

## **ETHNOLOGY AND ITS CONNECTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY AND FOLKLORE**

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### **Summary**

The goal of this chapter is to provide a general overview of the variety of disciplinary traditions that are enclosed under the umbrella-term ethnology, the history and evolution of these traditions, as well as some of the current lines of research that are being developed in these fields. This chapter is structured into four parts: (1) an exploration of Claude Lévi-Strauss' classical definition of ethnography, ethnology and anthropology; (2) a section dedicated to the disciplines that, depending on the place and the time period, are related to ethnology, in particular to European ethnology; (3) an overview of the history of the term ethnology, and (4) a focus on folklore studies and its connection to ethnology.

### **1. Introduction**

Unlike other fields of study, the term ethnology refers to a wide spectrum of disciplines; in particular, defining ethnology is extremely complicated when it is related to the European domain. In some countries in Europe, the term ethnology is not used at all and has been included in the broader discipline of anthropology. In other places, the term ethnology is still used as a synonym of anthropology. Finally, in some cases, the term

ethnology refers to the study of local cultures and as such, it is defined as a separate discipline from anthropology altogether.

The present authors are writing from an academic tradition in which ethnology is not a separate discipline. However, through the exercise of this chapter, we seek an understanding of the logic behind ethnology that is maintained as a separate discipline in other European countries.

## **2. Classical Differentiation of Ethnography, Ethnology, and Anthropology Revisited**

In this section, we revisit Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1963) classical and clear-cut differentiation of ethnology, ethnography, and anthropology in its historical context. Lévi-Strauss (1963:354-355) described ethnography as the first stage in anthropological research, a methodology that involved observation and description and was primarily based on field research that focused on a single community. Likewise, ethnology was considered the next stage of the investigation in which ethnologists compared and contrasted different groups of people. The final stage of investigation, according to Lévi-Strauss, was aimed at using theory to find structural principles. Paraphrasing Lévi-Strauss, ethnography, ethnology, and anthropology do not form three different disciplines but three stages, or three moments of time, in the same line of investigation, “and preference for one or another of these only means that attention is concentrated on one type of research, which can never exclude the other two” (1963: 356).

French anthropologist Philippe Descola argues that ethnography, ethnology, and anthropology involve a sequence of increasing maturity in the development of an anthropologist (Urry 2006: 26). He argues that British and American versions of anthropology tend to confuse the three topics by labeling all of them as “anthropology”. However, in a recent work, Descola recognizes that the division of the discipline in three stages cannot be maintained because of the continuum of “description / comprehension / explanation” (2005:68).

According to the classical division, ethnography was mostly understood as the intensive study and description of a single group of people. In his classical work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), Malinowski established the bases of ethnographic fieldwork by living for an extended period of time with a group of people, taking part in their daily activities, and collecting ethnographic data.

Currently, the word ethnography refers to the research methodology used by anthropologists as well as the monograph produced after fieldwork. Ethnographic methodology, also known as fieldwork or ethnographic fieldwork, may consist of observing and recording data by establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, keeping a diary, tracing genealogies, and mapping fields (Geertz 1973: 3-30).

These techniques are not the main objective of fieldwork, but rather provide the description, interpretation, and creation of theories. The main tool in ethnographic fieldwork is participant observation in which ethnographers participate in the daily lives of their informants over a period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is being said, asking questions, and collecting data to answer research questions

(Hammersley y Atkinson 1994:15). Ethnographic fieldwork is not limited to just the fields of anthropology and ethnology. The ethnographic method is used in other social sciences and is often wrongly referred to as a synonym for qualitative research.

Regarding ethnology, the second term of Lévi-Strauss triad, it was defined as an inductive generalization among different ethnographic research methodologies. According to this definition, ethnologists aim to find common principles by comparing and contrasting ethnographic descriptions. Founders of the discipline of anthropology, such as Edward Burnett Tylor and James George Frazer, were engaged in theory construction and as a result, their work lacked direct observations.

The use of second-hand data collected by other people, such as missionaries, traders, or colonial officials (Goodenough 1956: 36-37; Barfield 2001), and the production of analysis constructed outside the collecting context, earned them the moniker of “armchair anthropologists.” In addition, the classical definition of ethnology also leads to problematic ideological issues, as such ethnology can only be understood in a colonial context (Urry 2006). Ethnology was considered to be the comparative study of “primitive” societies that were “without writing.” These societies were considered to be “wild” by nineteenth century authors. The categories of “wildness” and “primitiveness” as comparative elements among societies have been discarded in academia. Maintaining this definition of ethnology, therefore, questions the validity of this object of study (Lombard 1997:17-18).

Finally, according to Lévi-Strauss, anthropology is the final stage of research. As Philippe Descola points out, “among the various social sciences to have merged in the course of the past two centuries, anthropology is probably the only one that is still pondering over the definition of its subject matter” (2005:65). We can try to define anthropology by its content or its methods, for instance. A common current definition is to understand anthropology as the academic study of humanity and cultural diversity.

It was institutionalized and defined as a discipline during the nineteenth century in a colonial context when physical anthropology and ethnology were combined into one discipline in order to trace human evolution. In the period between the two world wars, anthropology was divided into two traditions: in Britain, the idea of “social structure” was emphasized while in the US, the focus was on the concept of “culture”. Before World War II, the differences between British and American anthropology began to disappear. Each discipline borrowed objectives and methodological approaches from one another, forming the discipline of sociocultural anthropology.

However, the clearly defined distinctions among ethnography, ethnology and anthropology cannot be maintained. As the social context changed, the distinctions became increasingly blurry as they gradually shared interest and research lines. The next section will explore contemporary practices linked to these disciplines.

### **3. Disciplines and Contemporary Practices**

The historical context as well as the current geographical context of the three terms requires further explanation. In large areas of central and northern Europe, ethnology

became the generally agreed upon term to describe it. In Britain, the US, Latin America, and some southern European countries, the term used is either social or cultural anthropology. Also, the term ethnology is seen as somewhat archaic in Anglo-American anthropology while in British anthropology it is rarely used (Urry 2006:5).

The authors of this article ran an internet search of the terms ethnology, ethnography and anthropology that directed us to different institutions, departmental curriculums, journal editorials, and the action lines of related associations. Drawing on this data, we analyzed the practices and research projects of each institution. Finally, we concluded that the goals, interests, and current research lines of each institution are quite similar.

In our mapping, we found that some university departments, professional associations, and scientific journals use the term anthropology without any mention of ethnology or ethnography. On the other hand, other institutions use the term ethnology as a synonym for anthropology. There are also cases in which the difference between ethnology and anthropology is maintained to designate the study of ourselves and otherness. Following these differences, we have structured this section in three parts based on the institutional use of each of these terms: (1) cases in which ethnology is not employed; (2) cases in which the term ethnology is used as a synonym for anthropology; and (3) cases in which anthropology has meanings different from ethnology.

<b>France</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>Scandinavia</b>
Ethnologie rurale et historique	Volkskunde	(Regional) ethnology Folklife studies Social geography	Folkliuforskning
Ethnologie des sociétés modernes et urbaines	Volkskunde Empirische Kulturforschung Kulturanthropologie Europäische Ethnologie	Sociology Sociography Social history Social Anthropology	Socioalantropologi Europacisk Etnologi
Folklore	Volkskunde/ Philologie Europäische Ethnologie	Folk-Lore Oral History	Folkemindvidenskap Folkloristik
Technologie	(Volkskunde)	(Regional) Ethnology	Folkisforskning Etnologi
Ethnologie sociale	Socialgeschichte Historische Soziologie	Social History Historical Anthropology	Socialantropologi
Ethnologie extra-européene	Völkerkunde Ethnologie	Social Anthropology	Etnografi Socialantropologi

Table 1. Some of the terms to refer to ethnology, anthropology and folklore in various European countries. Our own elaboration of the terminology analyzed by Thomas K. Schippers (Schippers 1991: 147).

### 3.1. Cases in Which Ethnology Is Not Employed

In many academic traditions, ethnology has been substituted by anthropology, thus rejecting its controversial past and establishing itself as a scientific discipline. The term anthropology is used in the name of most departments in the US, Latin America, Britain, and in some south European countries such as Spain and Portugal. This broad expansion of the term anthropology is mostly due to the two most influential anthropological mainstream traditions: British social anthropology and US cultural anthropology.

Some American anthropology departments and journals still preserve a broader vision of the discipline by dividing it into four fields: cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics. Other American universities do not maintain that structure but have specialists in all those areas. For example, the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, USA, established by Franz Boas' doctoral student Alfred Kroeber in 1901, explains in the departmental website that “anthropologist study human beings from every time period, in every time period, in every way possible, in all their complexity” ([www.anthropology.berkeley.edu](http://www.anthropology.berkeley.edu), accessed June 18, 2012). In this manner, anthropology is conceived as a wide-ranging discipline. In their official website, the name of the department has no adjectives (i.e., social, cultural) before the word anthropology and in addition, the term ethnology is not used anywhere on the website. Like other anthropology and ethnology departments, Berkeley professors are especially interested in citizenship, urban society, modernity, social organization, visual anthropology, primate behavior, gender and queer studies, performance, religion, identity, post-colonial theory, and various geographical sites. These are worldwide contemporary interests that are not particularly different from those at any other university department or research center.

In the British academic tradition, linguistics and archaeology developed in separate disciplines with different methods while physical anthropology is linked to the biological sciences (Urry 2006:23). British anthropology was the mainstream model in Western Europe in the 1970's. As an example of British influence in western European countries, we will concentrate on the Spanish context, where ethnology and folklore are seen as a precursor of anthropology (Sánchez-Carretero and Ortiz García 2008:23). In this academic context, for instance, the webpage of the Department of Sociocultural Anthropology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM) considers anthropology to be “a discipline framed in the social sciences that studies the variability of human cultures” ([www.ucm.es/info/dptoants](http://www.ucm.es/info/dptoants), accessed June 18, 2012). Like many other anthropology departments in Europe and the Americas, the UCM Department of Anthropology works on cultural heritage, development, urban anthropology, international cooperation, gender, human rights, citizenship, cultural diversity to name but a few areas of study. Although the word ethnology is not employed to refer to any discipline, we have found the term ethnology used in a course, “Regional Ethnology”, that focuses on the particularities of Spanish regions.

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