The "European" prefix in European ethnology is far too seldom brought into play by comparative or contrasting studies. One field where this really is rewarding is the study of national identities, ideas, and practices.

Reading Götz's book that deals with the terrain of national identities and culture building in the postwar period, I am struck of how interesting the German experience is in a comparative European perspective. Is there a German Sonderweg here and if so, what can we learn from it? I am, for example, reminded by the somewhat idyllic and uncritical ways in which many of us in Scandinavia have handled the national. One reason for this is that the national often becomes invisible or unproblematic to the locals, but not to the outsiders - immigrants and others. More important German scholars, unlike many other European ethnologists, have devoted a lot of energy into critically analyzing the political uses of the national during the earlier eras, especially the Nazi era, which creates a much better platform for studying contemporary uses of the national. This becomes quite clear in Götz's book, where she shows how the national in postwar Germany has been a minefield, where you learned to move carefully, often under the watchful eyes of European neighbours. When classical arenas of national identification are tabooed, there is a search for new terrains: for example pride in the Wirtschaftswunder, in the strong D-mark and successful tech industries - "Made in Germany". The 1950s and 60s created a kind of forward-looking national identity. The past had to be avoided. We find a similar pattern in Sweden, a kind of nationalization of modernity. Old chauvinistic attitudes and outdated symbols of the past had to be discarded in favour of pride in being "the most modern nation in the world".

Irene Götz focuses on the return of the national, in the 1980s and 1990s. All over Europe the national discourses were revitalized and often also emotionalized, in new and sometimes surprising ways. Her study reminds us that the national can be a latent or dormant element in social and political life, only to be activated in specific situations of change or conflict. As ethnologists we need to keep analyzing the ways in which the national card is played: how, when and why and by what actors?

One of the strengths of the book is the way it shows how different forms of national identification led a parallel and competitive life, representing different social strata, interest groups and generations. There is, for example, a "postmodern" national style, with an ambivalent and ironic attitude - often a kind of joking relationship with the national project. This style can also take the form of what Götz aptly calls "Party-Patriotismus": "let us have fun playing at being Germans". This is the world of painted faces and flag-waving of sports fans. (For the onlooker as well as for the participants it might be difficult to know if this is a serious or playful engagement with the national.) Secondly, we have Germany's role as the big brother of the EU project, a new political role of domination, being the best but also the most responsible pupil in the class, which creates a new platform for national pride and self-understanding.

Thirdly, there are the conflicts emanating from immigration and discussions of a multi-cultural society. Here the project of German identity and culture building is by some seen as threatened, something that needs to be defended, and thus also calls for an identification and reification of "good German virtues and traditions". It is striking that this attitude often takes the form of a national nostalgia: if only we could return to the times when Germany was truly German - for example during the 1950s. (A similar nostalgia is found in many other European anti-immigration debates.) Fourthly, there is the reunification of East and West after 1989 that provides a totally different arena for negotiations and interpretations of the national. The old cultural polarization between North and South is made more complex by the East-West polarities.

The important analytical challenge here is to show how such different arenas of national identification are related or played out against each other, a job that Irene Götz tackles nicely.

The field of national identifications is heavily populated by many disciplines and Götz rightly asks what the specific ethnological contribution can be. She points to the importance of the everyday life perspective, but here I think she could have dug a bit deeper into the routines and materialities of German life - things people rarely talk about but actually do. Take for example the 1960s and 1970s, when younger generations saw the national project as a dying one, outmoded in times of internationalism and transnational European futures. My point is that it is precisely during this period of economic boom and optimistic welfare state policies that nations like Germany and Sweden developed rather national styles of consumption and ideas of modern living. While the rhetoric often was strongly internationalist and modernist, everyday life was nationalized in new and often unnoticed ways. The welfare state had a growing influence in people's lives, as consumers, home-builders, students or motorists. This tendency seems most marked in North European nations with strong state welfare ambitions. There is a great deal of talk about the new world in terms of international or global identification, but meanwhile the body is silently nationalized into a specific habitus. "This is the way we do things here!"

An important part of Irene Götz's analytical contribution concerns what one could call "micro-nationalisms". Through her interviews she illustrates in interesting ways how people's life experiences and family histories create rather personal ways of handling and feeling "the national". Such a perspective stresses the ways in which national identification always is deeply entangled in questions and experiences of class, gender, locality and generations, and it is this kind of detailed ethnography of situated national experience that make an important ethnological contribution to the general debate.

I found it very rewarding to read her book and would wish that she would make a shorter version in English, to remind scholars out there what an interesting case the multi-faceted German experience is. Reading her I was reminded of the classical question: "Is the world becoming more global, national or local?" The ethnological answer to that is: yes! Changes on these levels are constantly intertwined.

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