

Utopias, Realities, Heritages: Ethnology and Folklore Studies between the Past, Present, and Future

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This special issue of *Narodna umjetnost* is the result of a partnership between the Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research and SIEF, the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore. It continues the successful cooperation that produced the international SIEF congress in 2015, co-hosted by the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Zagreb and the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research (which publishes this journal). The seven articles in this issue have been developed from papers presented at the congress in Zagreb, which brought together nearly one thousand scholars from across Europe and beyond for roughly 800 presentations. The authors represent the SIEF fields, ethnology and folklore, and they range from senior, established scholars to junior, up-and-coming researchers from the south, north, east, and west of Europe, as well as North America. Their contributions to this issue are not representative, of course, of the wide range of topics and approaches at the congress itself, but taken together we might say that they offer a partial glimpse of the SIEF fields at the current moment in time.

The three hottest topics in 2015, judging by the number of panels and papers, were migration and mobility, urban spaces, and cultural heritage. Each of these represents a major challenge to contemporary societies and begs for ethnographic attention, for cultural and historical analysis – precisely the sort of consideration that SIEF scholars bring to them. Religion, foodways, and the body closely followed the first three topics in terms of popularity. Other themes around which a number of different panels were organized included museums, archives, the home, gender and sexuality, digital culture, rural spaces, and narrative. Cutting across topics and panel streams, the affective turn in our discipline(s) was very much in evidence at the congress, with affects, emotions, and the senses cropping up in the most disparate contexts. Running parallel to the emergence of the affective in various topics was the more established critical attention to their political complications.

Of course, the relative popularity of topics changes fairly quickly, not from one congress to the next perhaps, but certainly between decades. Founded in 1964, when the preexisting CIAP (International Committee on Popular Arts, founded in 1928) was reconstituted as SIEF, the society's congresses bear witness to this intellectual history and, indeed, are an important venue in which that history is made. Yet throughout its existence, some key concerns have stayed with us. It is difficult to imagine that they will fade away any time soon: the popular, the vernacular, the everyday; the local and the translocal; the national and the transnational; diffusion and migration; difference and sameness; religious and secular imaginaries; the narrative and the material; tradition and creativity; class and gender; food and the home; the archive and the museum.

These topics cut across panels in the Zagreb congress and across SIEF conferences from the outset to the present. They define the society and its field(s) of research and practice; these are the concerns that mark the common ground of ethnologists and folklorists in all their various denominations and renominations, concerns shared also with colleagues from neighboring disciplines who take part in the work and congresses of SIEF, from social anthropology to cultural history to human geography. We bring to these common concerns those questions and concepts that motivate us any given year: from the historic-geographic, the functional, or the (post-)structural at congresses in the 20th century, to the affective, the digital, the corporeal, the postcolonial, the postsocialist, the posthuman, and so on at current congresses. These traveling concepts bring us into larger conversations that cut across disciplines; they are crucial, if ephemeral. The common concerns, in contrast, have proven resilient; they remain at the heart of our field(s) through all of the various "turns" it takes. They unite us, in spite of our differences. In 2015, they brought us together in Zagreb, in greater numbers than ever before. Our theme for the congress was: *Utopias, Realities, Heritages. Ethnographies for the 21st century.*

In 1891, Oscar Wilde wrote in his essay on *The Soul of Socialism* that a "map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing." "And when Humanity lands there," he added, "it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail." If the end of the 19th century heralded progress as the realization of utopias, the past century has buried many visions of the future: big modern projects and the idea of linear progress itself are dead.

The fascination of the public with heritage in recent years might be understood in the context of this history of temporal imaginations: burying various visions of the future, we excavate multiple visions of the past. Indeed, heritage also presupposes a projected future for which we must safeguard it, populated by future generations who we imagine will care.

In between utopia and heritage are day-to-day realities, the ordinary and the routine: the practices and expressions that ethnologists have long taken as their principal objects. It is in this most mundane of realities that people realize their utopian visions and heritage imaginaries, motivating their actions and interpreting their existence in the context of pasts and futures onto which they project their hopes and fears, their inspirations and aspirations.

The congress theme took this triad of utopias, realities, and heritages as a challenge and sought to relate it to the ethnographic study of expressive culture and everyday practices: from religion to politics, from heritage to spatial imagination, from the physical to the virtual, from narrative to the food chain, from music to the museum, and from nationalism to tourism. The congress was thus a critical platform for debating contemporary and historical imaginaries of utopias, realities, and heritages.

The 21st century confronts humanity with a series of challenging questions. Vernacular culture and everyday life are central arenas to face these questions and to answer them with reference to social and cultural dynamics and in the context of new economic, political, religious and cultural visions. In that endeavor, our societies need ethnography like never before. Recording and making sense of the production of imaginaries, projections, wishes, frustrations and anxieties that people have with regard to the future, ethnologists and folklorists also take an active and engaged role in this production. In one sense, their role has always been active, ever since these fields took shape in 19th century Europe and helped to produce a vision of harmonious rural communities, their tales, customs, and worldviews for an urban, middle-class reading public.

Two of the essays in this issue present compelling disciplinary reflections on the heritages and utopias of European Ethnology and Folklore Studies. In his contribution, Fabio Mugnaini, Professor of Folklore, European Ethnology, and Performance Studies in the Department of Anthropology of the University of Siena, takes the reader on an exhilarating journey through the political history of the discipline, analyzing various ways in which knowledge of the people and performances of “folksiness” have been instrumentalized and turned to ulterior ends; the ways in which they have been politicized, depoliticized, repoliticized, and tooled to suit diverse purposes and agendas: scholarly and political, radical, conservative, and commercial. His account is firmly embedded in Italian scholarship and equally firmly set in an international context; notably one may mention the Croatian context, to which Mugnaini refers through the work of Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, who not only directed the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research (one of two hosts of the Zagreb congress in 2015) but also served as vice-president of SIEF and as editor of this journal, *Narodna umjetnost*. Mugnaini’s account is at once learned and personal, and it offers clear lessons not only on the

political nature of folklore but also on what he terms “the political destiny of its study”. In his contribution we find a thoughtful consideration of the disciplinary heritage of past utopias and an historically grounded critique of current utopias, in particular those of the heritage turn in the discipline. Throughout, however, Mugnaini argues against neutrality and for public and political engagement; in this, his essay captures well the spirit of the panel in which he took part in Zagreb (*Engaged Anthropology: Reality? Necessity? Utopia?*).

In another essay reflecting on disciplinary heritages and utopias, Laurent Fournier, maître de conférences in European Anthropology at the University of Aix-Marseille and member of IDEMEC (Institute for Mediterranean, European, and Comparative Ethnology) in Aix-en-Provence, likewise uses hindsight to open up space for the future. Where Mugnaini offers an account and an argument embedded in the Italian history of the field, Fournier’s contribution is grounded in the development of the discipline(s) in France. In both cases, however, the lessons they offer have implications well beyond national borders. Ingeniously drawing on classic theories from across the social sciences (from Simmel, Evans-Pritchard, and Bourdieu) to analyze the disciplinary structures and dynamics in the study of the SIEF fields, from Folklore to European Ethnology to Anthropology, Fournier presents different models of cooperation between scholars in these fields, ranging from unitarianism to federalism, offering an instructive example from France (AFEA: Association Française d’Ethnologie et d’Anthropologie) set in the international context by way of comparison to the history of SIEF and those of the WCAA (World Council of Anthropological Associations) and the IUAES (International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences). His essay offers a partial glimpse of discussions in the panel that Fournier was part of in Zagreb, which was sponsored by the WCAA and titled *Is There a Sense of Community Uniting Anthropology, Ethnology and Folklore Today?*

In the following essay, Orvar Löfgren, Professor Emeritus of European Ethnology at Lund University, offers a compelling study of the suitcase and a lesson in one of the hallmarks of ethnological scholarship: its analytical excavation of the minutiae of everyday life that open up to important insights into cultural dynamics, social structures, and historical events. Bringing together eclectic sources, from film and literature to memoirs, the media, and fieldwork, Löfgren begins with the trivial and the mundane – packing and unpacking a suitcase – on which he trains a keen and creative scholarly gaze and which he opens up to larger conversations through the analysis of temporalities and time frames, and with Massey’s concept of “throwntogetherness”. Juxtaposing historical and contemporary cases, intertwining historical analysis with ethnography, in this essay Löfgren explores people’s everyday negotiations between the sediments of their past experiences, their fears

and longing for the future, and the ordinary and extraordinary tests and trials of the present at any given moment in time. This masterful unpacking of utopias, realities, and heritages, as they mesh and are entangled in the practice of everyday life and in its material objects, is an article-length version of Löfgren's keynote lecture, which opened the SIEF congress in Zagreb and set the tone for much of what followed.

Drawing from the panel *Gesturing Toward Utopia: The Politics of Exemplarity*, which she organized at the SIEF congress in 2015, Dorothy Noyes, Professor of Folklore at Ohio State University, contributes to this special issue an analysis of exemplary gestures, from narrative to performance, and from popular imaginaries to news cycles and revolutionary movements. Shaping the future by reference to the past, the exemplary gesture, she notes, is "mutable and malleable: it can circulate from body to image to language, or join all these modes in one". Exemplarity, she explains, refers to a "complex of practices held together by reflexive interplay between the conduct of individuals, the creation and transmission of narratives and images, the formation and reformation of social agendas, and emic discourses of exemplarity itself". In other words, exemplarity is a particular form of tradition, and Noyes brings to its theorization an arsenal of analytical tools and concepts from folklore studies and related fields for the study of tradition (to which she has previously made important contributions herself). She is careful to point out, however, that unlike some other practices labeled as (folk) tradition, exemplarity is in no way marginal to modernity "but central to the history of its imaginings of power, progress, and the self". Citing a number of case studies (drawn from her co-panelists in Zagreb), in this essay Noyes offers a critical invitation to an important conversation on exemplarity and she sets out some of the major topics and stakes in that conversation.

In her essay on "Depoliticization from Below", Čarna Brković, lecturer at the University of Regensburg and the 2015 winner of the SIEF Young Scholar Prize for ethnological research, explores the shifting boundaries between humanitarianism and the political sphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her analysis offers a persuasive example of the power of ethnography to complicate simplicity and to unravel complexity. Citing the plight and the actions of Milica, Mina, Ana, Marko and other people whom she interviewed, Brković demonstrates how actors on the ground rely on depoliticizing discourses of humaneness and humanity in a political context dominated by ethno-national rhetoric and identity-based divisions, in order to try to secure medical care for sick children or otherwise stake claims to survival and well-being. Her essay offers a much-needed perspective scarcely represented in the anthropological criticism of the depoliticization of development and humanitarianism, which has been more preoccupied by what Brković qualifies as "depoliticization from above" while largely ignoring the vernacular, de-

politicizing rhetorics and practices of people at the lower ends of social and economic hierarchies: of social actors who seek out the help of others in the name of human solidarity. Her contribution to this issue is based on a paper she gave in Zagreb as part of a panel that she co-organized with David Henig (University of Kent), entitled *Human, All Too Human: Locating Humanity in Humanitarianism, Charity, and Human Rights Activism in Eastern Europe*, a panel that offered various ethnographically grounded studies of the moral registers of humaneness and humanity and their encounters and mediations in activism.

Drawing on ethnographies of everyday life in 20th-century Yugoslavia and contemporary Croatia, Sanja Potkonjak and Tea Škokić in their contribution, “Working Class Gone to Heaven”, explore the post-socialist phenomenon of a depoliticized working class, one that is no longer invoked in the political sphere, not even “in ideological manifests of the governing nomenclature” as was the case in the “socialist consumer culture” of Yugoslavia. Analyzing current laments over the extinction of the middle class after the fall of Yugoslav socialism, and the social repercussions of a tectonic rift between economic, cultural, and social capital, the essay offers a thought-provoking perspective on class in contemporary society through an ethnographic lens. This ties in rather nicely with the opening essay, that of Fabio Mugnaini, and its analysis of the politicization, depoliticization, and repoliticization of the subaltern collective subject, the folk. Indeed, if Mugnaini refers in hindsight to Croatian ethnology a quarter of a century ago, the authors of this article represent its cutting edge today. Škokić is a Senior Researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, while Potkonjak is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Zagreb; the two host institutes of the SIEF congress in Zagreb. Their essay is based on their lecture in the congress panel on *Rethinking Class: From Utopia to Reality and Back*.

Finally, the closing essay in this issue is by Bernhard Tschofen, Professor of Popular Culture at the University of Zurich, developed from his keynote lecture in Zagreb, “The Experience of Culture: Approaches to an Ethnography of the Immediate in Complex Relations”. Taking the congress theme as a challenge, Tschofen defies us to reverse the intellectual refinement that produces heritage, utopia, culture, and other essentialized spirits to return to the diverse undistilled corporeal and sensory practices of social actors in a messy world that ethnography can hold up to critical reflection. Investigating examples from alpine sports, culinary arts, and living history practices, and examining various mediated, sensory, and imaginative ways in which humans relate to their environment, the essay makes a powerful plea for ethnographies for the 21st century and demonstrates both the specific promises and challenges of our work.

Some of the concepts and challenges that tie together the articles in this issue of *Narodna umjetnost* include those of class and tradition, material culture and the body, politicization and depoliticization, cultural and historical analysis, engagement and ethnography. As noted at the outset, these offer a partial glimpse into research in the SIEF fields and into conversations that took place at the congress in Zagreb in 2015. Of course, any number of other essays could have been selected and developed from among the 800 or so presentations, and the glimpse offered here would have changed accordingly, either slightly or dramatically. Indeed, a couple of other authors were invited to contribute to this issue and their contributions would have further broadened its scope, but they fell out along the way due to the timeline and to other obligations, as often happens. Regardless, I think that readers will agree that the essays written for this issue give us very good reason to value the critical and creative exchanges that SIEF helps to uphold in our fields of knowledge and practice. SIEF invites you to join this conversation, to listen, to debate, and to deepen it fruitfully for our disciplines, to explore differences and convergences and to cultivate the critical capacity for dialogue and engagement in ethnology, folklore, and neighboring fields. The next occasion to do so will be at the SIEF congress in Göttingen in 2017, which provides an occasion to look afresh at classic topics from our fields' history – from craft to house, from mobility to museums, from narrative to ritual, from homelands to home-work – and uncover the rich opportunities in looking at central areas of present-day research through the lens of the congress theme: *Dwelling: Crisis, Craft, Creativity*.

Finally, I would like to draw the readers' attention to the ways in which this issue contributes to the internationalization of scholarship in our discipline(s). Its eight authors write from the vantage points of at least seven different national ethnology traditions and speak into a scholarly field that is truly transnational in its critical conversations. At the same time, this issue of *Narodna umjetnost* is not only circulated to the journal's regular subscribers and through Open Access online, but it is also distributed as part of the conference documents to all the participants of SIEF's next congress in 2017 – placing a printed copy of the Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research in the hands and on the bookshelves of SIEF members from every corner of Europe and from far beyond its borders. In this respect, the cooperation between SIEF and *Narodna umjetnost* marks the beginning of what I hope will become a longstanding SIEF tradition, working together with a scholarly journal from the host country to bring to its readers a taste of the conference discussions, while also building a bridge from one biennial SIEF congress to the next one. Such a tradition will strengthen and move forward our field(s), both locally, in our national institutions and scholarship, and internationally, in our common society and conversations.