

## II. FOCUS ON US: FOREIGN ANTHROPOLOGISTS ON THEIR RESEARCH IN POLAND

MICHAŁ BUCHOWSKI

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

Poland

European University Viadrina

Frankfurt (Oder)

Germany

### MUTUAL ENCOUNTERS

Contemporary anthropology has many faces, subfields, and research interests. Anthropologists study every conceivable topic, study “up” and study “down” or, when focusing on their peers, even study “horizontally”; they also travel to all corners of the world, where they visit rural communities, indigenous populations, sweatshop floors, scientific laboratories, military training camps, border crossings, and NGO offices, and are seen in the halls of the headquarters of global institutions such as the European Commission, World Bank and United Nations. What seems a common and eternal practice to us today was not the case in the past. Our research interests have changed over time, and the world surrounding us has been transformed. By changing our focus, we have moved the boundaries of the discipline. Things are not the same as they were three or four decades ago.

For a long time, doing the anthropology of Europe was not an accepted practice for overseas anthropologists. In his introduction to a special issue of “*Anthropological Quarterly*”, Conrad Arensberg (1963) made an appeal to study the cultures and people of the “Old World”<sup>1</sup>. Of course, he was probably not the first to have this idea. It seems that Europe as an ethnographic field site for anthropologists was discovered

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<sup>1</sup> I ask for readers’ understanding, as I am unable to mention here all the names and histories related to the anthropological study of Europe, or even of Poland. Selected issues and publications can only illustrate certain trends. I apologize all those whose works or names do not appear in this short account.

and penetrated step by step. The first inroads were made in the Mediterranean countries. Although various ethnological studies were carried out in this part of the world long before World War II, such as those by Eugeniusz Frankowski (cf. 1920), anthropologists began to penetrate it more systematically in the 1950s. Julian Pitt-Rivers' monograph *The People of the Sierra* (1971 [1954]) is considered a milestone in this respect. John Campbell's (1964) *Honour, Family and Patronage* about Greece, Paul Sterling's (1965) *A Turkish Village* (cf. Giordano 2012: 13), and William Douglass' (1969) *Death in Murelaga* about rituals in Basque countryside continued this tradition. Nowadays doing ethnography in this area has become a usual, or even fashionable, practice. Several scholars have built their academic reputation based on their research there.

The next area to be explored by anthropologists was the Alpine region. One of the pioneers here was Robert Burns (1959), who studied Saint-Véran, the highest village community in the French Alps. In the 1950s and 1960s, scholars such as John Honigmann (1970), Frada Naroll (1960) and Raoul Naroll (Naroll R. 1958; Naroll, Naroll 1962), John Cole and Eric Wolf (1974), Leopold Pospisil (1971, 1995), John Friedl (1974), Robert Netting, and Daniela Weinberg have studied this region. Robert Anderson (1973) wrote a comprehensive overview of the studies in Europe at this stage<sup>2</sup>.

Socialist Europe was the last region to which western anthropologists arrived. Various factors led to this. Going east was often not conceivable for political or mental reasons, or both. It was not easy to get behind the Iron Curtain. Not surprisingly, relatively liberal Yugoslavia under Josip Bros Tito's rule was the first country to which anthropologists were allowed. Joel Halpern (1956, 1958, 1967), who studied Serbian villagers, was one of the first, if not the first western anthropologist doing long-term fieldwork in a socialist land. In Yugoslavia he was followed by many, for instance, Irene Winner (1971), author of a monograph on Slovenian peasants. Steven Sampson (1974, 1982), Gail Kligman (1981), Katherine Verdery (1977, 1983) and David Kideckel (1993), who defended his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Massachusetts (Kideckel 1979), ventured into Romania. Some of them were encouraged to go there by John Cole, an expert on the Alpine region, who also worked in Romania (cf. Cole 1977). Sam Beck carried out studies first in Yugoslavia, and then moved to Romania<sup>3</sup>. Research in Romania was possible thanks to Nicolae Ceaușescu's policies since the late 1960s aimed at gaining partial independence from the Kremlin's dictate. Economic ties with the outside world were strengthened, technology from the French car industry imported, capitalist iconic products allowed (a Pepsi factory was built, and Coca-cola imported), and western loans granted. In a sense, the opening of borders to western scholars, anthropologists in particular, became part of this package.

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<sup>2</sup> My knowledge of the studies done in the Alpine region is based on a comprehensive manuscript written by Paolo Viazzo (n.d.)

<sup>3</sup> An account of works on Central and Eastern Europe up to the 1980s is given by Halpern and Kideckel (1983).

This expansion from the “soft (communist) underbelly” proceeded from the south northward. In the latter half of the 1960s, János Kádár started his policy of goulash-socialism in Hungary, in both the economic and political spheres. In consequence, western students were allowed to enter this country. Michael Sozan, who graduated from Syracuse University in 1972, based the fieldwork for his Ph.D. thesis on the Hungarian minority in the Austrian Burgenland. He later published two important books on Hungary (Sozan 1977, 1985). Soon afterwards, Chris Hann (1980) studied a collective farm in Hungarian Pusztá (for more details, see his contribution to this issue). But there were also others: Éva Huseby-Darvas (Huseby 1984; Huseby-Darvas 1987), linguistic anthropologist Susan Gal (1978), and, a bit later, the more historically-oriented anthropologist and sociologist Martha Lampland (1996), who completed her Ph.D. thesis at the University of Chicago in 1987.

Since Czechoslovakia under Gustáv Husák after 1968 had embarked on a politically strict policy of “normalization”, Poland was next in line. After Władysław Gomułka was toppled by Edward Gierek in 1970, the country began a more open policy, both with regard to the flow of capital and of people. Accounts given by Chris Hann, Carole Nagengast and Frances Pine show how the structural framework made possible their individual actions. Chris Hann (1985) moved north to Poland from Hungary, Carole Nagengast (1991) came here across the Atlantic in order to study the people in Wola Pławska/Rzędzianowice, near Stalowa Wola. Frances Pine decided to do research (in collaboration with Przemek Bogdanowicz) among the Polish mountaineers in the Podhale region (Pine, Bogdanowicz 1982). In addition, Janine Wedel (1986), an anthropologist trained at the University of California at Berkeley, paid several visits to Poland between 1977 and 1986, spending also two years here during martial law, mostly in Warsaw. With the exception of Bogdanowicz, all of them remained devoted to anthropology, and, to lesser or greater degree, interested in Polish affairs.

The reasons for coming to Europe, and Poland in particular, were multiple. As we can read in the following essays, some were personal, some accidental, and others based on the rational decision to chart an anthropological map of barely explored territories. In the history of anthropological studies on Europe some scholars, for instance Leopold Pospisil and Eric Wolf<sup>4</sup>, as well as Michael Sozan, and Zdenek Salzmann in Czechoslovakia, were actually born in continental Europe or in the countries where they did later their fieldwork. Quite a few returned to their countries of origin after 1989, including Petr Skalník and László Kürti. In the Polish case, some had more or less distant ancestors in the country, such as Przemek Bogdanowicz, Carole Nagengast, Edouard Conte, and later Marysia Galbraith, Genevieve Zubrzycki and Michał Murawski. And lastly, many had chosen to do their research in (post-)socialist Europe without having any family ties to the country being studied. In Poland,

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<sup>4</sup> “Eric Robert Wolf, an Austrian-born sociocultural anthropologist (...) Wolf’s lifelong fascination with cultural diversity can be traced to his childhood in multilingual Vienna and his teen years in multiethnic Sudetenland, where his Austrian father (his mother was Russian) ran a textile factory prior to the 1938 Nazi takeover. To avoid persecution as Jews, Wolf and his family moved first to England and then to the United States” (Kottak 2012).

this applied to Hann and Pine, as well as to the majority of the representatives of the second generation of anthropologists of Poland (more about them anon).

As has already been mentioned, the socio-political context was decisive. The advancing thaw in East-West relations enabled young researchers to do their fieldwork in the respective countries. Anthropological interest in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) was a part of a progressing ethnographic penetration of the continent from the south-west towards the north-east. The emergence of the anthropology of Europe faced strong resistance in anthropological circles. For decades, at least in the Anglophone world, the anthropology of Europe was not considered “truly anthropological”. Privileged status was assigned to research done in other parts of the world, in colonial and postcolonial settings, and among indigenous communities. John Cole summarized the problem: “the incorporation of an anthropology of Europe into general anthropology has met with substantial resistance from within the anthropological ranks and continues to face accusations of illegitimacy” (Cole 1977: 353). For “traditionalists”, it appeared contradictory for the study of “our” society to be conducted by experts who by definition dealt with “others”. Western and semi-western industrialized societies were to be studied by sociologists.

From a global political perspective, with the Iron Curtain still in place (one should not forget that all of these “liberal” communist rulers were authoritarian and often treated any resistance harshly), CEE was perceived of as less anthropologically significant than the rest of the world. Although it was important for the West to have knowledge about the communist camp, its ideological and political competitor, this area study was reserved for political scientists and historians, not anthropologists or even sociologists (see Hann 1994). On top of this, as I have indicated above, in the Cold War milieu anthropological research in the region was either impossible or difficult. Authorities in CEE did not want to have “western agents” wandering the countryside, asking people strange questions. Perhaps they were implicitly aware of Michel Foucault’s wisdom that knowledge is the vanguard of power. Only political relaxation made such anthropological inquiry conceivably. Still, it appears in many reports from the period between 1960 and the end of the 1980s that fieldworkers were treated with suspicion by the people they studied.

Thus, the obstacles to developing the anthropology of CEE were dual in nature: both political and intra-disciplinary. This state of the art adversely affected anthropology’s position in terms of studies of “actually existing socialism”. Although the region remained a blank space on the anthropological map, the position of anthropologists working in CEE was disadvantageous. No large interpretive community of scholars was ready to absorb and discuss CEE anthropological experts’ findings at that time. Halpern and Kideckel whined that there were numerous “difficulties facing the anthropology of Eastern Europe as it attempts to penetrate into a general anthropological consciousness” (1983: 378). And they continued: “Marginality develops from the status of both European and peasant studies within anthropology and, from a broader perspective of culture history, the position of Eastern Europe within Europe”. This status quo “forces researchers to justify their anthropological identity and the legitimacy of some of their research topics” (Halpern, Kideckel 1983: 378). This

perception of CEE anthropological studies also had negative repercussions after the “Nations’ Fall”. In the mid-1990s, Deborah Cahalen complained about “a widespread exclusion of Eastern Europe from mainstream anthropological discussions” (1996: 21). She continued by giving an account of an American anthropologist’s response to her essay on gender relations in Poland. In general, she felt that “it was very difficult to «get into» the paper because the concepts and arguments were too specific to the Eastern European experience, and therefore were not broadly anthropological” (Cahalen 1996: 24).

We should appreciate our foreign colleagues who became the forerunners of anthropological studies in the region, particularly in Poland, for their determination to study a subject that was not considered significant by disciplinary gatekeepers. It should be underlined that by no means they have subscribed to dominant discourses in the West about totalitarian regimes having made people’s lives unendurable and producing social anomia. On the contrary, they contested these essentialized and ossified images, which were far from reality. They made every possible effort to show how people managed to make their lives bearable, resisted state domination, got around “impossibilities” by resorting to traditional group and family solidarity, by using the institution of *znajomości* (connections) and by developing strategies known as the skill of *zalatwić* (wangle). These monographs and articles on Poland written by the first generations of external anthropologist give us a unique account of social life under socialism. At least to me, their works were not only paradigmatically different, but, for my own research interests, often more insightful than knowledge produced by the two postwar generations of local ethnologists.

It is interesting that most studies carried out by Anglophone anthropologists in the postwar period in Europe were done among peasants. Even a glance at a bibliography clearly indicates it, and this statement is valid for all European regions indicated above. The reason for this is rather obvious: several decades ago, anthropology was expected to study “others” and small communities. Studying rural communities fitted this pattern and was excusable even if it was carried out in Europe. This kind of research was analogous to several other studies carried out on peasants in Latin America, South-East Asia and Africa at that time and before. No wonder that virtually all explorers did their ethnographies in the countryside, with Janine Wedel being the exception that confirmed the rule. It is also striking that in Poland all of these rural studies were done in the former Galicia, in a region populated by numerous rural smallholders. Did this fascination result from a search for “exotic” topics? Or did it simply fall into the mainstream of anthropological studies of Europe at the time? Why was no other region of Poland studied in this period?

The way these first studies on Poland were conceptualized and problematized differed significantly from the ethnological studies of rural populations conducted by local ethnographers. Rural sociologists and social historians were the primary interlocutors for the first wave of anthropologists visiting our region. Stefan Kieniewicz (1969), Bogdan Gałęski (1971) and Witold Kula (1976) were the authors cited by them, while Polish ethnographers (e.g., Roman Reinfuss and Maria Biernacka) were referred to only sparsely, if at all (cf. Buchowski 2012: 23-24).

I suspect that young scholars trained in Anglo-Saxon anthropology implicitly shared the opinion of John Davis about ethnologists. He made a distinction between backward and progressive anthropology. For him, the nationalist agenda of ethnologists immobilized the discipline like a mammoth in the frozen Siberian ground. Ethnologists were so petrified in such an allochronic manner that to refined western anthropologists they seemed like the living skeletons of nineteenth-century research paradigms (Davis 1997: 4). Many years later, Katherine Verdery regretfully acknowledged that “when I first went to Romania as an ambitious graduate student, I felt intellectually superior to my Romanian ethnographer-colleagues even while recognizing that they had a wealth of knowledge I lacked about Romanian life-ways. But they didn’t have «theory», and that’s what I had been trained to care about” (Verdere 2012: 2).

The issue of the mutual relationship between external and local scholars continued for some time. There is no necessity to discuss this here, since many articles have been published about it, and it seems that my exchange of opinions with Chris Hann exhausted the topic in a friendly manner (Buchowski 2004, 2005; Hann 2005). A book on Poland’s “transition” to which scholars from both Poland and outside contributed was one of the first attempts to combine these varying traditions and produce some form of synergy (Buchowski, Conte, Nagengast, eds., 2001). Overall, my argument in this discussion was that the image of Polish ethnology and anthropology as theoretically insipid and disconnected from the world flows of anthropological knowledge was incorrect. The visible domination of western anthropological models – observed also by scholars in other parts of the world (e.g., Viazzo, n.d.; Kürti 2000; Anăstăsoaie et al. 2003; Narotzky 2006) – resulted from hegemonic hierarchies of knowledge that hindered productive intellectual exchange. Well into the twenty-first century, western scholars did not really consider local contributions to be valuable for their research or significant in general for anthropological scholarship (Buchowski 2012). However, the situation has been improving systematically, and contemporary anthropologists doing research on Poland are readily integrating local scholars’ findings into their works. This is a result of, among other things, the increasing international movement of people and ideas as well as the growing number of English language publications written by Polish authors. For this generation of scholars, language and political borders have no special meaning, and they all belong to the transnational community of scholars working on Poland.

However, this question of mutuality also has another side. The eagerness of Polish authors to cite western gurus in their anthropological theories made them somewhat reluctant to recognize the expertise of their colleagues doing research in Poland. It is indicative that among the hundreds of anthropological books translated into Polish only a few monographs were based on research in Poland (Wedel 2007; Dunn 2008; Zubrzycki 2014; Murawski 2015).

In this context, it worth mentioning “halfies”, people who were born in Poland and did research here, and then made careers abroad. In many ways, they have acted as intermediaries and facilitators. Their language competence and contacts with scholars in the country of origin has contributed to the emergence of an anthropo-

logy without borders. There are no doubt many such individuals, but let me here just mention some of them: Jan Kubik (1994), Karolina Szmagałska-Follis (Follis 2012), Longina Jakubowska (2012), Joanna Mishtal (2015), and Kinga Pozniak (2015).

Meeting local ethnologists and anthropologists personally has been unavoidable. It seems from what we can read below that initially the major contact point for the first international visitors was Grodzka Street 52 in Kraków. Nagengast, Hann, Pine and Bogdanowicz, and later Galbraith, in one way or another were associated with this address. I can only guess here why, but Andrzej Paluch's international connections certainly played a role. Interest in south-east Poland encouraged them to seek academic contacts there, too. No doubt, those associated with the Social Anthropology Division at the Department of Sociology at Jagiellonian University comprised an interesting research group. The then-young scholars who were there, and who functioned or still function in academia include: Mariola Flis, Grażyna Kubica-Heller, Jan Kubik, Marian Kempny, Zdzisław Mach and Janusz Mucha. Their spectacular academic careers indirectly prove that they learned something from these visitors. This is a good moment to stress how many Polish anthropologists remain thankful for the help provided by these first scholars in making connections throughout the academic world.

More recently, the situation in anthropology has become much more complex and diversified in all possible respects. The anthropology of Europe is no longer a peripheral specialization within the discipline (for instance, the Society for the Anthropology of Europe within the American Anthropological Association has an enormous membership, reaching 800 persons); anthropologists who study Europe do not have to legitimize their interest in this "strange" region; in the CEE context alone, "postsocialism" has emerged as an innovative topic whose importance has been often compared to postcolonial studies; the region has become a laboratory for neoliberal reforms in which unprecedented sociocultural processes have been instigated; a number of young scholars have been attracted to CEE, including Poland.

After 1989 a new generation of scholars appeared<sup>5</sup>. For them also, as Marysia Galbraith remarks, "Eastern Europe was the new frontier for anthropology" (this issue). The list of these researchers is quite long, and in the following I cite just names which first come to mind. First are those who came to do research in Poland all the way from the US: Elizabeth Dunn (2004), Deborah Cahalen Schneider (2006), Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006) Lisa Gurr, Elizabeth Vann, Christie Long (nee Evans), Marysia Galbraith (2014) Dong Ju Kim, Eunice Blavascunas and Jessica Robbins-Ruszkowski; second are several scholars who arrived from European countries: Rosa Lehmann (2001), Esther Pekerkamp (2008), Anika Keinz (2008), Alexandra Schwell (2008), Jonathan Webber (2009), Michał Murawski (2015), Juraj Buzalka (2007), Jan Grygar (2016) and Iuliia Buyskykh. The presence of anthropologists from the CEE region is particularly praiseworthy. Two of them contributed to this volume, and it is striking how their perspective can differ from those coming from the West.

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<sup>5</sup> For a short overview of Anglophone anthropological studies on CEE and the former Soviet Union, see Wolfe 2000.

From the writings of this new generation of scholars, it is visible how the way anthropology is done has changed. Contemporary anthropologists do not have to make excuses for their coming to areas seemingly peripheral for general anthropology. Europe as a subject of anthropological research is as justifiable as any other region in the world. One gets the impression that for some time, CEE has become even a privileged area of anthropologists' study, since they have been able to observe sweeping sociocultural processes. All these circumstances made CEE and Poland attractive for a new generation of scholars. They have established academic networks in various cities – Poznań, Warsaw, Wrocław and elsewhere. As indicated in the first paragraph here, we have witnessed how research methods and topics have changed since the very first studies were carried out by the pioneering generation in the 1970s and 1980s. Rural communities have ceased to be the prime object of focus, and now most field sites are in big cities and towns. For a long time, transformation has been a catchword. Religion, Jewish studies, gender issues, borders, the construction of identities, ethnic conflicts, memory, and aging as a sociocultural phenomenon, as well as hegemonic discourses and practices, are all terms by which we can, at least partly, characterize these new anthropological studies on Poland. They simply subscribe to what anthropologists do all over the world.

International scholars have always been helpful towards the Polish community of anthropologists. It should be pointed out that Chris Hann and Frances Pine have supervised a number of doctoral students who came from Poland and/or did their research in Poland: Juraj Buzalka, Agnieszka Pasięka, Agata Ładykowska and Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk immediately come to my mind. Several others attended seminars held by them at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle and at Goldsmith College at the University of London. But these and other scholars' impact on our academia is much wider than this. Perhaps some personal accounts would be illustrative; I know that many of my colleagues can evoke similar stories from their memories. The point I want to make here is that we have all profited from these collaborations and friendships. In other words, my personal encounters multiplied many times over provide a vague image of how enormous the impact of our international peers has been on what we do in anthropology and how we do it.

I met Chris Hann for the first time when he was still in Cambridge; he lent me his bike to ride around and invited me to his home for parties. Ernest Gellner attended them, as well, and I mention this only because the enormous help this towering intellectual extended to many Polish anthropologists at that time should be recognized here. Chris and I apparently missed each other before when he visited Poznań to attend the Rural Solidarity Meeting in 1981; I was there, too. We have come across one another on various other occasions, and he has also been very supportive of me as the director of the Institute in Halle. I know that he has helped many other scholars from Poland, as well. I came across Carole Nagengast quite unexpectedly at the University of California at Riverside in 1990, where I went for a year-long Fulbright scholarship. I remember her finishing her book *Reluctant Socialists*, and her consulting me about the Polish terms used in the text. This book gave me several inspirations for a series of works on Dziekanowice, a rural community in the Wielkopolska region,

starting with the title of a short book on it, *Reluctant Capitalists* (Buchowski 1997). Since then, we have collaborated on several projects, including one founded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation in 1995, and on a book that we co-edited with Edouard Conte (Buchowski, Conte, Nagengast, eds., 2001). I have met Frances Pine on several occasions through the years, including at conferences and workshops we attended together, and she invited me to supervise the dissertations of two of her students. With few exceptions, I have met all the contributors to this issue, as well as several other scholars who did their research in Poland. With many, like Deborah Cahalen, Elizabeth Dunn, Juraj Buzalka and Jessica Robbins-Ruszkowski, I collaborated on various occasions. Alexandra Schwell attended my seminar at Humboldt University in 1997. Since then she has not only visited Poznań as an exchange student, but we have worked together on research and book projects. Anika Keinz, before she became a junior professor at European University Viadrina, was a research assistant at my chair there. Until today, we hold common Ph.D. seminars and workshops there. Behind all of these collaborative works, which comprise merely the tip of an iceberg, many friendly stories can be told.

The role of international scholars in the development of Polish anthropology needs to be recognized. I only hope that their contacts with Polish anthropologists have been as inspiring to them as our contacts with them have proven to us.

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