

*Postsocialist Europe. Anthropological Perspectives from Home.* Edited by László Kürti and Peter Skalník. New York, Oxford: Berghahn 2009, 336 pages.

This volume is a collection of works from various East European anthropologists. Most scholars participating in this project are from Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, but there are also contributions by Lithuanian, Bulgarian, Slovenian and Czech anthropologists.

The book starts with a very impressive introduction arguing that East European scholarship is often ignored by Western scholars. The authors argue correctly that the nature of East European research is different from the Western 'average'. East Europeans usually have their field site in their home country, conducting in this way "anthropology at home".

"Spending many years, sometimes a whole lifetime, in trying to understand particular processes and culture complexes is often dismissed by foreign scholars as leading to unnecessarily detailed knowledge with which the rest of the world cannot do much. Moreover, intimate knowledge of local phenomena is often dismissed as naïve navel gazing, with meticulously collected data seen as marginal to more high-theorizing and existential philosophizing." (p. 4) With these two sentences László Kürti and Peter Skalník make clear the position of East European scholarship within international anthropology dominated by Anglo-American scientists. The introduction gives the reader much thought about what is the perception and function of 'national' and 'international' anthropology. The claim of the authors that it is a "double burden" to try to be engaged in both because "different audiences require different sorts of production and interpretation" (p. 4) hits the nail on the head. This situation is well known to all of us who publish both at national level and international journals.

More important and interesting is the discussion about the difference in the anthropological research. While foreign scholars visit their fieldwork region for a limited period of time, East European scholars often literally live in it. Therefore their field material is more detailed. Moreover, East European home anthropology has a better chance to observe and document various political, social, economic and cultural processes. Despite this, the works of East Europeans are often dismissed by Western scholars who publish in English as "too particular" (p. 10). The introductory chapter demonstrates very well the controversy in the world of anthropology. The question whether "new styles of anthropology" (which have actually existed for a long time) should be integrated into and recognised by international anthropology is not only a question for East Europeans. Even Germans might lament that their home anthropology is not fully recognised on the international level.

What follows is 11 case studies from East European scholars (with one exception). Topics vary from underground punk culture and homelessness in Hungary to the emotions of military officers caused by the adoption of NATO aeroplanes into the army. Michael Buchowski presents a study of property relations, class and labour in rural Poland. The studies on transitions in property relations are a rather traditional approach in studies on East Europe. However, this focus seems to be fading in the last 5 or 6 years. That there are scholars who keep documenting the changes and new developments is very positive. Hana Červinková discusses rather an exotic topic in anthropology – postsocialist military. She interviewed several Czech air force officers and found that they have strong affection for Soviet Mig aeroplanes, which were supposed to be replaced by NATO military planes from the West. In a very interesting discussion she demonstrates how feelings,

social security, turbulent times and military ethos are tied together. Migs symbolised for many officers the 'good old times' when being a military officer was a position of respect. Rajko Muršič discusses changes in Slovenian punk culture over the period of transition. The author shows how place and time are linked to the position of the subculture in the society. The analysis follows how punks are moved, due changes in property relations, from the city centre to the outskirts. This does not only mean that the meeting places change when earlier abandoned property is privatised. The symbolic presence of punks and their public perception changes through this movement. Terézia Nagy and Grażyna Kubica discuss new groups in society that were publicly invisible during the Socialist era. Terézia Nagy focuses in her article on homelessness people in Hungary and Grażyna Kubica analyses the public perception of gays and lesbians in Poland. These relatively new social groups in the postsocialist countries have been studied outside of East Europe, and from the point of view of comparison it is positive to see the continuation of this research in East Europe.

One must admit that all the case studies presented are fascinating, covering as they do often little or unresearched topics. However, the 'Western style' of the authors is rather disappointing. After very impressive introductions a reader might wait for a presentation of East European national anthropological schools, theories and approaches. Citing local studies in local languages (in addition to citations to English language works) is too little to give an overview of "postsocialist anthropology". The reader can barely discover something

what we could call distinctive East European approach. Nevertheless, the case studies are interesting and the way the ethnography is presented gives a good picture of the studied groups and questions on which the author focused.

This collection should be interesting for people engaged in East Europe studies, although not to all. The wide variety of topics makes this book interesting for specialists of gender studies, identities, economic anthropology and cultural studies. Hopefully volumes like this will initiate more discussion about the balance between and particularities in national and international research and discussions.

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