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Eastern Europe as Anthropological Construct. Hierarchies of Knowledge and Power in the Foundation of East European Ethnology

Karolina Koziura
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland

Abstract: Eastern Europe has been perceived as invented by the Enlightenment and popular for this time expeditions of people from the West to the East. In this way invented “Other” has become the subject of first anthropological investigation within the frameworks of: “community studies”, “kinship and social structure”, “word system and the region” to mention just few. Together with bigger interest in Eastern Europe and numbers of fieldworks conducted here, among anthropologists raised new idea on founding the Eastern Europe as a separate field of anthropological investigation. But together with this new conceptualization of Europe, a new problem appeared on the definition of the borders of Eastern Europe. Should Eastern Europe be understood in geographical terms or rather social and cultural? Is the post socialism a new definition of Eastern Europe? What is more, in the process of the formation of Eastern Europe, it looks like Western anthropologist forgot about their Eastern colleagues and the traditions of national ethnographies here. In my presentation, I would like to show, in which way Eastern Europe is described in Western anthropological literature and in which way perceive themselves ethnologist from this area. It is visible that so-called ‘native anthropologists’ almost do not exist in Western works and give the power of their representation to Western colleagues. I will try to answer the question posed by Chris Hann, why we are marginalized in the international area? It looks like, that the category of orientalism implemented to the Humanities by Edward Said understood as the set of discourses practices in which ‘West’ describes ‘East’ together with the concept of ‘Other’ can explain the existence of hierarchies of knowledge and power in modern anthropology. Finally, based on my speech and my own fieldwork conducted for more than 5 years in Ukraine, I would like to propose my own definition of Eastern Europe and its borders.

Keywords: Anthropology of Eastern Europe, orientalism, the concept of “Other”, hierarchies of knowledge and power, scientific colonialism

Anthropology of Eastern Europe is relatively a new field of study within cultural anthropology. For the very first beginning of cultural anthropology as a science the study of native communities from previous western colonies has played a significant role in its practice and later given theories and methodologies. The end of XIX. century has been perceived especially as a beginning of East European ethnologies. It comes together with the processes of nation-state building and the study of peasant communities was a key factor in it. Among the East European ethnologies in this time emerged the ideas on settle a kind of networks between their national ethnologies. In 1928 there was a first Congress of Folk Art which aim was to settle a common approach to theory they used in their research which tools supposed to be new scientific magazines: “Wörter und Sachen” and “Folk-Liv”. Nevertheless, this first steps towards the integration of East European ethnologies have never truly came true and the need for a wider communication of this surrounding as well as a more international studies (on the common basis of East European ethnology) remained open (Kabzińska 2010). Similar problems were faced by West European ethnologies. They also strived for common theoretical approach within European ethnology. The main problem, which they concerned was whether can be found a common basis for all the European cultures as well as theoretical approach to study them.

The end of World War II and the collapse of colonial world turned the interest of mostly American scientists towards European cultures. The visible processes of integration within European communities was one of the key factors of a kind of turning point within cultural anthropology interest. Mediterranean area was a first place settled for investigation by mostly American anthropologies. Urbanization and social structure as well as the system of values were the main interests for fieldworkers (Halpern and Kideckel 1983). Later on this concepts under the single name “beyond the community” were extended to the rest part of Europe and become by this the first basis of common European studies. But Europe was always a very specific field of study for anthologists. Far more complicated and complex than the traditional native communities in Oceania or North America. The contradictions between general and particular aspects of observed in Europe processes such as the regionalization, integration processes, international organizations, industrialization, urbanization, bureaucracy and finally high level of people’s mobility were the main problems for anthropologists because of which it was hard to conclude whether European Anthropology as a separate field of study can be establish at all (ibid.)

In such a understanding of the process of foundation of both East and West European Ethnology one contradiction remains visible. From the one side we face here the anthropology going from “inside” represented by “native” European ethnologies who represented national bounded ethnologies and from the other side anthropology

from “outside” represented mostly by American anthropologists, who were more likely to build up a more uniform study of European societies in general. As I try to show, this contradiction between “native” ethnologies and this from abroad is especially seen in the case of foundation of East European ethnology. Nevertheless the status of the European Ethnology within the World Anthropology is rather marginalized the same as the status of the East European Ethnology within the European Ethnology.

In following article, my aim is to describe to processes of the foundation of East European Anthropology but writing from American anthropologists perspective. What is visible in this works is the relative absence of East European ethnologists and their works. This is an open question on why are they marginalized in their own field? One may think, that the language is the only barrier why the Western scholars cannot reach their Eastern colleagues (who still are more likely to use their native tongue). Or maybe, as I try to show in this article we face here a deeper problem on the idea of Eastern Europe itself and the existence of hierarchies of knowledge and power within anthropological discourse.

In my article I would like to answer several question: in what way do Western anthropologists describe Eastern Europe and why “native” ethnologists remain marginalized? Then, I focus more on the potential contribution of East European ethnologists to the foundation of Anthropology of Eastern Europe. Taking into consideration the polish example, I would like to show the still existed problem on the definition of Eastern Europe. In the second part of my article, I focus more on the concept of the “Other” and the idea of orientalism implemented to the Humanities by Edward Said. I believe that by using this approach to the discussion on the status of East European ethnologies within cultural anthropology it can be the key answer for understanding the hierarchies of knowledge and power which, I believe we still have faced today.

The anthropological definition of Eastern Europe

Joel Martin Halpern and David A. Kideckel in their article “Anthropology of Eastern Europe” (1983) define the borders of Eastern Europe by giving two criteria: geographical and cultural. In geographical terms Eastern Europe consisted of: “Slavic states of Europe outside the Soviet Union and geographically contiguous states of Albania, Hungary, Romania – excluding East Germany” (ibid. 379). Cultural background of East European countries is the main reason for such a understanding of the region. The definition is based on the peasant nature of Eastern Europe (in comparison to Western Europe with its well-developed urban tradition and Greece with its heritage of Classic civilization). Here the national identities have resided historically with the rural folk by which it is understood the small-scale urban centers. The second component of the cultural definition of the region is the peripheral political economic situation of Eastern Europe to the series of empires: Ottomans, Habsburgs, Russians, Western capital and The Soviet Union. The most characteristic feature here is also a conflicting Ethnic diversity. Ethnic and national groups together with its competition were always one of the most popular field of study in Eastern Europe. Since the World War II the basis for understanding of Eastern Europe was the commonality of its socialist institutions such as a socialist economy, collective farms, centralized political parties and so on.

Another - modern definition of Eastern Europe is strictly connected with the last mentioned issue, I mean post socialism. The reason for that is, the collapse of Soviet Union, which has changed the anthropological perception of Eastern Europe. The previous Soviet republics became a part of East European studies and in anthropological literature the hole area was named as post socialist Europe (the same as post socialist anthropology). The post socialist approach was especially important (and popular) in the beginning of 90. During the time when the transformation of Eastern European economy, politics and especially societies were clearly visible. One of the main issue of anthropology of post socialism represented by such a scholars as Katherine Verdery (1996), Caroline Humphrey (2010), Chris Hann (1994), Michał Buchowski (1994) and many others was to define socialism itself. What is important to stress for our investigation here, the new components such as the independent countries of previous Soviet republics were included to the definition of Eastern Europe. Before it, they were a part of different area of study under the name “sovietology”. Nowadays, more than 20 years after the collapse of Soviet Union, it is hard to say whether we can still use the term post socialism to describe such a different areas the same as different paths of transformation observed in each of the part of previous Soviet Union. How can we compare modern Ukraine, Russia Federation, Belarus or Moldova? Chris Hann (1994) even asks: “does it make sense? Can we call all this different paths (and different socialisms) under one name ‘post socialism’?”

This kind of anthropological definitions of Eastern Europe were established on the basis of anthropological works, which from the end of XIX. century shaped our understanding of the region. On the one hand at this time we face the establishment of national ethnographies – Polish, Ukrainian, Czech, Slovakian and many others – but from the “Western” point of view this heritage is treated at the margin mostly because of its role in national building processes. The end of XIX. century was also a time when Western anthropologists got the interest in the region. The first place

where they settled their investigation were Balkans together with the phenomena of Zadruga – the characteristic for this region kind of joint family with economic function investigated by Philip Mosely (1983) then there are the study of national character – the case of Romania and the study taken by Ruth Benedict (ibid.).

The second period of developing the anthropology of Eastern Europe is settled in postwar time. Then – after the experience of the World War I the main problems for investigations were seen in defining national and cultural groups. Also studies on peasant societies – so characteristic feature for Eastern Europe, together with the study on domestic groups and religious rituals were in the center of anthropological investigations.

The period after World War II is characterized by two main perspectives in investigating the Eastern Europe. The first one is called the social structure research and it is connected with the study on the peasant society and characteristic for it the local institutions and the role of family. Many researchers investigated also oral traditions (ibid.). The second perspective is called political economic research. Researcher under this approach emphasized on the interaction of local cultural units and supranational ones. Within this two given perspectives on the modern anthropological investigation of Eastern Europe, several fields of study are observed. The first one called “community studies” are focus on the history as a tool for understanding the cultural phenomena and regional patterns, the second called “kinship and oral structure” are mostly related to the first period of establishing anthropology of Eastern Europe and it is strictly connected with mentioned study on the phenomena of Zadruga, lineage organization, marriages mostly observed in Southern Slaves. “Word system and the region” is another characteristic approach of East European anthropology. This studies are focus the most on the problem of ethnicity as the important marker of identity here. Last field of study under the name “the transformation of peasant society” are focus on the agrarian change and collectivization on the one hand and problems of industrialization and urbanization on the other.

The contribution of East European ethnologists in the understanding of Eastern Europe

Mentioned Joel Martin Halpern and David A. Kideckel in their article “Anthropology of Eastern Europe” (1983), which is the most important synthesis of American anthropologists work on Eastern Europe conclude that there is a lack of comparative studies on Eastern Europe. Most of the researcher focus rather on the given state, region, village or investigated phenomena such as kinship. Only the Balkan region has witnessed the attempt to generalization. Nevertheless, they do not try to solve this problems – on actually why researchers did not try to generalize more in their investigation. Maybe as for them this region was too complicated itself? Having in general some common features, in particular cases it could not be compared? Although in “Western” works comparative studies on Eastern Europe are something unique or almost they do not exist among the “native” ethnologies were examples of such an approach. The most obvious from Polish perspective is the monumental work of Kazimierz Moszyński (1968) on the folk culture of Slavs, in which the author by describing the specific parts of material, spiritual and social culture give the examples from almost each part of the Slavs trying to show common cultural background among them. Such a works can be found also in Ukraine – an attempt to comparative study is visible in works written by Fiodor Vovk and Mykola Hruszevskij. Such an approach can be certainly found in other East European ethnologies (Czech, Hungarian, Russian and many other).

The problem of modern East European anthropology is still the lack of not even comparative studies but rather a communication between certain national ethnologies. In Poland, while taking 5-years education in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, I did not meet with the heritages of given national ethnologies. The program of almost each of institutes on universities is bounded between teaching the theory of western anthropology and own national ethnology. In such, there is no place for another central or eastern to Poland ethnologies. The consequence of such a situation is rather small knowledge on not only what is going on in our neighbors concerning this science but also what is its history and common backgrounds. Anthropology in Poland is dominated by Western discourse. What is more, in Poland when we teach the anthropology of Eastern Europe, we conceptualize the region as being eastern to Poland. Basically we understand under this term the ethnologies of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Ethnology of Poland is a separate field of study – and the ethnologies of our southern neighbors almost do not exist. It is hard to answer, why we do not conceptualize our own ethnology as being part of East European heritage. Although we do know it, somehow we do not like to placed ourselves like this. In my opinion, it is a reflect of the Polish attitude towards Eastern Europe itself. Although, we know that in general we are perceived in Western Europe as a part of the Eastern region. We do not like to associate ourselves in this way. Eastern Europe here is a kind of stereotype which is associated with under develop, peripheral region in the shadow of Western civilization. But somehow, we do not associate ourselves with the idea of Central Europe as well. The place of Czech, Slovakian or Hungarian culture is still marginalized in Poland – the same their ethnologies. Although there are good examples of cooperation – the existence of international ethnological associations and journals, still on the micro level Polish anthropology is divided between

West and East. Only in the program of Ethnological Institutes lying in the borderland, a wider flow of ideas is observed. It is visible especially in the Institute of Ethnology, Silesian University which establish more cooperation with Czech ethnologists and together with them publish the periodic, called "Europae Centralis", then the Institute of Ethnology, University of Gdansk which focus more on the Baltic area ethnology and The Institute of Cultural Studies, Maria Curie-University in Lublin, which in its theoretical base is partly using the Russian school of cultural studies. But, in my opinion all together they form rather micro studies and still in the official program of ethnology in Poland wider studies of Central or East European ethnology is not included.

The Polish attitude towards Eastern Europe itself can be understood as a reason why we do not develop this studies in Poland. We face here a marginalization of science, visible on two levels. The first one is the marginalization of European Ethnology within World Anthropology, the second – marginalization of East European Ethnology within European Ethnology. The lack of specific supra regional platforms for communication between East European ethnologists is also, in my opinion, the reason why in general their voice is not hear from outside. The question of their marginalized position within World Anthropology can be also understood through language difficulties. English is the lingua franca of modern anthropology. Being a part of World Anthropology surrounding means having good skills in using it – especially publishing. This can explain why "native" ethnologists are not included in the given foundation of Anthropology of Eastern Europe – for the simple fact that they cannot be reach for outside users. But should it work in other way round? Should Western anthropologists who work in the East know the "natives" languages? But maybe language is not here the only problem?

The concept of "Other" and its use for understanding the Anthropology of Eastern Europe

The concept of "Other" together with the division between "Us" and "Them" are central and universal categories for anthropological investigations. Even more significant is the process of making the "Other" bounded by the relation of power hierarchy. Its base is the distinction between mentioned "Us" (the civilized) and the exotic and often uncivilized "Others". Such division become the fundaments of the concept of orientalism, implemented to the Humanities by Edward W. Side (1978). It is understand as: "a set of discursive practices through which the West structured the imaged East politically, military, ideologically and scientifically" (Buchowski 2006).

The most important factor here is the distinction between "the Orient" and "The Occident". They are both real the same as imagined. Real in a sense that as such they exist the same as real people live here. Imagined - because the most important is the way how they are both perceives. So, in case of "the Orient" it is the way how different countries, regions, areas and people bounded together under one category and represented by "the Occident". Such notions concerning Eastern Europe is visible in several works – like Maria Todorova's work on Balkans (1997) and Larry Wolff's work on the invention of Eastern Europe in the Enlightenment (1994).

The problem of distinction between "Us" and "Them" is also visible in anthropological science and their consequence is the hierarchical relation of knowledge and power (Buchowski 2006). On the one hand on East European ground we still observe the domination of West European and American Anthropological discourse. Eastern Europe is perceived as a place to investigate and conduct the fieldwork. From Polish perspective we do know, that if we want to gain proper education, seek new theories we need to move "West" and if we want to explore we move "East". It is a matter of prestige to study on Western Universities, took up fellowships, publish in Western journals. Scientifically, it looks like we do not need to move East in a sense that the heritage of Eastern ethnology can simple give us less. Nevertheless, it is a good place for doing fieldwork. An overview of most fields of study and certain ethnological Institutes in Poland shows that we still treat in favor doing the fieldwork eastern from Poland. East is still more exotic, traditional and simply cheaper for investigation. Rarely, we try to establish contact with "native" ethnologists there and seek also theories for us. This distinction can be best describe by the notion of "scientific colonialism" used by Johan Galtung (Rajewski 2010, 31). In his opinion it releases when a young scholar from under develop countries are invited for taking scholarships for longer time in high develop countries. Then, when his value passed – they are forced to come back. A characteristic processes in it is the unsymmetrical distribution or accumulation of personal knowledge. A scientists who come from the science empires are more likely for having a wider knowledge on different countries – in the time when the knowledge of their representatives is full of stereotypes and is under develop.

As for me it explains, our attitude towards "the East". I have this impression that still we perceive ethnology eastern to Poland as more old fashioned and before the anthropological turn. In Poland we experienced it in the late 80. when the discussion on problem of the anthropologization of the ethnological science started. To the Institutes of

Ethnology almost automatically was added the Cultural Anthropology equivalent and by this it was a symbolic break with the past and heritage of national ethnography and the loyalty with Western anthropological discourse.

As for me, the problem of “scientific colonialism” on European ground is visible in not only the way how West European ethnologists conceptualize Eastern ethnology but also how the East European ethnologists describe themselves. The border between East and West is here ambivalent and depends on self-perception. Taking Polish case, we treat East as a vacuum to explore and not a place of scientific empire where we can seek theories. This is the way, why we may not try to establish contact with Eastern colleagues and do not cite them in our works.

At this part of my article, I would like to use the example of my own experience of doing fieldwork in Ukraine but taking into consideration not the fieldwork itself but my communication with Ukrainian scholars.

I started my work in Ukraine in the year 2005 while doing my research in small community in Carpathians as a part of the students’ expedition. It was my first experience of doing fieldwork not only abroad but at all. At that time I did not even try to establish connections with Ukrainian ethnologists for simple problem of lack of Ukrainian language and the distance to closest University from my village. Then, I focus more on the study of my community. When two years later, I came back to Ukraine my situation changed. I conducted fieldwork in urban setting (so the distance to university was closer) and knew the basis of language. But still, I could not communicate with Ukrainian ethnologists and it released that we have totally different fields of interests. I defined myself as being the cultural anthropologist being bounded by postsocialist anthropology and what I believed I faced in Ukraine was more national bounded ethnography. For Ukrainian ethnologists from Ivan Franko National University in Lviv at that time the most important concerns were study of Ukrainian folk culture in XIX. century – a subject totally outside my personal scientific interests. Although, I learned a lot about the foundation of Ukrainian ethnology and its similarities with Polish one – for my investigation it remains useless. I was more interested in the problem of multiculturalism in Ukraine and the impact of Western non- governmental organizations in postsocialist areas. It released that there was a huge gap between what I supposed to investigate and what was center for Ukrainian scholars whom I met.

During the third time of my fieldwork in Ukraine, which focus on the socio-cultural transformation of the city of Chernivtsi I found that the groups whom might be helpful for me are from outside the ethnological surrounding. It released that sociologists, historian and writers can help me more in my own investigation. They were a source of ideas, articles, books and support during fieldwork. But still, I asked myself – do I ignored Ukrainian ethnologist? Did I live them at the margin? Do the stereotypes of Eastern ethnology unable my understanding of it and further communication with the surrounding? By this example, I do not want to stress that Ukrainian ethnology is not worthy. I found there an inspiration for better understanding of Polish ethnology and I believe we have the common base. The problem here is deeper and partially it lies on the problem of language. In anthropology it is a general rule the knowledge of native language of people, who anthropologists investigate. But it should be also a rule for communicating with native scientists. Europe is a specific field of study and it cannot be treat in the same way as the traditional area of anthropological research. Cultural Anthropologist while investigating the native communities of colonial world do not have the need and sometimes possibility to cooperate with local scientists (for the simple fact that there were not any). Later the postcolonial approach brought the critics of this attitude and the voice of postcolonial scientist started to be heard in the West. In Europe from the very first beginning of the foundation of Anthropology of Europe – native ethnologists existed. It was not a vacuum but a field reach of its own theoretical approach. The dominance of the Western Anthropological discourse and its theory somehow shadowed the European heritage. In my opinion, it looks like in the same way we treat this parts which we conceptualize as the East. Although we do not like to call ourselves as colonists we feel this kind of dominance upon the Eastern heritage. There is a set of books, authors which we need to know and the Eastern one are not perceived as classics within anthropology. Sometimes, although being open towards the East – the barrier of language remains open. Even when there are works potentially useful for us we somehow cannot reach it. If we argue that Western scholars while investigating Poland need to know the language and should use our own theories, the same rule we should use by investigating others.

Another – also very important problem here is, whether we – East European anthropologists as being representatives of rather young science here, actually produce theories which can contribute to the European and even to the World Anthropology? This is an open question. I believe that the key for overcoming the hierarchies in anthropology is the flow of ideas and knowledge not only from The West but also The East, The North and The South which as I claim started to be visible recently in Poland.

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Karolina Koziura works currently at the Institute of Cultural Studies, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Her main interests concern the study of postsocialism Europe – especially in Ukraine. She has conducted her research in both rural setting (the village of Libuchora in Carpathians) and urban one (the town of Chernivtsi). She also did an internship at the Institute of Ethnology, Ivan Franko National University in Lviv, Ukraine. In the year 2010-2011 she conducted research on the problem of the modern urban transformation in Ukraine concerns such issues as: the economy of everyday life, family relations and multiculturalism.