

THEORETICO-METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY ETHNOLOGY

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The author tries to outline the possibilities of the crystallization of current ethnology in Slovakia. The basic models of the anthropology of culture in the world are presented. The process of crystallization may be diverse and inspired by several sources. One cannot say as yet what will be the future orientation of Slovak ethnology. It is the opinion of the author that ethnology has to be reinforced creatively by anthropological approach, particularly in the research and interpretation of the current socio-cultural reality.

Political changes at the beginning of the 1990s launched in Slovakia discussions on the need to seek new research fields, effective methods and interpretation also within the context of sciences and culture of ethnic communities – in ethnology, ethnography, folklore studies. One of the first signs of this phenomenon was the change of the official names of university departments and scientific institutions from ethnography (*národopis*) to ethnology. The period sporadically witnessed the attitudes of some scientists, who, on the one hand, tried to “modernize” the research and teaching processes by implanting new conceptions and a sort of harmonizing of the Slovak ethnology with the “world standard” of social or cultural anthropology, for example P. Skalník (Chorváthová, L.: 1991, pp. 15-18). On the other hand, there were also concerns about inconsiderate devaluation of the results of ethnographic research, which had been shown to be of good quality and useful for the future. The concerns often followed from a sort of misunderstanding that everything that had been done in Slovak ethnography and folklore studies would be of no value and relevance any more and that complete theoretical and methodological re-orientation would be necessary. Such apprehensions were often expressed without any serious analysis of what the cultural and social anthropology actually is.

First, let us pay attention to the basic models in which the anthropology of culture is realized in the world. There are in principle two models: monocentric (Anglo-Saxon) and bicentric (complementary) realized mostly in Europe. Each of them is divided into two basic regional types.

The monocentric model is characterized by the fact that it is built on the anthropology of culture as the main and the only discipline, specially structured as much as possible. This model has two variants.

1. American type – where anthropology is part of the four disciplines: cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, biological anthropology, and archaeology with a characteristic culturological choice and a visible strong tendency towards cultural history and ethnohistory. The effects of that orientation are also sensible outside the USA and their presence in Europe is most evident in the Netherlands and Finland.

2. British type – where social anthropology is a sister discipline of sociology. This opinion is the source of its emphasis on social aspects, which prefer analyses of various human relations and social structures. The response of this tradition is also considerable in other parts of Europe, particularly in Spain, partly in France, very strongly in the Scandinavian countries and also in some centres of Poland (linked with sociology). This orientation is becoming increasingly popular mainly thanks to the activities of the European Association of Social Anthropologists – the organization of European anthropologists with a strong representation of British scientists.

There are currently two basic streams of thought in social and cultural anthropology. The first is directly connected with the methodological bases of neo-evolutionism, developing a wide, global perception of culture as a specifically human non-genetic, adaptation mechanism. The second stream is represented by a series of theories, which interpret culture as a system of ideas and signs. Culture is thus regarded as a set of specifically organized knowledge, symbols, meanings, socio-cultural regulations, cultural codes and rules, acquired by humans as members of a particular society and applied by a group of people. The current social and cultural anthropology is a empirico-theoretical science, which, on the basis of intercultural comparative researches, is trying to do a systemic analysis of socio-cultural structures in space and time. In such researches, ethnography and ethnology are regarded as the basic subdisciplines of social and cultural anthropology, since they secure its two basic phases. Ethnography covers the descriptive level of the study and fulfils tasks associated with collection, description, classification, and analysis of the data by the field research on the particular culture. Ethnology generalizes this material in the intercultural and historical perspective (Soukup, 1993, pp. 17-19).

On the other hand, there is an entirely different model – bicentric, where ethnology is equal and complementary to anthropology. This structure is also realized in two types. Type (1) – could be named German, existing in the countries where German is spoken and partly in France and Spain. It consists in the fact that there are two disciplines existing next to each other but in principle separately: *Volkskunde* and *Volkerkunde*, today mostly represented by the terms – ethnology and cultural anthropology. They have different institutional structures, different traditions of the implementation of science and different research fields. The contacts between them are usually only limited.

Type (2) – existing within the framework of the bicentric model is of osmotic (spontaneously mixed) character. Ethnology is still separated from cultural anthropology but both operate together, preserving strong autonomy conditioned by the tradition of development and the specificity of exploration. Ethnology soaks up anthropology, preserving thereby the essence of both ethnography and ethnology and the anthropology of culture ceases to be merely a science of exotic foreign tribes and the problems of general theoretical level. This type is like the postulated model realized, for example, in some Polish centres (Poznan, Warsaw) satisfying two positive conditions of the transformation of ethnology. Firstly, it is strongly interconnected with the main sources of western anthropology without ignoring the national tradition and the distinctive features of ethnological studies, and secondly: it enable us, without any drastic revolution, to break the “corset” of traditional orientations and obsolete ethnographic procedures in spite of the fact that they brought a lot of new knowledge into the understanding of the cultural specificity of a nation, especially its non-elite, so-called folk strata in the past (Posern-Zieliński, 1995, pp. 21-36).

Given the examples of various models and types of the institutional organization of ethnology and anthropology of culture in the world, let us try to think about the main possibilities of the crystallization of ethnology in Slovakia. There are at least four routes, namely the “ethnological”, “sociological”, “culturological”, and “subdisciplinary” possibilities.

The first of them is the “ethnological” route. It is the pathway of inner reconstruction of ethnology, its innovation and adaptation to the mainstream of the anthropology of culture, that is to say, the anthropologization of ethnology. This process can be implemented with its own strengths, by shifting accents in the methods, scientific fields and aims, in new questions close to anthropology, inspired chiefly by American and French anthropology. The specific feature of this route is the establishment of the balance between empirical exploration and theoretical generalization and the research-oriented study in one’s own country as well as in the most distant regions of the world. The problem on this route is the strong ties of many ethnologists to traditional ethnography and their routine research and often merely routine procedures. Such an orientation has also its place in the contemporary rapidly changing socio-cultural reality but with a precondition of the innovation of the research means. There is immense space particularly for: reinterpretation, de-construction, ethnohistory, that is for returns to the old sources, whose goal should be a new interpretation creatively using anthropological correlations.

The second way is the crystallization of ethnology by the “sociological” route. It is created by a stepwise atomization of social anthropology, which has so far been perceived as an auxiliary sociological science and has been settled within its frames. This area is under the strong pressure of British social anthropology, it does not follow the results of ethnology but the other way round: it looks for its new objectives in sociology. Its specific feature consists in the fact that general theoretical

works predominate over the empirical and it is conditioned by its background and by the need to look for its own identity. The roots of the relationship between sociology and anthropology of culture can be found as early as in the evolutionism of the second half of the nineteenth century; the cooperation between these two disciplines deepened particularly in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century in relation to the works of B. Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown; they anticipated the mainstreams of the sociological research and contributed to the building of the categorial apparatus, which found its place in sociological theories. The last years have also witnessed significant parallels between sociological and anthropological research. Bilateral inspiration is evident chiefly in connection with the development of humanist sociology and cognitive and symbolic anthropology with a unifying factor of the efforts to overcome the unilaterally positivist attitude to the study of socio-cultural phenomena. (Posern-Zieliński, 1995, pp. 21-36, Soukup, 1993, pp. 20-22).

The third possible way of crystallizing ethnology is the "culturological" route. In the world it takes place around the sciences of culture and also within the framework of the theory of culture, philosophy of culture, history of culture and the history of art. Contemporary culturology is based on the world-wide anthropological understanding of culture as a system of suprabiological mechanisms, by means of which humans adapted to the surrounding environment. Its basis is an assumption that culture can be studied at three basic levels. The first is the research into culture as a universal human phenomenon, which motivates, directs, coordinates, realizes and ensures human activities at the level of *homo sapiens*. The second level of research represents a study at the level of cultures, subcultures and counter-cultures, that is particular socio-cultural systems identifiable in time and space. The study at this level is based on the fact that culture is manifested in variations of partial, local cultures, that is in the special way of life of various groups of people. The third level means the study of culture at the level of the individual. Its object is personality culture and an analysis of the relationship between culture, personality, language, and thought within the particular socio-cultural context (Soukup, 1993, pp. 22-24).

The fourth route, the "subdisciplinary" one, is characterized by the fact that the process of anthropologization emerges in other disciplines close to ethnology to become more distinctly anthropological within them. Thus, within biological anthropology there arises historical and ecological anthropology, within comparative linguistics – linguistic anthropology, and the anthropology of religion is formed within religionism and the philosophy of religion. The specific feature of this "subdisciplinary" orientation is greater emphasis on empirical explorations but with a strong theoretical background and sometimes a rather visible unilateral approach following from the specifics of the scientific fields (Posern-Zieliński, pp. 21-36).

Therefore the process of the crystallization of contemporary ethnology in Slovakia can be diverse and can be inspired from several sources. Today it is not yet

possible to say what will be its position in the future. However, what can be said with certainty is that its duty is to strengthen itself primarily by demonstrating the possibilities of the creative harmony of the ethnological studies performed so far with a new anthropological approach in research and the interpretation of socio-cultural reality. That ability (factual or potential) of the connection of both sources is our most precious capital and must be utilized effectively. Therefore, the fusion of the ethnology and anthropology of culture within the framework of scientific and educational institutions appears ideal for the future. From the perspective of an ethnologist the work on the anthropologization of ethnology should continue both in basic and in applied scientific research. The interconnection of both traditions, preserving their peculiarities, will be profitable and it will allow us to make use of the fruitful results of the past decades. Although attractive, the American route does not appear as a possible way forward. In the USA the connection: cultural, linguistic, biological anthropology and archaeology is also regarded as obsolete and ineffective. The strengthening of the cooperation with other alternative sources of anthropology, chiefly sociological and culturological, is also very important: their effect would be further possibilities of anthropological thought and solutions in the social sciences and humanities.

There is an issue of certain utopian vision of some scientists related to the integration of various anthropological or more broadly understood culturological resources. Their goal should be a joint institutionalization of all, so far independent anthropological (cultural and social) centres. These tendencies are known but only at the level of projects. Proposals of L.A. White (1949) to establish culturology as a new subject – the science of culture – could serve as an example. In addition to such theoretical projects we can also see tendencies of the use of the two-component characteristics of anthropology (socio-cultural) removing the older divisions into the British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology. We can also see attempts to characterize anthropology without adjectives – as a really general science of humans in all their existing dimensions. Within those efforts we meet such names as “integral”, “general” or “universal” anthropology whose ambition is to integrate all sciences about humans as social beings and creators of culture. In these tendencies there emerges an idea of the return to the original sources, to the times of the verified strategy of the “general study of society”, which, in a new form of the “science about man” (Kaplan 1968, p. 22) operates as a symphony orchestra playing the same composition but with many instruments (Peacock 1986, p. 19). Some anthropological futurologists even think that if such a process does not take place, anthropology, split into various sources and traditions, will not be able to work out new formulations of its existence, but it simply will be subjected to gradual disintegration to be finally absorbed by other disciplines which will acquire and develop its basic principles (Pandian 1985, p. 124).

Thus we have at least two scenarios of the further development of the anthropology of culture: one optimistic, strengthening the discipline, in which the scientists

see the central branch of the future humanities and the second, pessimistic, with the opinion that its potential will be gradually exhausted and will decay. The future will show which of these tendencies will prevail. It is, however, being created by the scientists themselves, and it rests mainly with them to decide about the future tendency of ethnology, cultural and social anthropology.

Slovak ethnology is currently at a sort of crossroads, feeling evidently that with its traditional, often tried and tested research methods, focused chiefly on cultural-historical explorations of ordinary people it will not be sufficient for the interpretation of the more and more complex manifestations of contemporary socio-cultural reality. Therefore partial attempts at new "anthropologized" ethnology are appearing, and starting to work with other scientific instruments inspired precisely by the arsenal of cultural and social anthropology. So far they are rather institutional non-coordinated experiments based on the ambitions of individual scientists. The relation of "anthropologized" ethnology to other social sciences, chiefly to culturology and sociology has not been defined as yet either, although their research fields are often very close, even identical. The question has to be answered: what will be the specifically ethnological aspect of such researches? What will distinguish our scientific discipline from other human sciences, since, so far, it has been perceived more as a historical science as followed from its dominant orientation to the traditional folk culture and the reconstruction of its forms and manifestations? The main point will be the principal question of self-definition and theoretical and methodological definition of contemporary Slovak ethnology.

The transformation of Slovak ethnology could be implemented when the following principles are observed:

1.

The process of the anthropologization of ethnology does not consist in changing the name of the field but in acquiring a different style of thought, interpretation and research methods.

2.

This process is unavoidable for further development of ethnology, if it is to participate in new assignments following from the current research and from the increasingly complex forms of culture and the life in our ethnic territory and outside it.

3.

Anthropologization of ethnology will make ethnology a partner of other human disciplines since, by using anthropological approaches and interpretations, ethnology, as a science concerning human beings and their culture, can offer really comprehensive knowledge.

4.

Anthropologized ethnology can better penetrate into the main source of scientific studies after being isolated from them by the force of geopolitical realities and other traditions for many years. It will be able to draw creatively on the world results of science and bring new ideas based on its own work, results and possibilities.

5.

Such a transformation will be an asset to ethnology, becoming the science regarded as creative and inspiring; other disciplines will be ready to refer to its achievements as well (Posern-Zieliński, 1995, p. 35).

Conclusions

Ethnology should be a natural and equal partner of cultural or social anthropology. A sort of "local" mutation of ethnology should focus primarily on local, regional, and national research into the culture of non-elite social groups and the anthropology of culture should find its place in the area of theoretical reflection and non-European researches. This division respects our traditions and orientation and it seems optimal in the current process of necessary transformation and modernization of our discipline. Polish scientists also came to such a conclusion: their discussions on this topic were held earlier and now they can speak about various "brotherhoods" and "clans" which were formed at different, originally ethnographic institutions where a certain form of anthropologization of ethnology is being realized (Buchowski, 1995, pp. 37-59).

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