



International Society for Ethnology and Folklore  
Soci t  Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore  
Internationale Gesellschaft f r Ethnologie und Folklore



www.siefhome.org  
sief@meertens.knaw.nl

www.facebook.com/SIEFinfo

Secretariat SIEF  
Meertens Institute  
P.O. Box 10855  
1001 EW Amsterdam  
The Netherlands

## SIEF Workshop

### The 'Dark Histories' of European Ethnologies and Folklore Studies

22 September 2023, 09:30-13:00 (online)

09:30-10:00

Welcome by Marie Sandberg

Opening Impulses: Hande Birkalan-Gedik (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Chair Hanna Snellman

10:00-11:10 Paper Session I (chair Dani Schrire)

10:00-10:15 Thomas DuBois (University of Wisconsin) **Taking Native Sovereignty Seriously: Notes toward an Ethics of Practice**

10:15-10:30 Angela Kocze (CEU University) and Carol Silverman (University of Oregon)  
**Roma and 'Dark Histories' of European Ethnologies and Folklore Studies**

10:30-10:45 Coppelie Cocq (Ume  University) **From Lappology to S mi Studies. Shifts in positionality, responsibility and ownership in Indigenous research**

10:45-11:10 Discussion

11:10-11:25 break

Paper Session II (chair  arna Brkovi )

11:25-11:40 Ljiljana Pantovi  (IFDT Belgrade) **Medicine, Eugenics and Nation building in the writing of Batut**

11:40-11:55 Rozafa Berisha (University of Prishtina) **Negotiations of "authenticity" in the margins of Balkans' ethnology: Internalised orientalism?**

11:55-12:10 Sanna K hk nen (University of Helsinki) **White, grey, black? Ethnologists and propaganda in Finland 1941–1944**

12:10-12:35 Discussion

12:35-13:00 Closing discussion, concluding remarks and future plans (chair Konrad Kuhn)

## **Abstracts**

Hande Birkalan-Gedik (Goethe University Frankfurt)

### **Perennial Moments and the Responsibility of Intellectuals: Towards More Engaged, Critical Disciplinary Histories**

As we are reminded repeatedly, folklore and ethnology have a history steeped in dark moments—be it scientific racism, eugenics, Nazi collaborations, governments established through military coups, and other shameful acts perpetrated by totalitarian regimes. In any case, these accounts were rendered either in total silence, with utter disregard or mythic denial, while other trends feature tyrants as ‘victimized accomplices.’ Regardless of how these events were documented, I contend that these dark moments, far from being relegated to the past, permeate our present and future. We now witness the emergence of new ‘-isms,’ which pose a threat to both academia and our everyday lives, perpetuating as ‘perennial’ dark moments in different guises.

Considering the nuances and intricacies found in well-known examples, I am exploring new avenues for writing disciplinary histories. I offer my reflections on three pillars that I deem as crucial: First, motivated by an emphasis on future-oriented folklore and ethnology, I aim to propose a different connection between the past, present, and future—one that is embedded and relational, transcending our conventional understanding of history. I suggest a re-orientation towards future rather than performing ‘past-oriented’ historiographies. Second, rather than lamenting the dark moments in our disciplinary histories in the confined geography of Europe, I suggest that we move transnationally and de-center an epistemic myopia that ignored the ‘national’ contexts at the margins of Europe and elsewhere. Third, I invite colleagues to pursue a dialogue with ‘critical folkloristics’ as a crucial methodological perspective. This will require us to position ourselves as everyday activists and engage ourselves in feminist, post-colonial, transnational, and transdisciplinary debates and issues and go beyond the tireless task of collecting the contrasting foils of several dark histories which come to us under different masks.

And, then if dark moments are yet to come to us as, take for instance, ‘embedded precarities,’ emergent new rights, and other perennials, we as folklorists need to unite ourselves in solidarity and strive to write engaged histories of folklore and ethnology. Writing critical histories should be attuned to emancipating our discipline from oppression, dominance, and privilege; and simultaneously aim at promoting positive democratic social change. It is in this light that I invite disciplinary historians, as ‘responsible intellectuals’, to think about these issues. Only then as intellectuals with a responsibility to be both actively engaged and critically analytical in our approach, we can write historiographies that can transform the future of human society, which can also transform the future of our discipline.

Thomas DuBois (University of Wisconsin)

### **Taking Native Sovereignty Seriously: Notes toward an Ethics of Practice**

The United States Constitution of 1787 (article 1, section 8) reserves to Congress the “power to regulate commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several states and with the Indian Tribes,” a wording that places Native American nations in a category at least as independent (and exalted) as a US state or a foreign country. Although later US Supreme Court rulings have sought to lessen the implications of this wording, it remains the case that federally-recognized Native American tribes (nations) enjoy a degree of sovereignty under US law. But for a variety of reasons that most probably stem from pervasive and ongoing attitudes of white supremacy, Euro-American jurists, policy-makers, educators, and ethnographers have had a hard time

according Native sovereignty the agency or respect this constitutional wording implies. While surveying some of the past (and present) acts of disregard of Native sovereignty in US contexts, my presentation explores the practical question of what respecting Native sovereignty looks like in practical terms in educational and ethnographic endeavors. I draw on and reflect on my own work as a white male Euro-American ethnographer and educator in projects with Anishinaabe and Menominee artists and intellectuals in the US Upper Midwest. I hope that these reflections will hold resonance and pertinence for professionals working with Indigenous communities elsewhere in the world, including in Europe.

Angela Kocze, Central European University and Carol Silverman, University of Oregon

### **Roma and ‘Dark Histories’ of European Ethnologies and Folklore Studies**

We are proposing a dialogue between Romani activist/scholar Angela Kocze, sociologist, Head of Romani Studies CEU, and Carol Silverman, non-Romani American folklorist/anthropologist about the history of ethnological studies of Roma and how they have contributed to anti-Romani stereotypes. Utilizing the concept of “scientific racism” we will interrogate how Roma were racialized by being assigned to a bounded category that is genealogically linked and whose distinct physical appearance and/or social characteristics are passed on by biological descent. Topics to discuss include how ethnographers have misused the binaries: civilized/uncivilized; nomadic/sedentary; traditional/modern; integrated/isolated, etc.; and valorized the classification of Roma into rigid categories of peoples, with a preoccupation distinguishing “pure-blooded from half-breeds.” We will interrogate which cultural markers, such as use of Romani language (or dialect of Romani) were used to categorize Roma and why.

We will cover the historical trajectory of the Gypsy Lore Society (founded in England) that promoted the collection of items of “Gypsy folklore” before they disappeared. The Gypsy Lore Society produced a large cohort of non-Romani “Gypsylorists,” who prided themselves on supposedly living the “Gypsy life;” some of them, however, sexually exploited Romani women. We will further explore what effects this ethnological scholarship has had and continues to have on Roma, such as in social policy, surveillance, and policing in numerous countries.

Coppelie Cocq (Umeå University)

### **From Lappology to Sámi Studies. Shifts in positionality, responsibility and ownership in Indigenous research**

In this intervention, I will reflect upon the history of the discipline of Sámi Studies, today part of the international field of Indigenous Studies, but with roots in Nordic Lappology. Early research has given us valuable documentation on languages, folklore, and cultural practices. However, the ideologies and political agendas behind these works require us to scrutinize the contexts and implications behind these materials. This calls for a reflection about how to make use of these sources and resources today in an ethically valid manner. Moreover, a prerequisite for contemporary Sámi and Indigenous research is to develop cultural-sensitive methods, that acknowledge the misconducts of the past and can contribute to building trust and sustainable relationships for research relevant to the communities.

According to Nordic researchers, Lappology – the study of Sámi people as objects of research – died in the 1970s (see for instance Korhonen 1992). On one hand, a major shift can be observed that took place at that time: the explicit aim of documenting and preserving Sámi languages and cultures on their way to vanish lost its importance; the paternalistic approach to education began to receive criticism; and Sámi voices started to be given more attention. An ethnopolitical organization and an active engagement from Sámi educators, artists, writers, and cultural

workers grow as a response to decades of questionable research practices. On the other hand, the traces left by Lappology and unethical research practices have to be acknowledged. Despite research paradigms, changes in ideologies and legal frames, and new ethical frameworks, contemporary research cannot ignore the misconducts, exploitations and harmful acts made in the past. For today's researchers in Indigenous and Sámi studies, the legacy of colonialism and paternalistic ideologies implies that our research design, methods, theoretical frameworks and relations are constantly in need of being negotiated, questioned, revised, and carefully adjusted in order to guarantee an ethically and culturally valid approach to the field.

This process of negotiation will be discussed based on the concepts of positionality, responsibility, and ownership. With this contribution, I also want to reflect upon ongoing processes, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in Sápmi, as well as upon blind spots and pressing challenges, such as how to make the academia an attractive place for Sámi students and scholars.

Ljiljana Pantović (IFDT Belgrade)

### **Medicine, Eugenics and Nation building in the writing of Batut**

This paper explores the entanglement of medical discourse, eugenics, and nation-building through an ethnographic lens, shedding light on the lesser-known Serbian context. Eugenics discourses, which have often been attributed to Western Europe and North America, hold implications for the biopolitical aspects of nation formation. This study shifts the focus towards Serbia and investigates how the early Serbian nation state conceived itself as an organic entity. Rather than utilizing traditional ethnographic methodologies, this research draws upon the ethnographic data embedded within the works of Milan Jovanović Batut, a prominent Serbian physician of the time. While Batut was not an ethnographer per se, his writings provide valuable ethnographic insights into the eugenic nation-building effort in Serbia. This study examines how Batut's works depict the process through which Serbian inhabitants were shaped as medical subjects within the nation-building project. Unlike eugenic initiatives in Western contexts, where middle-class populations were often targeted, the Serbian case highlights a distinctive focus on the rural populace due to the predominantly agrarian nature of the society. Through a critical analysis of Batut's writings, this study unveils the complexities of the Serbian eugenic narrative and its deviations from Western paradigms. Ultimately, this research prompts a reevaluation of our interdisciplinary histories, enabling us to better comprehend the diverse and intricate relationships between medicine, ethnography, and nation-building in different political moments.

Rozafa Berisha (University of Prishtina)

### **Negotiations of “authenticity” in the margins of Balkans’ ethnology: Internalised orientalism?**

In this paper I discuss how Kosovar Albanian ethnologists negotiated “cultural authenticity” in their writing, particularly during the politically fraught decade of the Milosevic regime. Located at the margins of Balkan ethnology, the early writing of these ethnologists initially reflected the wider concern of Yugoslav ethnology to document and advocate the culture of their own ethnic group's peasantry. During the Milosevic regime, however, Kosovar ethnologists took a more active role in producing knowledge that countered the Serb nationalist political and academic discourse on the racial inferiority of Muslim majority Kosovar-Albanians. In their prescribed

role as national authenticators, ethnologists engaged in a complex negotiation about the essence of the Kosovar-Albanian identity, categorizing some cultural practices as inherently “authentic” and some as part of the Ottoman legacy. What was cultivated within such writing was also a correlation between perceived Islamic practices and inauthenticity. Focusing on the interpretation of peasantry’s material culture, this paper discusses the specific conditions through which “cultural authenticity” is produced within Kosovar ethnology. I consider the production of “authenticity” to be a process that rests on unstable evaluative criteria and converges with the orientalist paradigm. Yet this negotiation of “authenticity” with respect to knowledge production draws on the very conceptual frameworks that engender hierarchies in the first place.

Sanna Kähkönen (University of Helsinki)

### **White, grey, black? Ethnologists and propaganda in Finland 1941–1944**

In 1930s and during the Second World War there was a popular idea that Finland could – and should - (legitimately) expand further east and form Greater Finland due to the Finno-Ugric history of the region. During the war between Finland and Soviet Union in 1941–1944, a wealth of research in various fields was conducted in the occupied areas. Antti Laine, who has studied wartime research in East Karelia suggests (in *Historiallinen aikakauskirja* 102) that researchers in humanities differ from those in natural sciences in that they published more general-interest articles and opinion pieces and that “the writings often had a propagandistic tone”. Were ethnologists working in the occupied areas propagandists, and if so, what were their motives? How can you assess the texts and identify possible propaganda? In communication science one way to analyse propaganda is to divide it into white, black and grey propaganda (for example Jowett & O’Donnell 2019), depending on the veracity of its message and whether the sender is known or not. White propaganda is the most difficult to distinguish because it is direct and open. White propaganda comes from an identifiable source and the information is accurate yet selective. Black propaganda is easily identifiable because it uses means that are clearly false. Grey propaganda is a hybrid of the two and probably the most common type of propaganda. What would the ethnologists’ texts look like if they were analysed using this classification?