

How people shape their lives, express their emotions and create their places: the Lisbon 2011 SIEF Congress

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The 10th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) took place in Lisbon in April 2011, under the theme “People make places: ways of feeling the world.” The congress evolved around the ways in which people construct their views, opinions, values and practices and how these are constantly being re-negotiated and re-interpreted in various creative forms. It comprised three sub-themes: “Shaping lives,” “Creativity and emotions,” “Ecology and ethics.” The texts compiled in this dossier reflect this thematic organization, making visible the rich variety of subjects of the introductory talk and the keynote speeches of several well-known social scientists, historians and ethnologists that in this way contributed to the academic quality of this event.

KEYWORDS: place-making, creativity, emotions, ethics, ecology.

Como as pessoas moldam as suas vidas, expressam as suas emoções e criam os seus lugares: o Congresso SIEF de 2011 em Lisboa ♦ O 10.º Congresso da Sociedade Internacional de Etnologia e Folclore (SIEF) teve lugar em Lisboa em abril de 2011, dedicado ao tema “People make places: ways of feeling the world”. O congresso pretendeu olhar para o modo como as pessoas constroem as suas visões, opiniões, valores e práticas e como tudo isso é constantemente renegociado e reinterpretado, sob variadas formas criativas. A temática englobou três subtemas principais: “Moldar vidas”, “Criatividade e emoções”, “Ecologia e ética”. Os textos compilados neste dossiê refletem esta organização temática, tornando visível a rica variedade de perspetivas do discurso inaugural e das demais conferências proferidas por um leque de reputados cientistas sociais, historiadores e etnólogos que desta forma contribuíram para a qualidade académica deste evento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: lugares, criatividade, emoções, ética, ecologia.

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THE 10TH SIEF CONGRESS TOOK PLACE IN LISBON IN 2011 UNDER THE theme “People make places: ways of feeling the world.”¹ The congress evolved around the ways in which people construct their views, opinions, values and practices and how these are constantly being re-negotiated and re-interpreted in various creative forms. The meeting intended to elucidate and develop perspectives on this topic by focusing on the making of places, and scholars were invited to present new perspectives on how people’s lives, memories, emotions and values interact with places and localities, focusing both on case studies as well as inquiries into theory.

The response of the scholarly community was excellent and Lisbon attracted almost 1000 scholars from all over the world, who came together to discuss many topics, organized under the three days in over 100 panels. Several workshops, intended to open to empiric and practice-based research, and poster sessions, to allow young scholars and others to make their work more visible, were also part of the event.

The conference aimed to encourage particular boundary-crossing explorations of ontological, epistemological and ethical issues that arose from a greater emphasis on a sensitive and even sensuous approach to knowledge and understanding. Thinking that the question of how people make the places they inhabit remains wide open, SIEF invited proposals that dealt with the role of cultural practices in the creation of locality: how a space turns into a particular place; how people relate to, construct, and are constructed by the places they live in; and which practices shape those places. Other questions that were posed included: What new approaches for the study of the emotional links between people and the places they inhabit are being developed? What theoretical tools can be used by ethnologists to understand a sense of belonging? What is the role of expressive culture linked to daily life in the shaping of the places? How do we combine ecological and ethical issues with ethnographic data, especially in cases where there seems to be a clash between what people do with their places and general ecological and ethical concerns?

The variety of places that were explored in this process included, among many others: work and home places, places for vacation, places for the dead, places to pray, places to create, places to destroy and to be destroyed, places to memorialize, places to arrive and to leave, as well as places that disappear and reappear, inside places, and non-places. Notions of multi-belonging, shared places, and generational differences all show how making places is a process that is not univocal, and people make places as much as places make people.

1 I was honoured to be a board member of SIEF and head of the organization of the 2011 SIEF Congress in Lisbon. I would like to thank the local committee, the volunteers, Nomadit and FCSH/NOVA for their outstanding work and support. More information about SIEF can be found at <<http://www.siefhome.org/>>.

New ways of making places – through the virtual space and the Internet – were also taken into consideration.

As it had been the tradition in SIEF congresses, under the major theme, each of the three days of congress had itself a sub-theme and two keynote speakers per day were invited having these subthemes in mind: “Shaping lives,” “Creativity and emotions,” and “Ecology and ethics.” Besides the three specific themes other two leading international scholars were invited to give an opening and closing talk. From all these keynote addresses, this special dossier in *Etnográfica* now publishes several texts that illustrate these three main themes, as well as the opening address.

The opening talk was given by Bjarne Rogan, a leading historian that has worked in the history of SIEF and CIAP, its former designation. Under the title “A remarkable congress and a popular general secretary: CIAP & SIEF, Arnhem 1955 and Jorge Dias,” Rogan expanded on how Portuguese Ethnology played an important role in the formation of SIEF, and how the leading Portuguese ethnographer António Jorge Dias, who became secretary of CIAP in 1955, was a key scientist in this process. Rogan’s talk became even more interesting since the congress took place in Lisbon.

The first sub-theme was “Shaping lives.” The basic idea behind this sub-theme was to analyze how our disciplines have from their early beginnings contributed to the understanding of how people shape their lives. This includes the study of narratives and beliefs, of material culture and practice, which still belong to the core of our analytical enterprises, but also the way new perspectives and analytical horizons suggest innovative questions to both old and new material. Shaping lives was also about creating and sustaining memory, which in turn makes places predictable and readable to cultural practices, to lived experience. But memory is also changeable and the object of additive interpretation, and both in the past and in the present people have moved between places, within sets of narratives and practices. We looked at contemporary culture, interpreted as global and de-territorialized, and how it can be challenged by past experiences and also how new dimensions of culture of the past can be detected when being confronted by today’s practices.

Reflecting on such perspectives, several topics and questions were addressed: By which means and strategies do people shape their lives? The relevance of media and mediation is obvious, as is the relationship between memory and practice. Everyday practices, symbols, rituals and religious values were taken into consideration, looking at how similarities and differences between human beings, nature and “society” are constructed and objectified, and how lives are shaped as seen from the perspective of the individual, the group or policy makers. The implications of memory as an important element of shaping lives also include the construction and use of history, without which human conditions can hardly be conceived. Is de-territorialization a way of neutralizing

memory and history or is it only a strategy for making memory and history cosmopolitan?

To address this theme we invited two keynote speakers, Saskia Sassen (Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology and Co-Chair of The Committee on Global Thought, Columbia University) and Peter Aronsson (Linköpings Universitet, Sweden). Sassen's talk, entitled "Emergent logics of expulsion – beyond social exclusion," used as central argument the idea that the current socio-economic system of advanced capitalisms contains logics of expulsion that need to be differentiated from the more familiar notion of social exclusion. Social exclusion happens inside the system. Sassen expanded on the logic that expels people from the system, thinking that in the last two decades there has been a sharp growth in the numbers of people that have been "expulsed," numbers far larger than the newly "incorporated" middle classes of countries such as India and China. She used the term "expulsed" to describe a diversity of conditions: the growing numbers of the abjectly poor, of the displaced in poor countries who are warehoused in formal and informal refugee camps, of the minoritized and persecuted in rich countries who are warehoused in prisons, of workers whose bodies are destroyed on the job and rendered useless at far too young an age, able-bodied surplus populations warehoused in ghettos and slums. Her argument is that this massive expulsion is actually signaling a deeper systemic transformation, one documented in bits and pieces but not quite narrated as an overarching dynamic that is taking us into a new phase of global capitalism.

The second keynote speaker on this theme was Peter Aronsson. Aronsson's talk – "Shaping lives: negotiating and narrating memories" – expanded on how life-stories and experiences are shaped within a broad range of uses of heavily institutionalized identity politics, mediated narratives and situational bodily experiences. Acting upon individual desires is a necessity for the formation of collective identities and identification, communicatively constructing society. The speaker used examples from a variety of contexts to argue that meaning is created thorough exchange between spheres of different logics: existential, political, market and institutional logics might openly oppose each other and crave for autonomy, but do more often reinforce each other when life experiences and new utopias are being shaped through narrating and negotiating memories.

In the second day of the congress the sub-theme centered around "Creativity and emotions." Within our anthropological disciplines, the knowledge of the influence of culture on creativity and emotions is still rather limited. This is due more to a lack of ethnography and under-theorizing than to their elusiveness. Emotions and creativity are major factors of change and continuity within all sorts of contexts and places; an ethnological engagement with them is therefore important. The idea of creativity as a basic element for personal

existence may accentuate contemporary concerns with issues of agency, but it may also stimulate the refashioning of classical themes of social and cultural identity. The questions the congress intended to pose concerned several related topics. To what extent are emotions and creativity idiosyncratic, and to what extent can general cultural principles be detected that affect them? How are emotions and creativity perceived by individuals and groups and in what ways do they influence daily life and the making of places? What is the role of emotions in the construction of a sense of belonging in a globalized world? What is the role of creativity in dealing with increasing contacts of people and cultural forms and ideas under current globalization? Furthermore, how does the organization of the world and the construction of places reflect itself on the ways of feeling the world?

Emotions remain a collective and powerful social engine. Some of today's collective performances (such as theatre, music or art) are related to place belonging and indigenous identity claims. How can emotions help us to question the transmission between the performers and their audience? How do emotions, like nostalgia, suffering or joy, deal with traditional patterns (either inherited or invented) and regenerate or transform feeling about one's place? Those questions should open vast queries, not only about the classical artistic fields of anthropology, but also heritage places, local festivals, web arenas, the cultural and tourism market, war and nation-building propaganda, diaspora communities, globalized religions, which are all linked with aesthetic values, the human capacity of creativity and the emotional background of social life. And, as a subsidiary problem, what is the place of the researcher himself in those processes touching or affecting us? How do these circumstances influence our disciplines and their academic output, thinking that scholars, like artists, are supposed to be creative and bring elements of originality and appropriateness to their research?

To talk about emotions SIEF invited a leading anthropologist, specialist on the subject, Catherine Lutz (Thomas J. Watson, Jr. Family Professor of Anthropology and International Studies, Brown University), who presented a talk entitled "Feeling the road: marketing car love in an era of violence." Her talk expanded on the emotional life of cars and drivers in the United States, with special focus on how car marketing shapes affects in the current sociocultural climate. Based on anthropological research with drivers, buyers, marketers, and emergency personnel, the talk outlined a political economy of automobile affect in the United States, raising issues of encapsulation and individualism, fear of crime and crashes, the anger and culture wars emerging around transit modes and congestion, and the car interior as a marketing and political space.

The following keynote address on the subject of emotions focused on creativity and ethnomusicology. It was delivered by Valdis Muktupāvels (University of Latvia), an ethnomusicologist who took us to the world of music and

the “Artistic interpretation of the semantic layers of the Baltic natural sanctuary Rāmawa.” Expanding on the three groups of motifs that characterize the Baltic sanctuary, he showed how these motifs are interwoven into his oratorio “Pontifex,” a postmodern vision concerned with spirituality of the modern world. Muktpāvels explained how his piece attempted to trace the interaction between Pagan and Christian worlds and to contour a bridge between them, to find the bridge-builder (*pontifex* in Latin). Thematically, the focus was on ancient Baltic people – the Prussians, whose priests *Waīdila* performed their sacred activities in Rāmawa and had a duty to carry the souls of the dead across netherworld waters into the hands of their gods.

The oratorio’s audio presentation was offered in the end of the talk; its text comprised several fragments in New Prussian, Latvian, Polish, Sanskrit and Latin: Karol Wojtyła’s poem “Myśląc ojczyzna,” Pēters Brūveris’ poems “Irk-lis” and “Piesitas rūtij,” Latvian folksongs, chapter 15 of Bhagavadgātā, the ceremony of papal election and the Roman mass, as well as Aestian, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Moslem and Hindu prayers.

On the third day of the conference, under the theme “Ecology and Ethics,” the congress threw a spotlight on the ecological relationships with both human and non-human makers of places through which culture is lived, and on the responsibilities that we as researchers face when we are dealing with them, both “in the field” and afterwards, in our ethnography and beyond. People rarely take a place as they find it, but do they actually make – in the constructivist sense – the places they live in, or are they rather co-creators shaping the places that they are shaped by? Intellectually, most of us are aware that we are part of “the field” which is also part of us – but are we actually addressing that issue concretely in our work, and if so: how? What are our responsibilities as researchers, and who are we responsible to? What can we learn from neighboring disciplines, such as cultural geography or human ecology? To what extent does our ecological connectedness with the people we study in their various places provide a justification for engaged ethnology/anthropology, or is it rather the reason why we ought to maintain our objective distance? Whose call is this, in the first instance – that of our institutional ethics review boards or promotions committees; the local ecosphere with the past, present and future generations of its constituents; or a generalized moral conscience? Who are the peers by whose standards our work should be judged, and why they?

To answer some of these questions, Amélia Frazão-Moreira (Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, New University of Lisbon) presented a keynote entitled “Ethnobiological research and ethnographic challenges in the ‘ecological era.’” Frazão-Moreira analyzed how local knowledge and ecological practices have been important issues in the study of the ways that people make places and feel the world, and how nowadays, in the “ecological era,” this subject gained

new prominence. She alerted to the fact that we attend to different dynamics that, in some way, can seem epistemologically ambiguous. The ethnobiological studies, heirs of linguistic and cognitive anthropology, are permeable to deductive logics and *etic* approaches. The ethnoecological paradigm is associated with the rhetoric of “indigenous rights” and is politically situated. The applied ethnobiological surveys are engaged in global nature conservation programs and in intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, but also in community development projects. Therefore, we can consider the ethical and political dimensions of research relationships and the relevance of the ethnographic approach in contemporary ecological research. Taking data from different contexts and focused in her fieldwork experiences, Frazão-Moreira outlined some of these theoretical and methodological challenges and discussed the ethnobiological construction of how people make the places.

Mauro Almeida (Campinas State University, São Paulo) was the second keynote speaker of the day, with a talk entitled “Is there an ecological ethics?” His discussion evolved around the question of whether it is possible to reconcile a minimal epistemological consensus with ontological pluralism. In his approach he dealt with the fact that ethics was defined nearly two and half millennia ago as the wisdom about what a good life is, and how to attain it by means of virtuous conduct. Aristotle, the author of this definition, also defined economy as the science of the good management of the *oikos*. Almeida asked whether it is possible to bring together these ideas of ethics and *oikos* management under the notion of an ecological ethics. In his opinion, it is possible; however, he defended that this return to an apparently pre-modern ethics of virtuous *oikos* management (in contrast with Kantian ethics and its modern versions by Rawls and Habermas) requires some revising in the current globalized context. First, we are required to extend the notion of *oikos* from the household to ecosystems and from these to the planet, and we must also include among its recognized dwellers not just us humans but all forms of being – human and non-human, material and immaterial. A second requirement, which may seem to contradict the first, is that we recognize the irreducible plurality of *oikoi* and the different ways in which a “good life” is invented and acted out. How then to reconcile the push towards ethical universalization – the globalization of *oikos* – with the demands of local differentiation which is inherent in the plural nature of the *oikoi*? Or, to put it in another way: how to reconcile the ecological imperative with the anthropological imperative? An initial answer includes perhaps the idea that any ethical imperative (e.g. the anthropocentric imperative of human rights, the pathos-centric imperative of animal rights, and the biocentric imperative of life rights, to use Otfried Höffe’s phrasing) implies a minimal epistemological assumption: that some partial rational consensus may be reached through communication on a partially shared world. This assumption of qualified universalism is compatible

with the anthropological imperative that requires from us that we take seriously the plurality of life-worlds.

The closing lecture of the congress – “Performing ritual tears on a global stage” – was delivered by Charles Briggs (Alan Dundes Distinguished Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley). Briggs took us to the scenario of the Venezuelan rainforest, where a mysterious disease was killing dozens of individuals. In this setting, relatives collectively narrativized emotions as performed ritual wailing over the corpse of a young man who had died. Their affectively-charged sounds inflected a novel process of knowledge production taking place next door as community representatives, a physician, and an anthropologist sought to produce a biomedical object – a diagnosis – that would travel seamless into a revolutionary government’s health policies and the international press.

Out of all these important contributions, this dossier compiles four keynote speeches that illustrate the variety of the sub-themes discussed: Rogan’s initial talk on the history of SIEF; Aronssons’s piece on “Shaping lives,” Catherine Lutz’s concerning emotions in the present-day United States car culture, and Amélia Frazão-Moreira’s inquiries into local knowledge and the ecological practices.