation with Bulgarian colleagues was the most fruitful and valuable aspect. Those in the team who had grown up under 'real socialism' tended not to see the unquestioned 'normalities' of its everyday life, all that went without saying and was 'self-evident', but they knew intuitively what was an adequate explanation and what was not; those of us who came from the outside did not have that 'cultural intimacy' and inside knowledge, but the critical outside view could place the findings in a comparative perspective and lay open hidden ground rules, mechanisms, and strategies²¹ of everyday life.

²⁰ A first project on "Everyday Culture in the Socialist Village" was financed by the DFG (German Research Association) from 1993 to 2001 (cf. Dobrova/Roth 1997); a second project (financed by the state of Bavaria) deals with aspects of socialist and post-socialist everyday culture in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Estonia, and Russia (cf. www.fak12.uni-muenchen.de/vkde).

²¹ On the strategies of life management in a socialist village see Roth 1991, 2000, Dobrova 1997, Petrov 1998, 2000, Wolf 2000a,b.

Let me finally point out yet another development in our world of increasing mobility, migration, and world-wide exchange. I have so far depicted the insider-outsider dichotomy as a stable condition of ethnological work. In reality, however, this distinction is increasingly blurred. Increasingly more people — including ethnologists — have more complex backgrounds. Ethnologists with hybrid identities can be both insiders and outsiders to their culture of origin; cases in point are first, second or third generation southeast European emigrants in Western Europe or North America who do research in their family's native country. But although the boundaries between native and foreign ethnologists appear to lose their clarity, there is, and there will remain, a marked difference between the insider's and the outsider's view on everyday culture.

Studying everyday culture is, as I hope to have shown, a difficult task that the combination of the native and the foreign perspectives can ease. In this sense, the long tradition of having two perspectives on Balkan cultures is certainly a valuable asset, not a liability — if the two approaches are related to each other in international cooperation.

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