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## Cultural and Social Anthropology in Central and Eastern Europe

For several reasons, it is difficult to discuss the position of cultural and social anthropology in the formerly socialist countries of Europe. First, it is not easy to identify the practitioners of these disciplines. Their institutionalization is a recent phenomenon in the region; most university departments and research institutions that bear the name social or cultural anthropology were established after 1990.

A notable exception is Romania, where a Department of Cultural Anthropology was formed side by side with a Socio-Demographic Department within the Research Center (Laboratoire) of Anthropology at the Victor Babes University of Bucharest. This research center was founded in 1964, and its first leader, Vasile V. Caramelea, was a student of the famous sociologist, Dimitrie Gusti. It was a small institution with a few researchers and a focus on value-orientation research in the 1970s (Caramelea, 1979).

The terms social and cultural anthropology, however, were widely used in the region. It is sufficient to recall the two conferences of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), the largest world meetings of anthropologists that were held in Eastern Europe (Moscow, 1964 and Zagreb, 1988) with many participants from the then-socialist countries. Social and cultural anthropology was lectured within ethnography and ethnology curricula in many countries for a long time or in special courses in the 1970s and '80s (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania), and anthropological texts were also translated.

Against this background, many scientists, irrespective of their narrower scientific affiliation, considered themselves social or cultural anthropologists in the 1990s, when the institutionalization of the subject had become widespread. Chris Hann is right when he remarks that local anthropologists "may or may not trade under this name" (Hann, 2002: xii).

Good evidence for his statement is the most recently published Register of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), which appeared for the 4th EASA Congress held in Barcelona, 1996 and in which the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, and Slovakia were listed as countries of the region having cultural and social anthropological institutions. In the EASA selection, only Polish institutions included the terms cultural or social anthropology in their names. The other countries were represented by institutions of ethnography, ethnology, and folklore.

Surprisingly, no institution was mentioned from Romania, where the abovementioned research center continued to exist as a member of the institutional network of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, anthropological departments were being formed at the universities of Bucharest, Cluj, and Timisoara, and a small research unit for studying the anthropology of communication was very active in Miercurea Ciuc. Moreover, the Romanian society of cultural anthropology used to publish yearbooks from time to time with studies in English or French (1998, 1999). Hungary was also omitted, where cultural anthropological departments were established at the universities of Budapest (1990) and Miskolc (1993) and where cultural anthropological specialization was possible at the University of Pécs. Names of scientists from these countries with their institutional basis were also published in the Register, so readers have had more chance to get information through these data.

If we keep in mind that the circle of historical anthropologists has also been broadening since the 1980s (Klaniczay, 1984), it is obvious that the boundaries between related disciplines have been shifting in the formative last decade and that scholars' self-classification can differ from their classification by others. I shall address this fact by discussing the recruitment for the subject.

Second, it is well known that social scientists of Central and Eastern European countries publish mainly in their own languages. A very small and probably not the most original part of their production appears in the leading English or French journals of anthropology. It is difficult to

follow and evaluate scientific achievements in so many languages. No publication tries to cover this heterogeneity.

Some stock-taking papers were written on anthropological research in Eastern Europe, but these deal mainly with English and American efforts; very little is said about research carried out by representatives of the region. It is clear from these works that economists and sociologists like János Kornai and Iván Szelényi and students of the philosopher György Lukács had a greater influence on the ideas of visiting anthropologists than did local anthropologists, if the latter's activity is referred to at all (e.g. Hann, 1994: 238, Wolfe, 2000: 203, 207). In a short article, László Kürti (1996: 14-15) presented some serious problems encountered in confronting European-style ethnography and its practitioners with expanding social and cultural anthropology and its representatives in Eastern Europe, but he discussed this situation in rather general terms without a deeper analysis – though he could not have done otherwise in the limited space available to him.

Under this handicap, I will try to outline the context in which social and cultural anthropology started to emerge as an institutionalized science in the formerly socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and to describe some of their characteristic features here. In this effort, I can rely on a fairly good knowledge of the Hungarian scene, on my readings, on consultations with colleagues, and on some international workshops held on the possibility of implanting social and cultural anthropology in the region. These workshops were held in the framework of larger anthropological conferences in Prague in 1999 (4th Aleš Hrdlička Conference), in Cracow in 2000 (6th Congress of the EASA)<sup>1</sup> and in Cluj (“Representing Anthropology and Anthropological Representations in Eastern Europe” regional workshop) in the same year. This basis of information is certainly not exhaustive and does not cover all the concerned countries equally. Therefore some subjectivity and exaggeration is unavoidable in the presentation.

### **Changing labels**

Vesna Godina from Ljubljana carried out research on the institutionalization of cultural anthropology in the formerly socialist countries. She did not publish her results in written form, so I have to rely on her presentation at the EASA Conference in Cracow in 2000<sup>2</sup>. She reported that various changes of names can be observed in addition to the foundation of new social and cultural anthropological departments. One form of transformation was when an older ethnographical department was turned into a department of social or cultural anthropology or of cultural studies, as happened in Poland. Another form was when it was turned into an ethnological department, as occurred in some other countries (Russia, or translation of native names as ethnology instead of ethnography, as in Czech Republic, Hungary or Slovakia), or when cultural anthropology was added to the accepted and well-known term ethnology (e.g. Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and at University of Poznan, Poland). The American ‘sociocultural’ variety appeared in the titles of publications, too (Skalnik, 2000, 2001).

Kürti (1996: 15) raises the possibility that in this rediscovery of anthropology in Eastern Europe “there is a competition for funding and jobs; a solidification of a new patron-client relationship; and a race for political and ethnic correctness.” Without denying the relevance of these factors, it is worthwhile to take into account other considerations for this change of names, like modernization or a desire for a more comparative look or for participation in international cooperation.

The old term “ethnography”, a heritage of an emerging interest in ethnic and cultural differences in Germany in the middle of the 18th century (Stagl, 1998), has become out of date in two ways. On the one hand, in the English-speaking countries, it has taken the meaning of descriptive undertaking, and, on the other hand, in the Marxist classification of science in the Soviet Union and in the German Democratic Republic, it covered the whole research procedure of description, analysis, and comparison of ethnic, cultural, and social differences. The term ethnology, coined by the French philosopher Alexandre Chavannes in 1786 (Bitterli, 1982: 399), seemed to be a good solution, well in accordance with European and American research traditions

alike, being the equivalent of cultural anthropology in the United States. It served those properly who wanted to express their detachment from a Marxist commitment, but maintain a continuity of research (Szynkiewicz, 1992)<sup>3</sup>. In contrast to the cautious reformers, the more radical preferred the use of social or cultural anthropology, by which they signaled a break with the past. The Slovenian and Polish solutions should be seen in this context.

### **Recruitment**

The advocates for introducing social and cultural anthropology to university education came from various scientific circles.

There were former non-European ethnologists. Their number was small in every country in Central and Eastern Europe except Russia. They had thought of themselves as social or cultural anthropologists earlier, too, and were recognized as such abroad. Publications and participation in congresses gave them presence in international anthropological life. They played the biggest role in the institutionalization of cultural anthropology in Hungary. They could have played a similar role in Czechoslovakia, where well-known social anthropologists worked in the 1960s, but the leading Czech social anthropologists left Bohemia after 1968 (Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik in 1968, Peter Skalník in 1976). Clear evidence of their recognition is that they all got jobs in social anthropological departments in the United Kingdom or the Netherlands. Peter Skalník wandered farther to South Africa, and he alone returned to Czechoslovakia in 1990, where he has experienced difficulties in finding a position for himself in the home scientific community.

Another important group consisted of European ethnographers and folklorists, who were not content with the research targets and the weak theorization in their science. Members of this group did not have to shift greatly, either. International organizations like the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) accepted them as members of the same club – together with all those who practiced native ethnographies without paying much attention to Anglo-American anthropology. They were, however, more selective in adopting objects of research and more inclined to theorization than were non-European specialists.

There were philosophers in all formerly socialist countries who were interested in theoretical problems of culture. This was also a chance to step away from the orthodoxy of dialectical and historical materialism. Some of them made outstanding contributions to anthropological problems (Márkus, 1966, 1992). The Armenian Eduard Markarjan even organized a group in Jerevan in the 1970s to investigate anthropological theories of culture, in addition to his own elaboration of a science of culture (Markarjan, 1971, 1986). These philosophers usually remained outside the new subject, but contributed to the clarification of the field. It was different with the next generation. Some younger philosophers entered cultural anthropological departments and became mainly interested in theoretical issues.

Sociologists, politologists, social psychologists, and even economists also started to work on social and cultural anthropological questions. They were also young scholars who focused on human and symbolic aspects of social, political, and economic behavior instead of the central problematic of their respective sciences.

### **The social context of social and cultural anthropology: a comparison of West and East**

The outcome of this great variety of impulses is a very broad circle of research targets and methods, which became especially apparent at the EASA meeting in Cracow in 2000. Cultural and social anthropology seems to be a very attractive science with this abundance of possibilities for students, but less for institutions. Social and cultural anthropological departments were formed with little personnel, with 2-5 lecturers as full-time employees. The reservation of the host universities can not be explained by the lack of unity in cultural anthropology or by vested interests alone. Moreover, the situation is very similar in Western Europe, where the implantation of social and cultural anthropology started a few decades earlier, but has not resulted in a unified

science except in those countries where these disciplines or some of their important intellectual traditions were created (the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France).

It seems to me that there are different approaches to the social and cultural phenomena at stake and that the split is a consequence of the development of social sciences in different historical, social, and intellectual settings.

Social and cultural anthropology are products of the English-speaking world. Their roots are in common with those of ethnography and ethnology in the Enlightenment period, but their crystallization as theory-oriented but empirically-based sciences is the result of a long development from the second part of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. By studying human behavior in its social and cultural diversity, their aim is to discover the unity of mankind or at least the principles that explain social and cultural diversity. This orientation deviates from the particularizing historical approach that has been dominant in the European and especially in the German tradition of ethnology and ethnography, which tended to distinguish the study of societies according to the researcher's relation to his or her subject, by distinguishing "our" problems (Völkskunde) from "their" problems (Völkerkunde).

Though important monographs were written about the development of anthropology, both in its American (Harris, 1968)<sup>4</sup> and British (Kuper, 1975) variants, it is not easy to clarify the factors responsible for the particular Anglo-American development. As I see it, the following circumstances were decisive in the formative period:

1. By the 19th century, the philosophical tradition of the English-speaking world had a different turn from that of continental Europe. There was no determining ontological tradition in it, moral philosophy was also losing ground, and "...the social sciences became arenas for the debate of fundamental issues about the nature and destiny of humanity..." (Adams, 1998: 2). In contrast, a strong epistemological interest was developing, which promoted the fight against speculation in social analysis.
2. The historical context of the development of sciences dealing with social and cultural diversities along the Atlantic coast was determined by the emerging capitalistic world economy. The leading trading and later industrial nations became the main actors in the colonization of the other parts of the world, and their social science was involved in interpreting world processes.
3. The colonial context of research demanded reliable knowledge and this led to a gradual improvement of research techniques (Urry, 1972). Fieldwork became a central element of the research process, in which theoretical considerations and local knowledge confronted each other.
4. Much research was carried out in societies in which historical data was not available or was available only covering a very short period and more attention had to be paid to the relationship between phenomena as they condition each other. This led to an acceptance of a structural-functionalistic approach in its various varieties, which encouraged raising questions instead of taking anything for granted, including questions about the relation of particular phenomena to a supposed totality of a society or culture.
5. Most studied societies were at a distance and were subject to the anthropologist's part of the world. It suggested itself to consider them laboratories (Benedict, 1960: 29) in which phenomena could be "objectively" studied with a hope to formulate laws or principles of social and cultural existence.
6. There were strong incentives behind the research, such as to help rule colonies (Asad, 1973), or to give a definite answer to the question whether the Southern and Eastern European immigrants would become culturally similar to other Americans (Frank, 1995).
7. Perhaps the key factor was freedom in democracy. Scholars before World War I were allowed to announce their discovery of anything, irrespective of particular interests, and this ideal was more consistently maintained in the English-speaking world than in other parts of the world, even after the Soviet Revolution in 1917.

This resulted in a classical phase of anthropology, which John Bennett puts between 1916 and 1953. It started with Alfred R. Kroeber's formulation of the superorganic concept of culture, according to which culture can be explained in itself and not by noncultural factors, and with Malinowski's elaboration of fieldwork methods. It ended with the revolt against colonialism (1999: 951).

In contrast, ethnographical or ethnological research in Central and Eastern Europe had other characteristics in its formative period:

1. It tended to separate the descriptive and comparative levels of research; theorization was reserved for the peers of the science; and the "great" problems of mankind were left for the philosophers who dominated intellectual life with their aura.
2. Ethnographers and ethnologists working in their own societies in Central and Eastern Europe had to face two problems. One was the relation of their knowledge to the task of creating independent nation-states. The other was a split in the society reflected in a differentiation between "great" (national) and "little" (local community) traditions (Redfield, 1956: 42-43). Academic disciplines developed in accordance with this division without hope for a holistic understanding. This division of labor limited the scope of the emerging ethno-sciences.
3. Consequently, the driving forces behind research activity were an awareness of ethnicity, nationalism, and historical and cultural ties and a recognition of social tensions with their concomitant illusions. The native ethnographers worked in a web of interests charged with strong emotions.
4. Research techniques were refined in connection with a historical approach, which accounted for divisions in society, culture, and language.
5. A search for laws or basic principles was rare, except in the period when Marxism, with its demand to discover laws of historical changes, became the dominant philosophy.
6. There was usually a scarcity or lack of democracy in Central and Eastern European societies. Short periods of relative democracy were preserved in memory as "golden ages", as Hungarians have seen the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy or as Czechs see Czechoslovakia between the two world wars. Freedom was always greater in science than in society, but national and social sensitivity limited impartial study and led to prejudiced debates.

It is not my aim to discuss the development of ethno-sciences in other parts of Europe, but it should be mentioned that developments on the continent varied in accordance with power status or geographical positions. Greater powers and countries on the shores of oceans (France, Norway, the Netherlands, even Russia) developed a science of different societies and cultures that was more or less similar to British or American anthropology or developed two separate sciences for the home culture and other cultures, similar to the German example of distinguishing *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde* – as in Sweden, where ethnology and ethnography have been similarly separated. In France, even the theoretical demand has been comparable to the American since Durkheim's work. But ethnology, or later social and cultural anthropology, developed in Continental Europe within a scientific orbit in which a vigorous philosophy, theoretical sociology, and influential historical science has been present, which limited the range of influence of ethnological (or later anthropological) thinking.

A surprising feature of ethnography (ethnology) in non-German speaking Central and Eastern European countries is that there has never been an absolute dichotomy between home investigations and research on distant territories. This may be due to the formation of this science in empires, with their many nations and ethnic groups (Russia and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy), which helped preserve a wider sense of unity even in Austria, for which the *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft zu Wien* is still the best evidence.

There was an additional element in the Hungarian case. The study of Hungarian ethnic and cultural history required a thorough investigation of the Ob Ugrians in Western Siberia and of the Turkic peoples in Central Asia. There was even a period at the end of the 19th century when the evolution of an American-style anthropology could have been envisaged (Sozan, 1977: 202-217).

But the Siberian studies were connected to the dominant historical-national trend and did not develop toward a theory-oriented social and cultural anthropology. The number of those who carried out research on other continents was small, and the famous anthropologists of the region worked abroad with the exception of the Russian. The Polish Bronisław Malinowski lectured in Great Britain and in the United States, Emil Torday worked in Brussels and in London, and Aleš Hrdlička did his seminal work on the American continent, to name a few.

The existence of ties between home ethnography and non-European studies, however, helped incorporate some anthropological ideas in Central and Eastern European ethno-sciences. Paradoxically, the compulsory introduction of Marxism did not transform the theoretical outlook, but strengthened the maintenance of already-present evolutionism and paved the way for the acceptance of structural functionalism as a method with an implicit historicism in its application. Notwithstanding important changes in the selection of research targets and increasing attention to the changing popular culture, theory remained weak in European ethnology. The “abandonment” of Marxism, which had never been extensively applied, was not followed by the acceptance of another comprehensive intellectual tradition. With this lack of theoretical awareness, it was not always realized that, even if anthropologists and ethnographers study the same phenomena, they conduct different research from different perspectives.

Tamás Hofer, who compared American cultural anthropology and European ethnography with perspicuous circumspection, called attention to the difference not only in stance, but also in the style of research. The cultural anthropologists conduct a “slash-and-burn” type of mobile cultivation of the cultural field, while national ethnographies “...may be compared to granaries where generations of ethnographers, one after the other, hoard and preserve their knowledge” (Hofer, 1969: 313).

This statement is true even in the Russian case, where the research themes of ethnography (ethnology) have most closely resembled American anthropology. There, Marxism had a more profound effect on ideas than in other parts of Eastern Europe, but it ceased to be a demarcating feature. However, research traditions are maintained and differences in interests play a role in approaching such an important issue as ethnicity, as Tishkov made explicit (1998).

### Options

By the end of the 20th century, the British and American varieties of anthropology became much more diversified than before, leading to many trends and rather unclear objectives in a new world of inequalities and increasing globalization. There was a wide selection of problems and theoretical directions to choose from at an unfortunate moment – unfortunate because this selection took place at a time when postmodern criticism permeated American anthropology. This criticism may have been beneficial in the United States by demanding greater methodological scrutiny, but it had a very different effect on the emerging cultural anthropology of Central and Eastern Europe. It hindered the choice of a firm paradigm.

Budding cultural anthropological education and research has directed more attention to theoretical inspiration and methodology than can be observed in its twin discipline, ethnography (ethnology). There are also some new targets of research, but this seems to be less important than a more analytical-critical look at phenomena described or studied by ethnographers, historians or other social scientists from a different perspective, such as the nation as a socio-cultural system, nationalism, identities, and ethnic, religious, and other minorities, or the transition from socialism to a new social order or as cultural process (e.g. Bitušíková, 2000; Buchowski, 1994, 2001; Hubinger, 1992; Mach, 1993; Manolescu 1998; Mihailescu, 1993; Prónai, 1995). This competitive overlapping of research raises the possibility of a confrontation with other sciences, particularly with those that are supposed to be significant in strengthening national consciousness or dictating the direction and pace of current social change. In order to avoid these confrontations or for other reasons a maintenance of disciplinary borders is favored despite the challenges of the new social reality. An exception from this rule seems to be a greater willingness for co-operation in the study

of rural social transformation on the last decade, though these researches started only a few years ago (Kovács, 1998, Borsos, Csité and Letenyei, 1999).

### **Difficulties**

Taking into account all these elements, it should be emphasized that the definition of the field of social and/or cultural anthropology has not been completed. There have been debates and curricula follow deviating vistas even in the same country or within the same department.

There are uncertainties about methodologies, as well. The key point is fieldwork. Here, opinions differ between those with an ethnographical background and those who lack it. The first group favors fieldwork, and non-European specialists consider long-term field experience indispensable in training. The second group places a different emphasis on it, and those who entered cultural anthropological departments with a sociological or philosophical background are sometimes content to conduct a survey and analysis of opinions.

Social and cultural anthropology took on two different classifications in the institutionalized scientific network in the region. In some countries, they have been treated as a branch of ethnology; in others, they have been associated with sociology. A general feature, however, is their weak ability to defend their self-interest or promote their own expansion; even existing networks can be in danger, as Vintila Mihailescu reported from Bucharest at the conference in Cluj in 2000.

There are possibilities for publication, but specialized cultural anthropological journals do not exist. Funding of research within the home country is usually possible, though it is not built into the university norms. It is a major problem if a need for research abroad emerges; support can be expected from scientific foundations in countries where anthropology has had a longer career.

There are also difficulties in writing up the research materials. Very few libraries have a tradition of collecting anthropological literature, and even they are unable to follow the recent production in the world. The great data bases, like the Human Relations Area Files, are not available in any countries in this region.

### **International connections**

The European Union exchange programs (Tempus, Socrates/Erasmus) enormously helped training. More than 20 students from the Department of Cultural Anthropology of the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest studied social anthropology (ethnology, *Völkerkunde*) within EU exchange program frameworks at Austrian, British, Danish, and French universities, and I suppose that students from other formerly socialist countries had similar opportunities. Personal connections played a decisive role in making the necessary agreements. No “brain drain” seems to have resulted. Many conferences are organized from year to year, usually with international backing, but real research cooperation is rare and a highly personal matter.

### **Cultural anthropology and the broader public**

The impact of original social and cultural anthropological research in the public sphere is small, compared with more influential sciences like history. It is limited to scientists and students with similar interests. The same group also makes use of comprehensive works dealing with a history of the discipline or with its problematic (Paluch, 1990, Sárkány, 2000).

Experience is different with translations of the works of great anthropologists. Publication of anthropological classics started in most East-Central European countries some decades ago, but has increased in the last twelve years primarily for training purposes. The success of these works is an important factor in increasing the status of anthropological knowledge in the region.



- <sup>1</sup> Many papers presented at these two conferences with additional studies were published by Peter Skalník in August 2002, after this manuscript was closed.
- <sup>2</sup> It happened in the meantime, see Godina, 2002 in Skalník 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> This choice is not fitting into the British tradition, where ethnology refers to ethnohistorical studies.
- <sup>4</sup> The scope of the book of Harris is wider than the American scene, but the non-American theoretical traditions are not discussed in the same extent and according to their own logic.

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