

KOHL, Karl-Heinz: *Ethnologie – die Wissenschaft vom kulturellen Fremden. Eine Einführung*. München, Verlag C.H. Beck 1993. 201 pp. ISBN 3 406 37733 5.

This publication was intended by the author to serve as a textbook of ethnology and is based on his lectures at the Institute for Ethnology and African Studies in Mainz. Kohl's chief aim was to sketch the latest developments that have brought about a deep change in the contemplation of the discipline. However, neither have been more traditional approaches to the object of study overlooked by the author, which is in accordance with the subtitle.

The book consists of six chapters. In Chapter One ethnology is characterized and its object is defined (pp. 11–28). Such terms as "savage peoples", "primitive peoples" and "natural peoples" (and "nations policiées" in France) are discussed. All these terms are to some extent depreciatory, not excluding the German term "Naturvolk", because such people are often portrayed as ahistorical, as murderers of children, slave hunters or cannibals (p. 21). As if the so-called civilized peoples have not perpetrated crimes in Ausschwitz, Hiroshima, Bosnia or somewhere else. The list of such crimes could be extended ad infinitum. Kohl believes that the term "archaic culture" is not much better and neither are the terms "preindustrial society", "traditional society" or "tribal society". Perhaps most of these terms were intended to be neutral without truly being neutral. And thus we could agree with Kohl's description of ethnology as a science of culturally strange peoples (p. 25ff.). But this does not fit completely either. Such an impression certainly emerges when one reads the list of diagnostic features given in Chapter Two (pp. 29–91). The list includes, e.g., restricted demographic size, linguistic and cultural homogeneity, fundamental importance of kinship, scarcity of institutions, absence of writing, undeveloped technology, and subsistence oriented economics.

One of the most far-reaching changes in modern ethnology has to do with the following issue. Although ethnography still prefers studying a certain type of non-European societies, these are not regarded as isolated and ahistorical but are considered in their relation to supranational structures (pp. 92–93). Taking into account what has been said above,

ethnology seems to be almost synonymous with cultural anthropology or social anthropology (p. 94), especially if we are ready to accept Lévi-Strauss' view that the primary goal of ethnology consists in the study of differences between cultures (p. 93).

A good deal of attention is being paid to the method of amassing primary data. Armchair research, questionnaires or surveys have been replaced by direct work among the peoples who are the subject of the study. The participation of the scholar, however, is not to be taken as a guarantee of objectivity and impartiality.

Another important issue to be discussed is the notion of culture. Kohl defines it as a sum of material and ideal achievements, their knowledge, and their internalized values (p. 131). The influence of linguistics as a theoretically more advanced discipline is felt especially in the approach to culture as a system and the cultural relativism betrays a parallel to the notion of linguistic relativity. However, while in linguistics all the various types of grammatical structure are usually not viewed as correlating with extralinguistic (racial, cultural, etc.) values and as taking place along the axis of time that is irreversible, the idea of progress seems to be inherent in the periodization of various culture types. The possibility of regress, however, cannot be a priori excluded, especially under deteriorated conditions.

The book concludes with a useful chapter on ethnological theories dealing especially with the issues of the unity of culture and their variety. There is also an annotated bibliography (pp. 167–175), a list of publications (pp. 176–194) and an index (pp. 195–201).

Kohl's publication is to be recommended both to students and to everybody interested in acquiring a pool of fundamental knowledge of the science of ethnology.

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