

## II. THE PAST AND PRESENT OF POLISH ETHNOLOGICAL STUDIES

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### A FEW REMARKS ON THE PAST AND PRESENT OF POLISH ETHNOLOGY

The centennial anniversary of the Polish Ethnological Society as a good opportunity to reflect on some problems of Polish ethnology's past. It is also an excellent occasion to discuss the current situation of Polish ethnology. Because of the political and social changes in Poland, above all, the fall of the communist state, there are greater possibilities of establishing contacts with the international academic community and participating in the development of science. In Poland the autonomy of scientific communities has increased; they can decide now on the directions of the development of their various disciplines. A question arises as how to deal with the specific features of Polish ethnology generated under specific local conditions? What should be preserved of the local scholarly tradition and how should the positive elements of Poland's unique experiences be used? On the other hand, how should those features that create barriers to the exchange of views and cooperation with scholars from other countries be eliminated?

In this short article I can only touch upon some problems of ethnology which I consider very important. I will try to answer the following questions:

1. What was and is Polish ethnology as a "national" ethnology?
2. What is the significance of the history of Polish ethnological sciences and studies of this history?
3. What are the features of Polish ethnology that have been shaped by history and what are their consequences for present studies?
4. How should the various changes in Polish ethnology be understood?
5. What is the present state of Polish ethnology/ethnological sciences in Poland? Do they form a coherent discipline or are they an unrelated configuration of interests pursued by individual scholars?

The concept of "national ethnology" is understood here as a set of people and their different activities pursued within the nation — defined as a historical, cultural and political community. The exceptional sensitivity of ethnology to local conditions is well known. These conditions were created by the geographic location and history of Poland: a country and people located in

central and eastern Europe, which for centuries was an agrarian society, with a specific in the past social structure (a large group of noblemen and gentry) and with strong ties with the culture of Western Europe. For most of history Poland has been a multi-ethnic country until 1945, when war-time territorial and population changes transformed Poland into an almost entirely mono-ethnic society. Poland is a nation in which has been deprived of its own state due to the Partitions and Nazi occupation, and whose independence was taken away after the Second World and the Yalta agreement, which for many years placed the country under the control of the Soviet Union. All these circumstances are important in understanding Polish ethnology as a national ethnology.

Institutions of the nation state did not support Polish science, since for a long time Poland did not possess an independent state. Paradoxically, because of the lack of these institutions and other circumstances during the Partitions in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Polish ethnology developed close contacts with ethnological studies in other countries. The Polish ethnology experienced its greatest isolation after the Second World War when, due to political and ideological constraints it like all other social sciences, particularly humanistic studies, were confined to the boundaries of the socialist state. In spite of the difficulties it faced in Poland, national ethnology was like in other countries under influence of eminent scholars — great masters who headed ethnological institutions and who attracted teams of students and followers.

The history of Polish ethnology is full of indications of the changing relations between ethnology and ethnological sciences in other countries. Therefore, it is not possible to present national ethnologies as distinct ethnologies which are internally homogenous. Quite the contrary, the use of concept of national ethnology assumes not only differences but also the adoption of mutual interaction between these ethnologies and the existence of broader ethnology and socio-cultural anthropology, both European and universal. During discussions of the relations between national ethnologies and continental or world ethnology/anthropology, the incompleteness of the concept of “centre-periphery” was noticed. This paradigm was faulted since it made the creative features of some centers absolute and alleged a cultural infertility of other regions and human groups.

As Polish ethnology has held the status of a national ethnology since the second half of the 19th century, some effort is required to sustain and develop it. Further work is required to enfold Polish ethnology as a whole: such work will include the syntheses of individual directions and studies, manuals of methods and dictionaries, descriptions and analyses of its history, literature etc. I want to emphasize that I am thinking here about ethnology as a “certain” whole — a whole that draws from the achievements of the broaden scientific

community yet remains a functional whole. Therefore, it is necessary to present the relations between Polish ethnology and its place in world ethnology and anthropology.

A special role in the shaping and functioning of national ethnology is played by studies of ethnological history. They not only let us trace the changes in the problems that were investigated and the development of notional and theoretical concepts, but also the relations between the conditions in Poland and world science. Furthermore, they point to a tradition to which reference can be made and in this way help define the scope of this discipline. Mention must be made here of valuable works on the history of Polish ethnology (Kutrzebianka, 1948; Terlecka, ed., 1973; Burszta, Kopczyńska-Jaworska, 1982; Damrosz, 1988). However, there is a need for new studies which will provide answers to our current question. What were the relations in the history of Polish ethnology between tendencies to make this discipline a universal one on the one hand and, on the other, to focus on the folk culture of the country? Why did Polish ethnology not take the opportunity to reestablish international scholarly contacts in the relatively free intellectual climate that existed in Poland after 1956? What were the reasons for the limited interest in anthropological theories in the post-war period — was this due only to political or ideological limitations imposed from outside, or were their constraints created within the community of scholars? What caused the manifestation of differences between generations, which is stronger in Polish ethnology than in other social sciences? What are the reactions of Polish ethnology to wider contacts with world anthropology, including post-modern anthropology? Attempts to answer the questions were made recently by some authors, for example by E. Jaworski and E. Kosowska (1994) and Z. Jasiewicz and D. Slattery (1995). I hope that they will be the beginning of a wider discussion of the past and present of ethnology, so much needed for further reflections on this direction of studies.

Different assumptions can be adopted to study the history of ethnology. In Central Europe, and in Poland, the paradigm of the history of local ethnologies is prevalent. According to this analysis, the past is seen as a gradual transition from descriptive knowledge of peoples or ethnography to global dimensions of culture, typical of socio-cultural anthropology. A different perspective which examines the coexistence of these two directions of interest is more valuable. Seen from this perspective, the history and tradition of ethnology includes not only descriptions of folk culture, but also the various interpretive frame works that earlier ethnographers employed to discuss and analyse their research. Using the perspective of coexistence it is possible to study works such as the folk descriptions of S. Staszic at the beginning of the 19th century, and the programmes of investigations of folk culture, as outlined by H. Kołłątaj in 1802, and which is treated as the beginning of Polish ethnology (Kutrzebianka,

1948, p. 71; Posern-Zieliński, 1973, p. 31) and also consider Staszic's and Kołłątaj's ideas on the development of culture and man's aims, debated within the framework of "philosophical history" (Szacki, 1981, vol. 1, p. 147). Such an approach is particularly valuable as this works make many references to results of investigations of peoples inhabiting regions outside Europe.

The task of an ethnological historian is not to find the time and situations in which, in addition to description, there is also an overall concept and in addition to the interest in folk culture there is also interest in global culture, but also to try to determine the character and mutual relations between these two ways of seeing the world. Adoption of this wide scope of ethnological and anthropological investigations helps us to return to the past and look there for more extensive foundations of modern ethnology.

The reasons for the appearance and consequences of the two features of ethnology which I treat as characteristic of Polish ethnology can only be discussed in a wider historical context. The first is the focus of interest on folk culture, another — combination of local studies on folk culture and studies of cultures of peoples inhabiting regions outside Europe, the so-called tribal or primitive cultures.

The studies of folk culture were focused on the "national" territory, a construct which has varied greatly depending of time and place. Initially, the territory was equivalent to the territory of Poland before the Partitions then was restricted to the territory of Poland between 1918 and 1939 and finally to Poland after 1945. Scholars were mainly fascinated with the eastern lands, the so-called borderlands, and regions with separate cultural features such as the Carpathian region, Cracow region, Kurpie (a district north-east of Warsaw) and, to a lesser extent, the Łowicz area, Kashuby, and Silesia. The selectivity of investigations was only restricted by O. Kolberg who advocated collection of materials from all the areas that were considered "national" or were treated as historically related to the old Polish Republic. The ethnically Polish character of regional groups was neither an encouragement nor discouragement of investigations. What was decisive was the degree to which a given group preserved traditional folk culture and its originality. The area of Slavdom rarely defined the limits of programmes of ethnological investigations. Interest in Slavonic peoples can be found in Z. Dołęga-Chodakowski (1818), in some presentations of tasks attempted in the second half of the 19th century by O. Kolberg (1965, p. 246), in A. Fischer's works (1932 - 1934), and primarily in the monumental work by K. Moszyński, published after Poland regained her independence (1929 - 1939). With the exception of K. Moszyński's work, these were interests focused on "closer" Slavonic peoples, with no regard of the Russian folk culture.

Folk culture was interesting because it was either archaic, a remnant of the past, or it was different from the culture of non-folk communities. It was

analysed from two points of view: as a subculture or even culture of these groups and as a carrier of values which were cherished at a given time — native character, traditional character, originality, simplicity, spontaneity. Scholars noticed the connection between folk culture and important socio-cultural problems — the gaining of identity by peasant communities, the inclusion of these communities into the national community, the development of local government, prevention of alienation and stresses during the modernization process. Axiological and instrumental treatment of folk culture led to its mythologization and this in turn triggered a demythologization effect. The above has had a nearly 150-year old tradition in Polish ethnology (cf. R. Berwiński who denied folk culture the value of unchangeability and independent from the culture of the elite strata (1854)).

What should be done with the abundant achievements of studies of folk culture? The task of the modern ethnologist is to grasp the many dimensions of the phenomenon and the different meanings of the term. This entails the cultural system of the former village which belongs to the past and the tradition transmitted from the past and continued in the modern family, local and regional groups. It also includes, however, those traditions and cultural forms the transmission of which was interrupted but to which reference is made because they are treated as values or, finally, as elements of cultural and social policy, that is as a tool and an activity which is to help in the solution of some problems of our contemporary life. The work of ethnologists should not simplify this multidimensional picture.

The valuable results of studies on folk culture can be used and the studies continued in the following main directions:

1. historical studies of the folk culture as a cultural system of former communities, primarily rural communities;
2. studies of folk culture as a tradition, mechanisms of transmission and the place and significance of elements and values of this culture in modern society;
3. studies using the materials and inspirations connected with folk culture in other studies of culture, for example those presenting folk culture as an aspect of culture, always present in it, and in discussions of the theory of culture, mainly when folk culture is treated as a model structure.

On the European map of ethnologies Polish ethnology was placed between the territory of Germany, where the culture of the German people and the cultures of peoples inhabiting the territories outside Europe were investigated separately, and the territory of Russia, where these two directions of interest were combined. Polish ethnology is more inclined to pursue the latter direction and for this reason I have treated it as one of its features.

There are no studies of the genesis of this link, its character and consequences for the overall picture of Polish ethnology. I can find reasons

for this link in the influence of evolutionism, strong in Poland, a certain distance to one's "own" people and the lack of an ideology of the folk that dictated separation of these two objects of interest. Another reason can be seen in the living conditions and the research possibilities that scholars had. In a country, which did not abound in scholars, at one time scholars were interested in rural people and quite often against their own will, they also became detainees or emigrants among peoples inhabiting territories outside Europe, primarily those in Asia. First investigations of the rural people in the scholars' own country and the peoples inhabiting territories outside Europe were conducted by the some scholars at the end of the 19th and the beginnings of the 20th century by J. Witort, B. Piłsudski and S. Poniatowski (Kuczyński, 1994). In the interwar period, out of nine professors who dealt with ethnology, five pursued studies of the folk culture in Poland and the cultures of peoples inhabiting territories outside Europe. Even today the number of scholars who work in this way is quite considerable.

The above combination of interests resulted in a tendency to relativize the value of Polish folk culture. Consequently, within the framework of Polish ethnology the nationalistic idea was not identified with the "folk" as was the case with German Volkskunde. An openness to anthropological concepts of culture, created primarily on the basis of materials collected outside Europe, was another consequence of the above combination.

Observance of the past and present of Polish ethnology leads us to note its exceptional changeability and variability. The range of interests changed, depending on the time: the culture of the rural folk in territories of Europe, sometimes restricted to its verbalized manifestations, the culture of peoples inhabiting territories outside Europe, folk culture including also non-peasant groups, primarily workers, community culture and, finally, culture in the global dimension. Changes in theoretical orientations, related to ideologies and directions in the social science in Poland was often dramatic. The conditions of national ethnology and its relations to the social sciences as a whole, ideology, socio-economic conditions and the political situation in Poland were different. Polish ethnology, like other national ethnologies, was also under tension related to its changing contacts with the international academic community. Today this tension is felt in Poland in connection with wider possibilities and participation in the development of world ethnology and anthropology.

Changeability, sometimes alternation, was also typical of the name of our discipline: folk studies, ethnography, ethnology, socio-cultural anthropology, anthropology. A well known Polish ethnologist, the late Professor Anna Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa, who I once asked whether she was not annoyed with the diversity and changeability of notions which we use to define our studies said, "I am not annoyed by the many names... Ethnology is always *in statu nascendi* in trying to find its own identity and autonomy".

Today ethnological sciences in Poland comprise, in addition to ethnology, other branches of science as well folkloric studies, ethnomusicology, ethno-religious studies and other studies bordering other sciences. Some scholars call themselves social anthropologists or cultural anthropologists. Ethnology is most stable in the formal structure of science. Following recent discussions, ethnological studies remained separate department at universities and ethnology is one of the scientific and scholarly disciplines which can be pursued for advanced degrees. Besides, ethnology is well established in many centres at universities and other scientific institutions and museums. There are six ethnological journals and the Polish Ethnological Society is celebrating its centennial anniversary. Attempts at integrating the diversity of directions of studies and tradition is made by the Committee of Ethnological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

What makes the search for the identity and autonomy of ethnological sciences in Poland possible? What are some common factors in the diversity and abundance of changes? It seems that it is the way in which socio-cultural reality is perceived and interpreted — the choice of the object of investigations which signify common cultural denominators, the historicism which makes it possible to cross the border of real time and the sociological approach which contributes values of culture to social life. These research methodologies, with their strong empirical bent, are complemented by a specific spatial universalism that helps to compare phenomena from different areas, and the effort to formulate valid generalizations — through the creation and use of many theories of culture.

The above features are not discriminants that act independently. Acceptance of these features as a factor that creates a branch of science called ethnological sciences is a matter of choice. We define our belonging, we are in favour of some tradition which we continually enlarge and, when we start investigations, we delineate the limits of the discipline and give it a specific theoretical status. The possibility of choice is also typical of scholars from another tradition — philosophers, sociologists, historians, philologists. Some of them, together with ethnologists, build modern ethnological sciences. Today the term “ethnological sciences” best describes the sense of diversity and commonness within folkloric, ethnological and anthropological studies in Poland.

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