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UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA
INSTITUTE OF
LATVIAN HISTORY

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Staged otherness as an object of ethnographic investigation

Abstract

of the report presented at the international interdisciplinary conference
“Challenges in Ethnography: Ethnographers and Ethnographic Knowledge”

Vilnius, Lithuania, 22–23 October 2020

Riga, 2020

Anotācija

Tēžu publikācija referātam “Citādības eksponēšana kā etnogrāfiskās izpētes objekts”, kas 2020. gada 23. oktobrī nolasīts Lietuvas Vēstures institūta organizētajā starptautiskajā konferencē “Izaicinājumi etnogrāfijai: etnogrāfi un etnogrāfiskās zināšanas”. Prezentācija konferencē tapusi pēcdoktorantūras projekta Nr. 1.1.1.2/VIAA/3/19/516 “Etnogrāfiskie un frīku šovi Latvijas teritorijā 19. un 20. gs. mijā – starp zinātņi, izklaidi un homofobiju” ietvaros.

Summary

Abstract of the report “Staged otherness as an object of ethnographic investigation”, presented on October 23, 2020 at the international conference “Challenges in Ethnography: Ethnographers and Ethnographic Knowledge” organized by the Lithuanian Institute of History. The presentation for the conference was made in the project “The Live Human Exhibitions in the Territory of Latvia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries between Science, Entertainment and Homophobia” (No. 1.1.1.2/VIAA/3/19/516).

Scientific Committee of the conference

Rodrigo Cespedes, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Anna Gomóła, University of Silesia

Vita Ivanauskaitė-Šeibutienė, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

Indrek Jääts, Estonian National Museum

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STAGED OTHERNESS AS AN OBJECT OF ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION

Staged otherness – live human exhibitions or ethnographic and freak shows – subject carefully explored in Western Europe and the USA is *terra incognita* in historiography of Latvia. Before the postdoctoral project was started, in collaboration with researchers engaged to the project “Staged Otherness: Human Oddities in Central and Eastern Europe, C. 1850–1939” (Poland) many occasions of staging exotic otherness were fixed in Riga. Until then in Latvia publicly known were only two of them – the show of five people from different continents held in Riga in 1835 and the presence of African village and Dahomey Amazones’ performance in the Riga’s 700 anniversary in the summer of 1901.

Nowadays researchers explore live human exhibitions (= the practice to stage non-European ethnic groups – mostly the representatives of the African, American, Asian and Australian people – or humans with anatomical differences) from variety of discourses. Scientists try to answer the questions link to the popularity of those occasions in a certain period of time (impact of colonial policy, matching to the spirit of modernism and discoveries in science like race theory and theory of evolution). They explore persons involved in this process. The role of impresarios and actors of the staged troupes, the reaction of the audience are under the interest of representatives of social sciences and humanities. The travel routes of the troupes and the management keep scientists’ attention as well.

Scientific interest spent the exotic shows almost all time of their existence. This was one of the ways in which both ordinary people and scientists gained new knowledge in ethnography, geography and medicine, which now has a label of “scientific racism”. The report will deal with interest of scientific societies located in Baltic gubernias of the Russian Empire (“The Courland (Kurzeme) Society for Literature and Art” (*Die Kurländische Gesellschaft für Literatur und Kunst*, 1815–1940), Society for history and archeology (*Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 1834–1839), “The Scientific Commission at the Riga Latvian Society” (Rīgas Latviešu biedrības Zinību komisija, 1869–1940) about the exotic shows took place on these territories.

CONFERENCE “CHALLENGES IN ETHNOGRAPHY: ETHNOGRAPHERS AND
ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE”
PROGRAMME

Thursday, 22 October

10.00–10.15 **Welcome**

10.15–11.15 **Plenary session**

Moderator Vida Savoniakaitė

Rodrigo Cespedes (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology)

Indigenous People and Cultural Defenses: Practical Experience of Ethnographers and Anthropologists as Expert Witnesses on Criminal Trials

Discussion

11.15–11.30 Coffee break

11.30–13.30 **Session I. Ethnographers: Historical Approaches and Beyond**

Moderator Auksuolė Čepaitienė

Diego Ballester (University of Bonn)

Words, Myths and Constellations. Robert Lehmann-Nitsche and the Construction of a Pan-American Ethnographic Cartography, 1897–1938

Vida Savoniakaitė (Lithuanian Institute of History)

Interactions in Ethnography: The Concepts of Eduard Volter in the Russian Empire and Beyond, 1882–1918

Anna Engelking (Institute of Slavic Studies Polish Academy of Sciences)

Towards an Integrated History of Anthropology. Thoughts on Ethnographic Activity in Vilnius Between the Two World Wars

Indrek Jäät (Estonian National Museum)

Brotherly Help to Kindred Peoples: Estonian Ethnographers' Role in the Ethnic Revival of some Eastern Finno-Ugrians in the Late 1980s

Discussion

13.30–15.00 Lunch

15.00–16.30 **Session II. Challenges in Ethnographic Theory**

Moderator Darius Daukšas

Ilze Boldāne (University of Latvia)

Staged Otherness as an Object of Ethnographic Investigation

Anete Karlson (University of Latvia)

Method of Experimental Ethnography – A New Approach to the Study of Historical Material

Jurgita Senulienė (Lithuanian Institute of History)

Ethnographic Research Strategies of Lithuanian Migrants' Identity and Food in the USA

Discussion

Friday, 23 October

10.00–13.30 **Session III. Challenges in Ethnography and Ethnographic Knowledge**

Moderators Darius Daukšas and Vytautas Tumėnas

Anna Gomóla (University of Silesia), **Małgorzata Rygielska** (University of Silesia)

Academisation of the City. Ethnography of Students Activity Based on the Values of Silesian Culture

Kamila Ғәсіқовска (University of Silesia), **Adam Pisarek** (University of Silesia)

Academisation of the City. Oral History of the “Kocynder” Students' Club Members

Vytautas Tumėnas (Lithuanian Institute of History)

Ethnography in Semiotical Research of Lithuanian Traditional Culture

11.30–11.45 Coffee break

Darius Daukšas (Lithuanian Institute of History)

Migration, Identity and Emotions: Approaching Lithuanian Migrants in Norway

Laima Butrimaitė (Vilnius University)

Gendered Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan: A Thematic Analysis of Online Debates

12.45–13.30 Final discussion and coffee

Moderator Vida Savoniakaitė