

SPECIAL SECTION ON POLISH ANTHROPOLOGY

2: Commentary

POST-WAR POLISH ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEASANT FIELD STUDIES

Rural communities in developing countries have been a focus of attention for anthropological research centres for many years. However, that interest arose first of all in countries engaged in some form of direct aid in agriculture and modernization in rural areas of the Third World. Poland's participation in this kind of international help has been modest and rather occasional, and as a result, Polish scholars have not had very strong motivations for engaging deeply in such studies. Nevertheless, there has been some Polish research on such topics in the post-war period.

Professor Andrzej Waligórski, the forerunner of modern Polish research on the peasantry of the Third World, tried to define the subject of such studies. By the term 'post-colonial peasantry' he meant communities living in rural areas, involved in agriculture, using simple tools and family manpower, and treating farming or animal husbandry as their way of life. They differed from primitive, isolated, tribal communities because of their intensive cultural contact with the rest of the world and their engagement, even though modest, in the market economy by selling their surplus.¹ I will not discuss the accuracy of this definition here, save to say that all in all it covered not only the settled farmers, but also pastoral nomads and semi-nomads.

During the inter-war period, no field studies on overseas rural communities were carried out by Polish anthropologists, although during the Second World War a Polish exile, the late Lucjan Turkowski, studied traditional farming technology among Palestinian Arabs in the Judaean Hills, publishing a paper on this topic in England during the same period.² The real starting point for such research by Polish ethnographers and anthropologists was the intensive field studies carried out among the Luo of western Kenya by Waligórski between 1946 and 1948. Waligórski, once a

student of Bronisław Malinowski, spent the war in Britain, and after getting an English grant for his research he went to Kenya, where he focused his attention on cultural change among the Luo and their response to fifty years of British colonial policy. Having defined the scope of his study so carefully and precisely, he refrained from any attempt to present the whole traditional culture of the Luo tribe. In 1948 he returned to Poland, though even twenty years later he had still published only a part of his field data.³ (The rest was prepared and edited by Leszek Dziegiel at the request of the author.) In 1974, Waligorski's premature death following a serious illness prevented the further studies he had planned on the peasantry of tropical East Africa. His studies were under-estimated and ignored by other Polish scholars, and they sank into oblivion despite the fact that they had been a real innovation in Polish anthropology because of their method and subject.

Nevertheless, in the late 1950s Polish anthropology gradually gained momentum and began to show more interest in non-European cultures. This was the close of the epoch characterised solely by field studies of isolated, small tribal communities, and post-colonial peasant masses became an important focus of Western anthropologists' interest. All the same, during the post-war period Polish scholars carried out several field studies devoted either to such primitive tribal groups or to problems far removed from traditional peasant economy and everyday life. Here might be mentioned Anna Kowalska's work among Shipibo Indians in the Peruvian Montana in 1948,⁴ Janusz Kamocki's research among the Kubu of the Sumatra forests in the 1970s,⁵ and Henryk Zimoń's studies on the historical sense of some Tanzanian tribes, carried out in the 1960s and published outside Poland by the Anthropos Institute.

The idea of research on the rural populations of the developing countries gained in popularity among Polish anthropologists in the 1960s and especially the 1970s, the most fruitful period of our field studies. Since the late 1960s, much research has been carried out in Mongolia by Polish scholars from Warsaw University and the Warsaw Ethnological Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The Poles and their Mongolian colleagues worked under the direction of Professor Witold Dynowski, most attention being paid to the processes of modernisation among nomad and semi-nomad pastoralists and to those traits of their traditional culture which survived in the changing economic and social milieu. (It was only in the 1950s that Mongolian society became the object of mass collectivization.) The most comprehensive study published by a member of the Polish team was the book written by Sławoj Szyrkiewicz in 1981 on the contemporary Mongolian family.⁶ Up until now, Mongolia has been the location of the most regular and comprehensive field studies on rural populations. Other research projects have been less methodical, and the subject of study has sometimes been a matter of chance.

Afghanistan was also visited by Polish scholars rather frequently up to the end of the 1970s, although their studies have not been limited to the rural population alone. Articles by Tadeusz Martynowicz on the traditional Afghan family and wedding ceremon-

ies,⁷ Jadwiga Pstrusińska on the Paštunwali tribal code and traditional healing practices,⁸ Bohdan Bielkiewicz on traditional customs of inheritance⁹ and Leszek Dzięgiel on traditional diet and nutrition systems¹⁰ concerned a traditionally minded urban population as well as rural communities. And Dzięgiel's paper on contemporary Kabul dealt with the sociocultural phenomena of the Afghan capital.¹¹ On the other hand, Krzysztof Wolski stuck to rural areas and their problems, presenting some features of traditional agriculture in Afghanistan and the culture of nomads from the Afghan-Pakistan border involved in bazaar commerce.¹² To this same category belongs the articles written by Dzięgiel on village architecture and problems of hygiene among the villagers.¹³

Almost all these scholars visiting Afghanistan were from universities and museums in Cracow. In 1976, however, a Polish ethnological expedition from Poznan University, led by Professor Zbigniew Jasiewicz, also visited the country. The expedition's main interest was in the rural communities of Hazarajat and northern Afghanistan. Their actual field studies took three months and covered four villages, and they found a group of Haydariyan quite unknown to Western anthropologists. Among the positive results of the expedition was a book by Marek Gawęcki on the Afghan village under culture change, published in 1983 and the first anthropological monograph on Afghanistan written by a Pole.¹⁴ Other problems of Afghan rural communities in the second half of the 1970s were discussed in articles written by other members of the Poznan team, dealing with traditional craftsmen, village house-builders, folk medicine, magic, and so on.¹⁵ Here, we should also mention the book published by Zbigniew Jasiewicz on Soviet Uzbekistan and its traditional, rural features of culture,¹⁶ and field research on the traditional farming of Pakistani Baluchistan carried out by Krzysztof Wolski in the 1970s.

Kurdish villages in northern Iraq were studied by Leszek Dzięgiel in 1977, 1978 and 1980 as a member of a team of agro-economic experts from the Institute of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture and Forestry of the Cracow University of Agriculture. The team worked under the direction of Lucjan Wollen in the three Iraqi provinces of Dohuk, Arbil and Sulaimania on contract to the Iraqi Ministry of Agricultural Irrigation. The venture was, therefore, more of a utilitarian than an academic character, though while performing his duties as a member of the team Dzięgiel collected data on the economy, everyday life and modernization of Kurdish villages resulting from oil prosperity and the government's policy of opening up Kurdistan. In 1981 he published a book on this modernization, the first scholarly report on the sociocultural consequences of the oil boom in modern Kurdistan.¹⁷ However, the difficulties of the situation in which the team had to work, as well as the fact that Dzięgiel was the only anthropologist in it, made it impossible for him to broaden the scope of his research, and some cultural problems had to be left practically untouched.

Another Polish anthropologist, Marek Tracz, did research in Egypt during his stay at the University of Cairo in 1975. He gave much consideration to the cultural and economic evolution of the Egyptian peasantry during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

under the impact of a long-term though rather ill-calculated government policy of modernization, studying especially simple technology and its transformations. The results of Tracz's studies in Egypt, together with observations made by Dziegiel in Libya during a trip around major Libyan irrigation projects in Tripolitania, the Fezzan oases and Cyrenaica in 1981, were published by the two authors in a separate study.¹⁸

In this same period (the mid 1970s) Adam Rybiński of the Warsaw University Institute for the Study of Developing Countries stayed in Algeria, where he was involved in research on Saharan nomads, Tuaregs and Arab Bedouins, especially their acculturation and the problems of their children's education.¹⁹ In a more comprehensive study, he concentrated on the social structure of one branch of the Tuaregs. Among Polish scholars interested in the problems of the Sahara and the Sahel should be mentioned Florian Plit, also from Warsaw University. In 1981 he published a book, based on his dissertation, on the ecology of pastoral animal husbandry in the Sahel, in which, though a geographer, he tried to insert some anthropological considerations.²⁰ Plit travelled to Algeria, but his study is a comprehensive and up-to-date compilation or textbook rather than the results of his field research.

Mention should also be made of the field research done in northern Egypt by Professor Zajączkowski, of the Centre for Non-European Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Zajączkowski took part in the West German expedition to Egypt in 1984, which was interested in some newly settled rural areas in that country. The same Polish scholar spent some time in Uganda in the 1960s, but his studies from that period concern more general problems, of African mentality, philosophy and culture.

The field studies on peasant communities of Black Africa which had been initiated by Professor Waligórski were also being continued in the early 1980s. One quite interesting piece of research has been carried out by Ryszard Vorbrich, a young anthropologist of Poznan University, among the Daba tribe of northern Cameroon. His attention was focused on the traditional economy of the inhabitants of a rather remote mountain region and the ecological aspects of this type of human activity. This economy developed under the impact of the Muslim Fulani invasions of the nineteenth century, which one hundred years later has proved rather disastrous to the natural environment and the whole local traditional culture. The cultural and ecological phenomena described and analysed by Vorbrich in Cameroon could be relevant also to several other regions in contemporary tropical West and Central Africa. Another African field study has been carried out by Henryk Zimon mentioned above, who between 1984 and 1985 studied the animistic funeral and agricultural rites of the Konkombo tribe of northeastern Ghana. Zimon is Professor of the History and Ethnology of Religion at the Catholic University of Lublin.

During the post-war period, the Americas were also a subject of interest for the Poznan Ethnological Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which formed a research unit quite separate from the local university, directed by Professor Maria Frankowska. In the 1970s the Andean countries, especially Peru, were the scene of

anthropological activity by some Polish scholars and undergraduate students, the culture of Indian mountain peasants being one of the most important topics of their studies. Unfortunately, up till now only a small part of this data has been published.

Indeed, a considerable amount of the data collected on all these field trips has yet to be published or even analysed by the anthropologists concerned. Waligórski's book on the Luo tribe, originally printed in a small edition, has been out of print for many years. Two books and a number of papers were the sole result of the long field trip to Mongolia. Some of the data collected in northern Iraq and Afghanistan has appeared, but we are still awaiting the publication of most of the material on Baluchistan, Egypt, Algeria and the Cameroons. Some field data has been analysed in theses, but unfortunately, these are still locked up in universities or the archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and as a result they have lost their immediate interest. Another problem is the dissemination of Polish anthropological research abroad. Almost all the published results are in Polish, though they are generally provided with an English summary of one or two pages, sometimes with a brief summary in French or Russian. However, Waligórski's book, an exemplary field study, was printed without any foreign-language summary at all.

It should also be mentioned that Polish ethnographers interested and involved in non-European studies form quite a small community of a dozen or so scholars dispersed among several academic centres and museums. An even smaller group are those concerned with the peasantry of the developing countries, and they are altogether too few to establish a nationwide forum for scientific discussion. Also, up to now we have had only very poor and unsatisfying contacts with our colleagues among foreign ethnographers. As Poland's participation in international aid programmes is rather modest, there is practically no demand in the country for sociocultural studies on rural problems in the developing countries. There are few Polish contracts with developing countries concerning our scientific and technical consulting services in agriculture, and even rarer are contracts requiring the participation of an anthropologist or sociologist in studying the local sociocultural milieu. In 1974, the team of the Institute of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture and Forestry working on the El Useta project in Libya used the services of a sociologist, Henryk Konarski, though only on a small scale. A greater interest in the human factor was discernible during the rather preliminary field studies conducted by the agro-economic team in northern Iraq mentioned above, where the anthropologist was more or less allowed to do his job. But generally, our academic centres and museums have almost no means of sending their scholars abroad regularly to make field studies. For a Polish scholar to get a grant enabling him to visit a non-European country and do field research is today most frequently the result of chance rather than planning. No wonder that Polish studies on Third World peasants are commonly marked by contingency and academicism. There is neither the skill nor the will to discuss the results of an anthropological field study with scholars representing the other branches of social

science nor natural science nor technology. As a consequence, many of these studies are too descriptive and inconclusive, since the researcher's knowledge of Third World realities has been based only on his personal experience in the developing country which was the object of his fieldwork. His interesting and even valuable field experience remains for him merely a body of information isolated from the broader context. He cannot obtain any greater socio-cultural perspectives, since the most up-to-date foreign publications on any particular topic are generally unavailable, simply because of the lack of foreign currency. And for the same reason, it is not possible for anthropologists to visit other developing countries of the same region of the world to get a broader anthropological background.

Some scholars are still influenced by an old, romantic vision of a traditional Golden Age, a tribal way of life destroyed ruthlessly by alien modernization and culture change. The analysis of contemporary cultures, the aspirations and motivations of the local population, and the elaboration of alternative proposals for socio-cultural development are all problems which are rather remote for some ethnographers and anthropologists in Poland. Such things belong to the world of the practical, and are rather remote in their turn from university lecture rooms and libraries. In fact, nobody expected our anthropologists to do such things or to solve such problems, since according to at least one popular opinion, an ethnographer should be involved and interested only in, let us say, folk dance, exotic objects of art, or museum artefacts.

Today, we have in Poland the scientific potential to carry out studies on the peasantry of the developing countries, and we also have some field experience. On the other hand, Polish scholars are quite conscious of their contemporary and rather difficult situation. In the hope that, in the future, our country will be able to establish closer cooperation with developing countries and become more interested in their rural problems, our ethnographic and anthropological community will try to continue its work and even to stimulate interest in the Third World among students and university staff, despite these handicaps. It is especially important to foster lines of research concerning contemporary rural populations and the problems of mass culture emerging from rapid urbanisation in the Third World. These decisive forces and phenomena should not be omitted or neglected if we want to be conversant with the current problems of these countries. For the sake of stimulating new ideas, as well as improving our theoretical approach and methods, we must be given opportunities to meet and discuss our problems. The discussions should by no means be limited exclusively to anthropologists, but ought to involve scholars from other disciplines. More than anything else, however, we need greater access to the developing countries to study their actual situations and improve our tools of research, greater access to foreign scientific literature, and contact with our colleagues at the seminars, meetings and conferences they organise.

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