

Discoveries in a Microcosm

Europeans. Essays on Culture and Identity
ed. by Åke Daun & Sören Jansson. Lund,
Nordic Academic Press 1999. 280 pp.

This review deals with a book which can be evaluated in two different ways with two different results. The title, *Europeans*, shows that this volume is going to examine one of the most interesting topics of our present day: the diversity of Europe, its culture and identity. Even the dust jacket suggests the approach of the authors: it depicts the continent as a puzzle. Since there is no explanation for this symbol, one can only guess that the authors see the European ethnic (and regional) identities as different, but well matching elements of one whole. Since some pieces of the game are already missing it is mere guesswork whether this puzzle is falling apart or is on the way to being put together.

Among the authors of the book one can find prominent scholars. A number of them are leading scholars in certain branches of ethnology. According to the editorial introduction by Daun and Jansson, the aim of this work is to publish interesting, readable snapshots of European culture. In the first essay Åke Daun analyses the peculiarities of Swedish communication. In his paper he shows that, unlike so-called verbal cultures, in Sweden not interrupting somebody indicates your commitment to the topic; he points out that in other parts of the continent it is more a sign of being bored. In the second contribution Inga and Jeremy Boissevain present some features of everyday life they considered strange after settling in the Netherlands. They speak about such traits as the too direct Dutch social intercourse, the pillarization of society (Catholic, Protestant, Socialist and other) and its effect. Their paper ends by claiming that there are two Netherlands: Amsterdam and the rest of the country. In the third contribution Bernard Ineichen leads the reader to the history and presence of British habits and taste. The continuous discussion of the differences in eating habits, etiquette, taste is one speciality of the book and of intercultural experiences as a whole. The volume continues with the

essay by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne about Ireland. This contribution starts in the same reflexive tone as most papers written in this volume. Ní Dhuibhne points out in her paper that Irish society is a composite phenomenon, consisting of Irish, Anglo-Irish and Scottish-Irish. The essay gives an overview of the role and place of sexuality in Ireland. One can wonder whether the changing attitude towards sexuality is really a sign of secularization in the traditionally Roman Catholic Ireland or not.

After the detailed study of Irish society the volume continues with a paper by Annick Sjögren and Catherine Fritzell about the French educational system. The authors are French, having lived in Sweden for many years. One of them is a teacher at the French Lycée Saint-Louis in Stockholm. In this essay they discuss questions such as the prestige of knowledge or expectations of the State in educational matters. The next contribution by Disa Håstad investigates how Russian intellectuals view the Russian people. In this paper the author speaks about the changing role of the Russian intelligentsia: people no longer need the intelligentsia as intermediaries. Zofia Sokolewicz turns our attention towards Poland. In the part dealing with Polish hospitality she points out the origin of the now stereotypical Polish dishes. Then she discusses a common experience of the peoples of Europe in between: living between East and West. It is here we find the only attempt to change the stereotyped image of the former Eastern and Western bloc entertained by the average European and to make it clear, for example, that Polish culture is deeply rooted in Western Christian tradition. The fundamental changes after the end of the Cold War clearly indicated that the future of the continent would be influenced more by deeply rooted cultural-historical similarities and differences than by political decisions.

The book continues with the essay by Elisabeth Wengström in which she summarizes her experiences gained during several sightseeing tours for Swedes in Athens, Greece. The contribution paints a sharp picture of the discursive tactics used by

the tour guides during their work. It is delightful to read her reports about the discourses on the connection of ancient and modern Greece or how the guides pit Greek and Swedish mentalities against each other while on tour. Marianne Gullestad points out the connections between discourses on childhood and the Norwegian 'No' to the European Union, while Sören Jansson again writes about dishes. He finds that, although the Swedes are open to foreign cuisine, they consider the home-made product better than the foreign one. The fact that national origin has become a quality label in several countries shows the segmentation of the continent that is undergoing political unification. Next Thoroddur Bjarnason analyses Icelandic identity. A surprising fact in the essay is that while Icelanders, though to a lesser extent, mostly turn towards the Scandinavian countries, these countries do not identify with Iceland at all. In his paper Konrad Köstlin presents the Austrification of Austria. This was the process through which Austria was excluded from the German unity and created a separate identity of its own. In his opinion, it was tourism which provided one important element of national identity and made the Alps into a national icon. Klaus and Juliana Roth deal with Germany after the unification. In their paper they provide details of the history of the last ten years from the unification euphoria to the disillusionment and alienation.

Anders Linde-Laursen writes about the very peculiar self-identification of the Danes on a north-south continuum. They consider themselves the southerners of the North and the northerners of the South. The result of a sociological survey is analysed in the next contribution by Åke Daun, Carl-Erik Mattlar and Erkki Alanen. According to their investigation, the Finnish population around Turku differs on four fundamental points from the inhabitants of the Stockholm region: the need for deep friendship, feeling guilty, being more aggressive and the wish to be independent. In a paper starting with the constructivist approach by Lars Fant, one can read about the connection of Spanish and Portuguese identity. Considering that the two

languages are amongst the most widespread in the world, the cultural connections formulated on the old continent have an influence on wider areas. The essay provides a historical framework to understand how Spain became the significant Other for Portugal while Portugal reached the very special role of non-significant Other for Spain. The book continues with the contribution of Elisabet Brouillard which states its main question in the title: "Does a Belgian National Identity Exist?" After briefly surveying the historical relation of Walloon and Flemish identity, she tries to point out some features of each. Because of its special situation she discusses Brussels in a separate section. In conclusion she claims that a feeling of Belgian national identity exists. Christine Burckhardt-Seebass, in her article on the linguistic heterogeneity of Switzerland, points out that language is not the only element shaping culture. Confessional differences also have an important influence on constructing boundaries. Angela Rundquist gives a brief survey of the mythical image of the Tuscan villa that is spread all over the Western world. The volume ends with a brief summary by Åke Daun.

The book definitely achieves several important aims. After looking through the book the average European reader can recognize the cultural diversity of the continent. This volume can help one to understand that the different habits of other nations are usually not offensive to us. Some of these fellow-Europeans would hopefully find the origin of their previous cultural shock recorded in lifelong stereotypes and would look back critically on themselves.

For the subjective reviewer the essays dealing with the origins of national myths, those presenting the heterogeneity of some peripheral and less well-known societies or the ones using all the capacity of their chosen method are the most important. Naturally, it is very important for scholars of culture and society to provide a broader audience with an image of their work through these colourful snapshots.

Reading the book, some more critical questions arise. Firstly, writing this review in

a country where the discourse on the historical and cultural regions of Europe has a long tradition, I would criticize the image of Europe held by the editors. In spite of its title, this book, like many others in the last decade, does not try to cover most of the continent, and does not even mention or react to the fact that *this* view of Europe is partial. Apart from the Polish and Russian essays, all the papers deal with countries that are members of the European Union or closely associated with it. If we examine who the chosen ones speaking about Europe are, it is visible that more than half of the authors are Nordic scholars, though only five papers discuss Nordic matters. There is only one author, the Pole Zofia Sokolewicz, who is not from the region mentioned. This has, of course, an effect on the book and especially on the average readers aimed at. Naturally, the editors have the right to collect essays on *their* Europe, but ten years after the end of the 'short twentieth century' (1918–1989/90) this collection seems to be a little bit outdated. There are a lot of people who hope that the notion of Europe has been changed.

On the other hand, some essays provide a relatively static view of ethnic groups and their cultures, although most of the contributions point out group- and sub-identities within national identities. This fault is even worse when authors deal with other cultures and the careful reader can recognize the effect of previous cultural shock. Reflecting our personal experiences is definitely an important tool for researchers of culture, but making these experiences the only and exclusive source of research will not help us and especially our readers to recognize the fundamental similarities.

There is no doubt that the cultural heterogeneity of Europe is a value in itself. Simultaneously with the rediscovery of local, regional and ethnic cultures and identities there is another process: the political, institutional and to some extent cultural integration of Europe. This is partly the result of global challenges: the old continent may lose, if has not already lost, its role and position in the world. To strengthen political integration, to make Europe capable of

handling at least her problems, the widespread feeling of community is needed beside political decisions. By keeping the cultural variety in mind, cultural research should help to formulate the emotions that we lost some centuries ago.

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