

POLISH ANTHROPOLOGY DAY

1.

Michał Buchowski, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań & European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder

‘Polish Anthropology: An (Impossible) Overview’

Post-war Polish ethnography/ethnology, as the discipline was called until 1980s, underwent a complex intellectual trajectory. Its actual practice differed from stereotypical Western images about social sciences under communism. In the first period, ethnography was definitely non-Marxist. It did not have anything in common with dialectical materialism as a normative theoretical explanation. In the 1970 and 1980s, in reaction to the naïve realism and empiricism of ethnography, ethnologists began to search for methods of interpretation and of theory going beyond those positivist schemata. By the end of the 1980s, Polish anthropology formed a self-conscious discipline representing various theoretical orientations. In terms of disciplinary origin and academic affiliation, it was comprised of two major pillars, ethnological and sociological. The increasing pluralism of Polish anthropology since mid-1970s intensified after 1989. Changes in the discipline are currently a function of the external influences of the international community of anthropologists and its own internal dynamics. The diversification of paradigms is systematically increasing. This results in a sort of intellectual entropy and a creation of certain discursive monads. The paper attempts to find a unity and common denominators in diversity.

2.

Anna Malewska-Szałygin, University of Warsaw

‘Post-socialist or post-agrarian? Conceptions of power and state in Poland’

Post-socialism is a very popular notion used by Western social scientists and commentators to describe the situation in former East Bloc countries. It is widely used by the researches affiliated with Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology e.g. Postsocialism, 2002, edited by Chris Hann. However, Katherine Verdery criticized it as continuation of Cold War rhetoric, while Michał Buchowski suggested it was a kind of orientalizing of East-European countries (Buchowski 2006). (In similar vein Maria Todorova writes about balkanization of Balkans by Western writers (Todorova 1997).

Without undermining the usefulness of this notion, especially in comment made from a distant perspective, I would like to examine of this concept in relation to the fieldwork carried out by a Polish researcher in Poland, (understood as “doing anthropology at home”). My fieldwork was not done exactly at home (Warsaw) but in South part of Poland, in Podhaleregion. My informants were village people, with primary or vocational education, cultivating their small farms and working as seasonal workers in Poland and abroad. The research topic I worked on was local concept of power, state, nation, democracy, free elections, party system in politics.

Realized that for my informants rural farm worked as “source metaphor” in Turnerian sense (Turner 1975). They projected power relations known to them from everyday experience of rural farm life into the macro scale of the state.

Therefore, I came to the conclusion that rural, local concepts of power and state are rather post-agrarian, or post-peasant in terms of the world view of my informants, than post-socialist. (The term post-peasant was used by Geertz (1961) in 1960s and recently by Juraj Buzalka (2007). The impact of socialism was of course very important but rather in preserving images and concepts that had existed before as state socialism tends to separate ordinary people from the sphere of politics (eg. Marody 1991) which results in hibernating the preexistence concepts and images.

3.

Marcin Lubaś, Jagiellonian University in Krakow 'The Anthropology of Borderlands and Transcultural Relations'

The issue of “borderlands” became an important field of interest for Polish ethnology and sociology even before the Second World War. In the 1930s, Józef Obrębski (a young disciple of Bronisław Malinowski) put forward a concept regarding the borderlands which anticipated subsequent treatments (though more celebrated and renowned) by the likes of

Fredrik Barth and Anthony Cohen. This field of studies continued to develop with uneven intensity in the era of soviet communism, gaining new momentum in the last years of dictatorship, and then after 1989. Since this period of time the anthropology of borderlands has gained prominence in Poland. A number of scholars (e.g., ethnologists, sociologists, and social historians) have conducted investigations into the Polish-Czech, Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Belorussian, and Polish-German borderlands. As of the late communist period, Polish anthropology of borderlands has begun to draw on Western anthropological theories. The now-outdated notion of the borderland underwent criticism, yielding to new conceptualizations which focus on complex individual transcultural interactions under the conditions of cultural diversity and unequal power relations. New geographic areas of research have opened up. Polish anthropologists have researched interethnic and interreligious communities outside of Poland. The anthropology and sociology of state boundary zones have become a focal point of scholarly interest. Looking back on the changes in the Polish anthropology of borderlands and of transcultural relations, we may today discern attempts to reflect and critically assess such inherited concepts as "culture," "society," "group," "nation," or "ethnicity" as well as evaluate the political imaginarium of Polish national ideology. This criticism has, in turn, opened new avenues for ethnographic research and theorizing.

4.

Monika Baer, University of Wroclaw

Grażyna Kubica-Heller, Jagiellonian University in Krakow

'Anthropology and gender/queer studies in contemporary Poland'

Even though the "woman question" as well as female scholars contributed to Polish ethnology both in the pre-World War Two and in the socialist period of the 20th century, feminism-inspired approaches toward gender and sexuality were basically adapted in the discipline as part of the so-called "transitional process" in the 1990s. Those developments were to a great extent connected with parallel advancement in interdisciplinary gender (and later on queer) studies, which also tried to pick their way through the Polish academia.

However, due to historically determined specificity of the local anthropology, until recently the political was perceived by many as unacceptable in academic settings, thus gender and sexuality were mostly taken as obvious descriptive categories. The specific character

of Polish gender/queer studies has not encouraged transdisciplinary cooperation with anthropology either. Both disciplines have been heterogeneous, but they have frequently constructed each other as entirely distinct epistemological universes. Although in the recent years shifts in anthropology and gender/queer studies have brought some improvement in this respect, they have resulted in other problems as well.

In the paper we investigate various scales of the process of dealing with diverse dimensions of that "awkward relationship" (Strathern 1987) by anthropologists working in the borderland of both disciplinary praxes. To this end, we analyze how over the last two decades specific strategies of identity formation and different meanings which such concepts as anthropology, politics, activism, gender and sexuality assumed have been working for and against cooperation between anthropology and gender/queer studies; what particular theoretical/political perspectives and problems have been shaped by their encounters; and how the discursive space in question has been influenced by local, regional and world-wide phenomena. The proposed approach aims not only to shed some light on the relations between anthropology and gender/queer studies in contemporary Poland, but also to contribute to similar discussions on a globally oriented level.

5.

Marcin Brocki, Jagiellonian University in Krakow

'Engaged anthropology and public anthropology'

It is usually taken for granted that anthropology should be present in public debate. The fact is treated as so natural that the discourse on it takes place almost exclusively within the frameworks of the "how" and "where" to be present, as if the problem was merely "technical". However, bearing in mind that anthropologists have inscribed in their discipline to question the obvious ("natural"), including commonsense truths generated by their professional culture, it's important to answer the question why "public anthropology" should be "natural" component of the discipline. I'll try to show that reflection on the "how", in today's cultural and institutional conditions must be adjourned, mainly because the involvement in public debate was disastrously combined with an engaged, applied and activist anthropologies. Such a view on public anthropology does not generate or multiply anthropological knowledge nor it brings any authority to the discipline. The fact is that engagement and applicability of scientific knowledge, or the fact that it could become a more or less adequate key for solving some short-term, practical problems (problems that dominate in a public debate), does not determine its value, nor disqualifies it from the public debate. If we were to use practical results as a criterion to judge the quality of work

in the social sciences and humanities, we'd have to conclude that for the largest part this knowledge is of little value, because it simply does not solve problems considered socially important at the time. Public anthropology should rather abandon the paradigm of the socially useful knowledge. Anthropologists definitely should not be judged by how they promote social change, they also should not concentrate on influencing the public opinion. They should rather be judged by the effectiveness in stabilizing (by translation) the social and cultural spaces. Anthropologists also should not follow the public debate to influence the public opinion; they should rather do their own thing: create conditions for efficient communication of our knowledge, and point out problems which are important from "anthropological point of view", and try to convince the public that these problems are also important for them.

6.

Kacper Pobłocki, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

‘A second-hand periphery: Poland's road to planetary urbanization’

With the rise of "planetary urbanization" and shifting of the epicenter of urban growth from the West to the Global South, there is an urgent need to "reassemble the urban", as Saskia Sassen put it. Most vocabulary in global "urban studies" was forged on the basis of the European and North American experience of urbanization. Under this paradigm, Eastern Europe was conceptualized as "under-urbanized", while the Global South was deemed "over-urbanized". This, however, assumes the West is the yardstick of "normal" urbanization. This talk will try to re-conceptualize Eastern Europe's place in the landscape of post-occidental urban studies by drawing a number of comparisons with cities from the Global South - an exercise that within the West-centered paradigm would seem impossible or even outlandish. Poland is no longer in a process of a "transition" from socialism to capitalism, or a "semi-periphery" of the West. Rather, with the center of the global economy shifting South, Poland's fundamental place in the new world order has changed. The talk will describe the local consequences of this fundamental re-Orienting - in both socio-economic and intellectual senses.

7.

Ewa Klekot, University of Warsaw

‘Anthropology and Memory: memory and

oblivion of Jewish Warsaw'

In Polish anthropology, more theoretical reflection on memory has arisen only recently and in our discipline, the question of memory is closely related to the one of cognition..

Memory has been discussed either as a source of knowledge, or as a particular cognitive procedure, together with narrative and interpretation, or the two fundamental processes of knowledge production in anthropology. However, it is the notion of postmemory that has proved particularly useful for anthropological studies and analysis. It has been applied in researching memories of recent past which resulted of extreme importance for understanding many current issues. Postmemory becomes a notion indispensable for understanding their meaning, for recognizing identities or reconstructing attitudes and beliefs.

Two centrally situated Warsaw districts of Muranów and Mirów are populated with buildings constructed after WWII, when in several stages (late 1940s to early 1970s) the area of the former Ghetto of Warsaw (existing in 1940–1943) was rebuilt. For over 40 years following the war there were very few material expressions of memory of the events that had taken place there during WWII, or of the mostly Jewish inhabitants of the Northern District of the pre-WWII Warsaw.

However, the last two decades have witnessed great number of commemoration activities, taking both immaterial and material form. Material interventions in the space of both districts (different kind of monuments and commemorations, Museum of History of Polish Jews but also elements of the city information system providing historic data on streets and their names) provide an interesting insight into the dynamics of construction of memory and oblivion, and their role in a memory struggle fought over the city space and over the imagination of its inhabitants. The presentation will reflect upon oblivion and memory of the Warsaw Jewish past, with a stress on activities of Museum of History of Polish Jews and its core exhibition scheduled to open in October 2014.

8.

**Hana Cervinkova, University of Lower Silesia,
Wroclaw and Institute of Ethnology, Academy of
Sciences of the Czech Republic, v.v.i.**

'Engagements and Disengagements in Contemporary Polish Anthropology'

I will focus on the developing tradition of different forms of engaged anthropological

scholarship and practices and consider the challenges that accompany the advancement of this paradigm in contemporary Polish anthropology. In the last two decades we have seen modest, but consistently growing interest among students, academic and non-academic anthropologists in projects that explicitly include public engagement in their scope. While the specific forms of these anthropological engagements are very varied, the important distinctions between them go largely unnoticed by the critics. While on one end of the spectrum we observe strictly applied forms of anthropological practice, whereby anthropologists get involved in projects that are sponsored by and consumed by specific institutions, we also see emergent efforts by contemporary academic anthropologists who develop subtle and theorized forms of engagement as an integral dimension of their academic research and/or writing, which they often share with public at large. This public sharing of anthropology extends from collaborative forms of field research to activist, media and policy interventions. In the context of contemporary Polish anthropology, this form of engaged academic scholarship is being actively developed for example by feminist, environmental, urban and educational anthropologists. Underlined by search for theoretical excellence and ethical integrity, engagement in the work of these researchers is an integral element of their deep research practice into situated knowledges, which has resulted in innovative theoretical and ethnographic scholarship. It is this tradition of engagements by Polish academic anthropologists that will constitute the focus of my paper. I will also draw on the debates between its proponents and critics, to illuminate the challenges and contributions that these researchers make to the development of contemporary Polish anthropology.

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