

Comparative Social Structure or Local Folk Culture? Towards a Unified Anthropological Tradition in Eurasia

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Tradition is not a much theorised term in the discipline in which I received my training in Britain, social anthropology. This may seem a surprising shortcoming, given the popular view that anthropologists are specialists in the customs/cultures/traditions of exotic peoples. In the first half of this paper I shall briefly outline how this neglect has come about, in a branch of anthropology which since the late nineteenth century developed its own distinctive academic tradition, based on wide-ranging comparisons and on fieldwork, which carries with it a 'presentist' orientation. In the second part I turn to another vision of the anthropological enterprise, one that stakes its *raison d'être* in a specific understanding of tradition. Again the concept may not receive theoretical elaboration, but in this case it has been the key tacit premise of a discipline which, even when fieldwork is undertaken, is oriented fundamentally towards the past. My conclusion is that the different styles of anthropology are equally valid and that they should complement each other. I look forward to the day when trench warfare between various 'national traditions' will give way to creative cross-fertilisation, not only within countries but at the level of individual anthropology departments.

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Part One

British social anthropology has its origins in the late Victorian period.¹ The intellectual climate was permeated by imperialism and implicit racism: the

¹ For fuller accounts of the British tradition see Kuper 1997; Kuklick 1991; Stocking 1996. The discussion in this section is drawn from Hann 2005.

inferiority of 'savages' in sub-Saharan Africa, Australia and the Pacific was taken for granted. In the post-Darwin decades evolutionism was also pervasive, but in early anthropological work in Britain this, too, remained largely implicit. The 'social Darwinism' of Herbert Spencer was not taken up. James Frazer is often taken as the archetypal anthropologist of this period. He argued that human modes of thought had evolved to become increasingly rational: magic, religion and science were his labels for three stages in human progress. His puritanical upbringing in Scotland had left him with a distaste for religion, but in some remarkable lectures he pointed out that many apparently bizarre 'superstitions' had, in the course of human history, played a beneficial role (Frazer 1909). For example, taboos might serve to protect property rights and thereby promote economic development as in the classical liberal model. The irrational could have highly functional, rational effects. But Frazer never attempted to formulate a general theory for the transmission of such beliefs and practices, Darwinian or other. He practised his science of anthropology in his rooms and library at Trinity College in Cambridge. His sources included travel literature and missionary reports as well as the data sent to him by fieldworkers. He habitually compared customs without attention to their social context, and classified everything that seemed odd by his own standards of enlightenment as a 'survival'.

The Frazerian style did not persist long into the twentieth century. A diffusionist school flourished briefly, but had even less long term impact. Instead, under the influence of Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown attempted to define anthropology as comparative sociology, devoted to the investigation of 'social structure'. The empirical implementation of the comparativist programme scarcely fulfilled the expectations of Radcliffe-Brown. Instead of attaining general laws on the basis of rigorous cross-cultural comparisons, the dominant feature of twentieth century social anthropology was the meticulous ethnographic case-study. Beginning with the Torres Straits expedition of 1898 and culminating in the work of Bronislaw Malinowski in the Trobriand Islands during the First World War, fieldwork itself became the hallmark of the modern discipline. The odd practices were now studied in their own social context, not lifted out to provide support for evolutionist speculations. Malinowski rejected the concept of 'survivals'. In his version of 'functionalism', every detail of the culture played some positive role in the working of the whole. There was a great improvement in the quality of ethnographic description, but the new approach ignored all the difficult issues concerning evolution and historical changes. For Malinowski, any attempt to discuss the past of an illiterate people such as the Trobrianders could only be conjecture. The important task was to study how

the society functioned in the present. In his numerous books about the Trobrianders, Malinowski found them to be as calculating and rational as any Europeans.²

Malinowski did not explicitly reject evolutionism and there is an obvious sense in which his functionalism implied a strong evolutionist argument. However, this issue was not debated. Under the leadership of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, social anthropology began to expand institutionally in the inter-war decades. The range of societies studied also increased, and Malinowski encouraged his students to pay attention to the historical background whenever solid sources were available. He was even contrite concerning his own failure to document the precise circumstances of his own fieldwork, which took place long after the Trobrianders' first contact with Europeans (see Young 2004). These developments, however, had little impact at first on the way in which anthropological knowledge was produced. A typical ethnographic study would still present 'the X' as standing outside of history, with perhaps a chapter at the end exploring the specific consequences of recent colonial administration and new economic activities. In extreme versions, societies were posited as equilibrium systems, analogous to the model of equilibrium applied by economists to markets. It was the task of the model to explain the adjustments that would lead a society back to a position of equilibrium after any disruption.³ These 'structural-functional' models neglected both questions of long term societal evolution and the precise mechanisms by which knowledge and practices were transmitted.

The British school was extremely productive in the late colonial period. The limitations of its approaches seem obvious enough nowadays, particularly when the second point of equilibrium was understood to be essentially identical to the first. Max Gluckman, the driving force behind what became known as the Manchester School, was among the first to offer alternatives. His own research in Southern Africa led him to argue that individuals had 'cross-cutting ties', which invalidated the use of simple models. He also recognised that peoples such as the Zulu had a well documented history. In Gluckman's view, however, no change in the sense of radical 'system change' was possible in pre-industrial societies. Such change, which we might call revolution, was possible, he thought, only in the context of more centralised states which exercised effective control throughout their territories. Some of Gluckman's best known work focused on 'rituals of rebellion'. An annual ritual could allow people to

² See for example the first of the monographs, which focuses on the ceremonial exchange system known as *kula* (Malinowski 1922).

³ For classic criticism see Leach 1954.

show their disdain for their rulers without ever posing a genuine threat to the status quo. In fact such rituals served to reinforce the existing hierarchy, they were part of a basically unchanging cultural whole.⁴

In recent decades, following the demise of the European colonial Empires, all varieties of structural-functionalism have been overturned. Fieldwork remains the basis of most anthropological dissertations, but there is much closer cooperation with historians and many anthropologists themselves do complementary archival work. There is a general recognition that societies must be seen in more 'processual' terms, so that even during the limited period of a year or two in the field the anthropologist will pay attention to elements of dynamism, e.g. to the strategies that individuals follow to achieve their goals. In short, there is more focus on the agency of individuals and less on the constraints of (social) structure. Perhaps the outstanding figure in these shifts was the Norwegian anthropologist, Fredrik Barth (Barth 1959; Barth 1984).

It is interesting to consider Gluckman's distinction between rebellion and revolution in the light of later anthropological work in societies in which some observers have diagnosed revolutionary change. Take, for example, the Bolshevik Revolution. Fieldwork in the Soviet Union was by no means easy for western anthropologists, but Caroline Humphrey was able to carry out pioneering work on a collective farm in Buryatia in the 1960s (Humphrey 1983). One of her findings was that the presocialist, primarily Buddhist traditions of this region continued to exert a marked influence. Similar points have been made by many researchers in China, for example by those who noted that, following Communist Party decree, peasants might indeed do away with 'superstitious' shrines to their ancestors; however, the same spot in the house might now be occupied by an image of Chairman Mao, venerated in much the same way as the ancestors had been in the past (Chan, Madsen and Unger 1984). In Africa David Lan (Lan 1985) has shown how Marxist-Leninist guerrilla fighters in Zimbabwe were adopted by local tribes and blessed by the traditional religious authority, the spirit mediums. This support helped the guerrilla forces in their struggle against one of Africa's last colonial governments; in other words, the 'revolution' was carried through on the basis of some very *traditional* cultural supports.

Alternatively, we might take examples from European societies. Both during the socialist period and in its aftermath we can see how very strongly the countries of this region have been affected by traditions that are substantially older than socialism: it cannot be an accident that Prague and Warsaw produce

⁴ See Gluckman 1965 for the fullest presentation of his general perspective.

figures such as Havel and Michnik, while the Balkans produce leaders like Ceaușescu and Milošević. Such examples seem to suggest that there is no escape from tradition. This is indeed a common view in the vast literature on the postcommunist transformations, where it is sometimes disguised in the jargon of 'path dependency'. You may change constitutions and political institutions almost overnight, you can legislate for a market economy, but it takes far longer to alter the cultural underpinnings. In an odd way, culture and tradition have come to be imagined as a substratum, such that the 'fatalist Russian soul' or 'Balkan informal economy' are taken as the ultimate barriers to the development and modernization of those societies.

Few anthropologists would endorse such approaches. In reality, matters are always complex, as the German case makes clear. There were undoubtedly significant differences between the *neue* and the *alte Bundesländer* in the 1990s. Some of these, including features such as a high level of female participation in the labour force, date back to the period before 1945. Many other differences result from divergent policies pursued in the years 1945–1990. Some are taking shape only now, in the course of the recent convulsions. We need to distinguish these periods, and perhaps it is unhelpful to speak of a singular enduring tradition. Elsewhere we find comparable complex patterns of continuity and change. The postcolonial government in Zimbabwe moved promptly to consolidate its own power and to eliminate spirit mediums, seen as agents of superstition; they may have succeeded at one level but, as recent developments in that country have shown, not all Zimbabwean citizens were able to discard their traditions and replace them with the modernist *Weltanschauung* espoused by the European educated leaders of the anti-colonial resistance; and some of those leaders appear in the meantime to have forgotten the ideals that they held when they came to power.

Anthropologists have also shown the need for caution in diagnosing a 'revival of tradition' when an authoritarian regime disintegrates. In a more relaxed climate, traditions that had previously been suppressed can once again actively be practised. For example, many observers have noted the resurgence of ritual activities in rural China. A more careful look, however, may indicate that an apparently similar practice bears little or no relation to the custom that communists banned a half century before. If local people themselves do not attribute any of the old meanings to the ceremonies, if the latter serve the interests of quite new elite groups, then it seems difficult to speak of the persistence of tradition in any meaningful sense (Siu 1989).

Then there is the familiar point that traditions can often be manipulated, even invented, by powerholders and by intellectuals in general (Hobs-

bawm and Ranger 1983). This is especially well documented in the history of nationalist ideologies, to which anthropologists have made some significant contributions.⁵ But this seems to be such a different use of the word tradition that we need to keep it separate from the anthropologist's traditional study of tradition, that is to say of beliefs and practices that are not the conscious creation of social and political 'engineers'. Of course the distinction may be fuzzy: some 'traditional traditions' were no doubt inventions at some point in the past; but past societies did not have the resources and technologies to impose them as traditions can be inculcated nowadays. We should perhaps distinguish further between two types of traditional tradition. The first is a body of knowledge that is central to the group's identity, though it is likely to be more available to some (typically the ritual specialists) than to others. The second concerns traditions (here we are more likely to use the plural form) that are not the object of any special attention or reflection by the people themselves. Such patterns in beliefs and practices, as documented by ethnographers, have commonly been lumped together with marked, explicitly celebrated knowledge under the umbrella term 'culture'. Both forms of 'traditional tradition' are presumably to be found in all societies, though the distribution of modern 'invented traditions' may be more limited.

How are the different sorts of tradition transmitted? Even after the demise of structuralism-functionalism, social anthropologists have tended to neglect the inter-generational transmission of knowledge. Following Durkheim, many paid close attention to collective rituals, which somehow generated the 'effervescence' that was crucial to solidarity; but the exact mechanisms of transmission and connections to identity maintenance over time were seldom a major focus. Jack Goody has explored the impact of literacy on societies that had previously been restricted to oral transmission, though whether this change has quite such far-reaching consequences has been challenged by other writers.⁶ Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977) suggested fruitful ways of approaching the vast realm of unmarked beliefs and practices in terms of 'habitus', but even he did little to examine transmission and modification. None of these discussions have led to any general reappraisal of the concept of tradition. For recent attempts to address issues of transmission and learning, one is obliged to look

⁵ For example Verdery 1991 shows how 'national tradition' was manipulated in Ceausescu's Romania.

⁶ Goody 1986; Goody 1987; for criticisms see Street 1997. Goody is the outstanding contemporary representative of the classical comparativist agenda in social anthropology. Much of his work (e.g. Goody 1990) is grounded in archaeological analysis of the long-term history of Eurasia, which distinguishes it sharply from the ahistorical scientism of Radcliffe-Brown's programme for the discipline.

outside the mainstream, to marginal areas where social anthropologists have drawn on the work of psychologists and cognitive scientists.⁷ Pascal Boyer is exceptional not only in his continuing efforts to explain cultural representations (notably religious beliefs) in terms of 'cultural inheritance tracks', but in having subjected the concept of tradition to close critical attention (Boyer 1990).

In summary, the Malinowskian rejection of temporality in favour of synchronic studies, 'snapshot' ethnographies, brought both advantages and disadvantages to British anthropology. It made sense at the time to overturn an evolutionist paradigm and to contextualise evidence by insisting on a much higher standard of fieldwork. The more or less contemporaneous aspiration, associated especially with the name of Radcliffe-Brown, to transform the subject into a rigorous generalizing social science has been much less successful. The subject is cosmopolitan in its range but it can easily appear dilettante rather than systematically comparative. A typical course in political anthropology might open with a discussion of Evans-Pritchard's representation of their kinship system and its role in maintaining 'equilibrium', then move in the following week to Highland Burma to see why Edmund Leach found such models unsatisfactory, then jump back to other parts of Africa to see how Gluckman and the Manchester School brought in more dynamic elements, and then in Week 4 back to Asia for an appraisal of Barth's 'transactionalist' theory. Sympathetic commentators might view these works as a cumulative body of literature but not even the fiercest partisans of British social anthropology could claim that this was positivist science. All of these authors produced 'presentist' classics of ethnography. Many later anthropologists have built more time depth into their field studies, but few have made use of the concept of tradition. Its use in the singular seems particularly questionable. We need to distinguish between older traditions (and within this category between those recognised as tradition and other customs not explicitly recognised as such) and the newer inventions; understanding the force of the former will help us to grasp which innovations are likely to succeed and which to fail, because they have no resonance with the 'weight of the past'.⁸

⁷ These borderlands are better populated in North America, where even the new 'evolutionary psychology' has found a few admirers. The traditions of American cultural anthropology are too diffuse to explore here.

⁸ There are a few anthropologists who would like to do more than this and debate the big nineteenth century issues of evolution with their colleagues in biology, psychology and other disciplines. I see this as much more problematic. The great majority of contemporary social anthropologists reject evolutionist models as over-ambitious and dehumanizing. For understanding social change, knowledge transmission and decision taking in human society, biological models of variation and selection of the kind advocated by Richard Dawkins (Dawkins 1976) seem irrelevant.

Part Two

In the preceding section I have argued that academic anthropology in Britain has, from its nineteenth century origins, been dominated by a cosmopolitan, comparativist orientation. Students of British folklore had their own Society and they occupied positions in museums, especially in the Celtic Fringe; but the influence of “national ethnography” and folklore on academic social anthropology has been minimal.⁹ Elsewhere in Eurasia the picture is quite different. The fact that France has maintained a rigorous community of *ethnologie française* suggests that the acquisition of an overseas empire is not the only factor involved; presumably the early destruction of the traditional rural society in the course of industrialization has also to be taken into account in the British case. When one looks further east a quite different pattern is striking: among the smaller nations of Central and Eastern Europe, as in Scandinavia, anthropology was associated not with far-flung colonies but with nation-building at home. I shall follow George Stocking (Stocking 1982) in viewing the two traditions as alternative variants of anthropology. The variant nowadays known frequently as ethnology (increasingly ‘European ethnology’) has a great many local names. Tamás Hofer (Hofer 2005) calls the nation-oriented discipline “national ethnography”, but I emphasize that in my view it is just as much a branch of anthropology as British social anthropology with its comparativist agenda.

The differences are most visible in the German speaking world, where *Völkerkunde* and *Volkskunde* have long had separate structures. Both strands were thoroughly discredited during the Nazi era and in the German Democratic Republic a concerted effort was made to bring the two branches of anthropology together in a unified Marxist-oriented *Ethnographie* that was modelled on Soviet *etnografiya*. Even before its formal dissolution after the unification of Germany 1990 it was clear that this attempt to transcend entrenched mental and institutional boundaries had failed. The older nomenclature was preserved and *Volkskundler* continued to busy themselves with their own society and to have little to do with the *Völkerkundler*, specialists in ‘underdeveloped’ societies overseas. Under socialism the content of both branches was substantially changed: the *Volkskundler* began to explore new fields such as the traditions of industrial, working class communities, and *Völkerkundler* were called upon to

⁹ The major positions are Chairs in Scottish and Irish ethnology at the Universities of Edinburgh and Ulster respectively. For explorations of ‘anthropology at home’ both in Britain and elsewhere see Jackson 1987.

make their analyses relevant to economic development planning.¹⁰ But my point is that it has proved impossible to bring these intellectual communities into effective dialogue and to the best of my knowledge this holds true throughout the German speaking countries. I believe it is also the case in Scandinavia: in several places highly productive departments of social anthropology have come into existence alongside older departments devoted to national ethnography, and the two have followed separate paths of development, usually in separate faculties.

Let me consider the case of Hungary in a little more detail, since it is the one I know best.¹¹ While in many ways typical of Eastern European national ethnography, it also has its distinctive features. The discipline was closely aligned with the national movement from its inception. The word *néprajz* was coined in the nineteenth century following the analogy of its prototype *Volkskunde* (*nép* = people, *rajz* = a drawing). Arguably the practitioners of *néprajz* came under the greatest pressure to serve the cause of the nation only in the inter-war decades of the twentieth century, when the country had lost much of its territory with the collapse of the Habsburg Empire.¹² At the same time, participation in the running of that Empire opened some opportunities for Hungarians to work outside Hungary. While never an imperial power like Britain or France, funding was made available to support expeditions to find the origins of the Magyars beyond the Urals. Others were able to contribute to the emerging field of comparative social anthropology through conducting fieldwork in Africa and elsewhere. The number of such researchers was small and they did not necessarily interact closely with the majority of *néprajzosok*, i.e. those who devoted all their creative energies to the “folk culture” of the Hungarians. But, unlike the German case, the two branches of anthropology were not separately institutionalized; within *néprajz* there was room for scholars whose primary interests were non-national, and this was given the name *egyetemes néprajz* (universal ethnography).

Contrary to what might have been expected from an ostensibly supranational movement, national ethnography flourished under socialist rule. It was given generous institutional support and the number of researchers increased, not only at the universities but also at the newly established research

¹⁰ See numerous contributions to Hann, Sárkány and Skalník 2005.

¹¹ But I emphasize that I have not worked on the history of Hungarian anthropology and most of what I know has been gleaned over the years from Tamás Hofer and Mihály Sárkány. See Hofer 2005, Sárkány 2005.

¹² For a spirited response from a leading contemporary *néprajzos* to charges of political time-serving see Kósa 2001.

institute of the Academy of Sciences in Budapest. In the early years of the socialist era some effort was made to emphasize the history of class conflict and to document the folklore of new classes, notably industrial workers. The principal focus, however, remained the folk traditions of the preindustrial era. As Klára Kuti has shown (Kuti 2005) the dominant temporality of the Hungarian national ethnographer was frozen in the past; the discipline was devoted to the production of an essentialized, ideal Hungarian culture, that was every bit as detached from real historical processes as the 'snapshot' ethnographies of the social anthropologists of the colonial era. The rationale underlying state support for this enterprise could only be that, precisely in an era of rapid change in which the socialist power holders lacked a democratic mandate, the *legitimacy* conferred through this cultivation of the nation's heritage was indispensable.

Within this framework, as in the presocialist era it is important to take note of certain minorities. Some scholars engaged seriously with national history by attempting to apply Marxist methods to changes in the rural sector (Hoffmann 1975). Others combined interests in matters Hungarians with a wide-ranging comparative evolutionism (Bodrogi 1962). A group of researchers led by Bodrogi applied some of the methods of social anthropology in order to address contemporary social change in the North Hungarian village of Varsány (Bodrogi 1978). However, although work of this kind was continuing in another location when I began my own doctoral project in Hungary in 1975, it was obvious that certain topics, e.g. concerning local politics or the victims of collectivization pressures in the 1950s, could not be addressed by the native ethnographers. Given my own interests in the comparative social structure of peasantry and economic transformation, I made more use of the literature produced by sociologists, economists, geographers, etc. than I did of the *néprajz* corpus (Hann 1980).

In retrospect I regret this deficiency, which was due in part to the nature of the village I studied and to the literature available at the time for the region between the rivers Danube and Tisza where it is located. This region was largely depopulated under the Ottoman Turkish occupation. Resettlement began in the eighteenth century but it was not until towards the end of the nineteenth that a new community emerged in Tázlár. The land was divided up into increasingly small parcels and sold to immigrants, most of whom resided on a farmstead (*tanya*) which they built on their land rather than in the nuclear centre. Only in the socialist era did the population of the scattered farmsteads decline significantly, as village infrastructural provision improved. The scattered settlement pattern was partly responsible for a pattern of collectivization

that allowed much more continuity in family-farming than was the case in most parts of Hungary, where an institution similar to the *kolkhoz* was imposed. It was precisely this exceptional flexibility and continuity that led me to chose this location for my fieldwork. But it would have been hard to imagine a community less well suited to illustrating the folk culture of the national ethnographers. This village was very much a product of the rise of capitalist relations in the nineteenth century; its ethnic and socio-economic heterogeneity contradicted every stereotype of a distinctively Hungarian tradition.

And yet the region did not escape the ethnographer's gaze. Two very different examples of their work were freshly available. István Tálasi was the doyen of material culture studies at the ethnography department of the university in Budapest. His volume *Kiskunság* (Tálasi 1977) evokes a pre-Ottoman designation of the territory in its title and dwells extensively on premodern techniques of farming and animal breeding. It conforms rather well to Kuti's above-mentioned analysis, and makes no attempt to deal with the period in which a new community arose in Tázlár. That was my reason for ignoring this work in my own project. The other study available to me was, by contrast, very precisely grounded in time and space. János Bárh's study (Bárh 1975) of settlement patterns around the important diocesan centre of Kalocsa was, however, again of little use to me, given my primary focus on the socialist era.

In recent decades the ethnographic literature has continued to grow and if I were beginning the project in Tázlár afresh I would have no excuses for ignoring the outputs of the "local scholars". Bárh went on to edit a massive study of a Kecel, a settlement with a recent history much closer to that of Tázlár (Bárh 1984). Melinda Égető (Égető 1993) produced a historical account of viticulture in this region, a branch of production that remains of central importance to many Tázlár households to this day (Hann 2006). Unfortunately her account breaks off in the mid-nineteenth century, but Antal Juhász and a number of colleagues have delved for decades into the later migration history of the entire interfluvial region, combining the methods of the historian with interviews and ethnography (1990). Juhász's investigation into the re-settlement of Tázlár (Juhász 1997) is a good example of what can be achieved by working in this way. Certainly more familiarity with such materials would have given me many useful insights into the picture I found in the 1970s; above all, I think I would have developed greater sympathy for the elderly peasants, many of them *tanya* dwellers, who were most dogged in their opposition to socialism, even to the diluted form of collectivization that was foisted upon them in Tázlár.

This is a rather straightforward argument: the foreign fieldworker can benefit from the works of native ethnographers, especially for their documenta-

tion of the historical context. But might there be opportunities for deeper co-operation, and what about the concept of tradition? The discipline that was for so long dedicated to the study of a Hungarian folk culture, forever frozen on the threshold of modernity, did no more to theorize a concept of tradition, than the British social anthropologists discussed above. The terms *hagyomány* (tradition) and *örökség* (heritage) are, like *néprajz*, both of modern coinage. National ethnographers have frequently used these terms. Both have acquired renewed prominence in the postsocialist years, when it has become possible to be more “up front” about the role of ethnographers in identifying national culture heritage, “values” etc. Yet the key terms have functioned as the enduring tacit premise of an empirically-oriented subject which did not aspire to address intellectual challenges; systematic theory-building has never been a forte of the national ethnographers, who have tended to be suspicious of it whenever it is thrust upon them from outside.

This suspicion, directed principally towards Soviet *etnografiya* in the socialist era, has found a new target in recent years. American cultural anthropology is apparently a more serious threat than any posed by Marxism-Leninism. A new department of *kulturális antropológia* was established at Budapest’s leading university in 1990. Whereas *néprajz* has always been located in the humanities faculty, the new unit is affiliated to the social sciences. Similar initiatives have gained ground in several provincial universities. Student interest has been strong but expansion has been restricted by the lack of qualified teachers for the new variant of anthropology as well as continued competition and resistance from the national ethnographers.

Why has it proved difficult for the two types of anthropologist to forge a common cause? The answer has a lot to do with problems of individual personalities and institutional rigidities of the kind one might expect to find everywhere. In the Hungarian case it is also significant to note the rise of critical perspectives on the Hungarian past among the ethnographers, a trend pioneered by Tamás Hofer around the end of the socialist era (Hofer 1991). Close attention was paid to the construction of national symbols: for example, Réka Albert has shown how national space, and in particular the romantic image of the *puszta*, was created by intellectuals in the nineteenth century (Albert 2005). Such studies, highlighting the constructed or invented character of “traditions”, should on the face of it make it easy to find common ground with the mainstream of modern socio-cultural anthropology. That this has not been accomplished is probably attributable ultimately to a fear on the part of many *néprajzosok*

that to acknowledge this common ground would be to undermine and jeopardize the continued existence of *néprajz* as a distinct intellectual community.¹³

At the level of scholarly communities we thus observe fragmentation. There has been no intellectual convergence, whether around a concept of tradition or any other key concept. Some students in Budapest take courses in both departments, but this is cumbersome and also expensive (since fees are charged on faculty basis). The *néprajz* department remains substantially larger than its rival, but neither has grown significantly in recent years. To an outsider such as myself, who identifies professionally with the upstart imported variant but who has debts over more than thirty years to members of the other camp, the present situation can only be regretted. It seems that the opportunity that arose with the end of socialism has gone unutilized. Despite the fact that within *néprajz* there had always been a minority of scholars pursuing more general comparativist agendas, it has not been possible to graft socio-cultural anthropology on to the old structures.

To illustrate concretely exactly why I find the divisions regrettable, let me return once more to consider the theme of tradition, this time in the context of Tázlár. As already indicated, no local traditions here can be traced back before the late nineteenth century. Of course villagers participate in the traditions of the nation. The market town of Kiskőrös is some 20 km away. It is the birthplace of the national poet Sándor Petőfi, whose birthday on 15th March has again been a public holiday since the end of socialism. In fact even under socialism schoolchildren spent weeks preparing to celebrate this day, and every classroom was drenched in the national colours. In short, contrary to the ideology there was a good deal of nationalist continuity in the sphere of ritual. Attempts to invent new traditions, notably on Mayday and November 7th, were even less successful in villages than in urban Hungary, and few mourned the abolition of these holidays after 1990. On the other hand 20th August, celebrated as Constitution Day under socialism, is now once again St. Stephen's Day, as it was before 1949; the honour paid to Hungary's first Christian King can also be tied to a well documented "folk culture" celebration, that of "new bread". Unravelling the complicated history of August 20th commemorations and linking this past to the forms and meanings of today's events, in which local

¹³ The stand-off on the part of the *néprajzosok* has multiple dimensions. One very important one was the inability of the majority of *néprajzosok* to operate academically in languages other than Hungarian; competence among older scholars was more likely to be in German or Russian, whereas English was the dominant language of the (mainly young) scholars who wished to promote cultural anthropology. Another significant factor in Hungarian developments was the departure of Peter Niedermüller, the most radical critic of *néprajz* to emerge from within the community itself, to a Chair in *Europäische Ethnologie* at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

politicians typically play prominent roles, seems to me exactly the sort of topic where collaboration between the different branches of anthropology might prove fruitful empirically; with a rigorous deployment of the concept of tradition, such collaboration could also make a valuable contribution to theory.

If one asked Tázlár villagers what event *specific to their community* best represents their sense of “tradition”, I think many would answer “the *Nyílik a Rózsa* (the rose opens) musical evening in the culture house”. This is a rather new event, which had not yet been invented at the time of my main fieldwork in the 1970s. It was largely the creation of János Horváth, a teacher and long-standing member of the Communist Party, from which he resigned shortly before the political transition. Despite this affiliation he remained popular and influential in the community in the 1990s. One factor explaining the high esteem in which he is held is his musical skills. For many years he and a few friends supplemented their incomes by playing as an orchestra at village weddings. When director of the culture house in the 1980s he approached a few older villagers whom he knew to be familiar with the repertoire and initiated a musical evening which allowed a cross-section of the community to step forward and perform their favourite ‘traditional’ songs, accompanied by himself and a few other musicians.

Note the multiple levels at which the term tradition can be applied in this case. Within just a few years the event was spoken of as a ‘tradition’. In fact it was new, though a few of those who took part could recall gathering in private homes decades before, when the traditional *zitera* (zither) was not yet threatened by the new Japanese keyboard instruments. So the event is new, but it draws on older memories and skills, dating back at least to the pre-socialist era; but it seems to me likely that even then the participants had a conscious awareness that they were cultivating a Hungarian tradition.¹⁴

Although villagers identify these songs and musical forms as traditional, probably most are aware that this genre as such is relatively new. In fact it enjoyed its heyday in the first half of the twentieth century. The tunes are known to almost all: some of them learned in school and some regularly performed on radio or television. They are distinguished both from today’s pop

¹⁴ It is in this respect quite different from the Slovak folk festival that has developed in recent years in Kiskőrös. Although this settlement was repopulated by Slovaks in the early eighteenth century, knowledge of Slovak songs and dances was effectively eliminated after waves of Magyarization which culminated in the 1940s. The success of the festival in recent years is the result of a “top down” initiative by local intellectuals, and it is supported by new ties to a ‘twin’ community in Slovakia. Of course here too the performances and their culinary accompaniment have their ancient roots, but local people in Kiskőrös had to deal with these traditions as if they were entirely foreign.

music (a field in which Hungarians have been highly creative since the 1960s) and from authentic *népzene*, the folk music which offers access to the pure roots of Hungarian culture. The latter is of course the domain of the ethnomusicologist. Hungarian composers of the twentieth century, notably Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, integrated folk melodies into many of their compositions; both were deep patriots (actually the same can be said of some of the pop musicians who rose to fame under socialism – a few wove folk themes into their rock and country music, and showed their nationalist political sympathies when it was safe to do so after 1990). In the 1970s a movement began among youth in the capital to rediscover the music and dances of their predecessors. The *Táncház* (Dancehouse) phenomenon was complex, and the cultural anthropologist László Kürti has documented some of its contemporary ramifications in the context of romanticized images of Transylvania (Kürti 2001). But this pursuit of authenticity by urban audiences in the capital had little or no resonance in villages such as Tázlár, where the “artificial” (*mű*) songs of recent generations had for greater appeal; but at least some of those producing music in the village culture house were aware that another variant of tradition, a variant with stronger claims on this term, could be enjoyed elsewhere.

In short, even in a community that did not assume its modern shape until the late nineteenth century there is plenty of scope to investigate competing subjective perceptions of what constitutes tradition, the politics surrounding its construction, and the extent to which “invention” can dispense with deep-rooted elements of continuity. This is a field in which the comparative literature that has been opened up by anthropologists and historians can fructify the more local expertise of the *néprajzos* – and vice versa.

Conclusion

I hope that my answer to the question in my title has by now become clear. I have argued that the long-standing division between socio-cultural anthropology and “national ethnography”, the former devoted to the comparative analysis of social structure and the latter to the study of particular folk cultures, must be overcome. We need to forge a new, unified tradition for anthropology throughout Eurasia, in which both of these strands are represented.¹⁵ Our subject is small enough already and should not be further fragmented; to establish

¹⁵ Although my examples in this paper have been restricted to Europe, similar tensions between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ orientations can be found in countries as large and internally diverse as China and India. For my justification for taking Eurasia as a framework at the present movement in the history of anthropology and in our unfolding *Weltgeschichte* see Hann 2006.

new departments of socio-cultural anthropology in faculties of social sciences as rivals to long-established departments of ethnography in faculties of humanities is therefore a strategy best avoided. In an ideal academic world the unified department of anthropology for which I am arguing would undermine that faculty boundary: anthropology needs to maintain close relations with history and other humanities disciplines *as well as* with adjacent fields of social science.

This utopia could be organized in a variety of ways, and the details would of course depend on traditions specific to the country and to the institution. I could imagine several sub-units corresponding to established intellectual communities, such as folklore, material culture, urban anthropology, ethnomusicology, medical anthropology, etc, some of which, if not all, would cross-cut the *Volkskunde/Völkerkunde* barrier. It would be important to ensure that staff with diverse interests came together at departmental seminars, and that students were exposed to a full range of sub-disciplines in their early training; by Masters' level it should be possible to specialize, but even then methodological pluralism drawing on both national ethnography and comparative anthropology should be encouraged.

Years of studying both socialism and postsocialist transformations (of which the awkwardness experienced in the consolidation of a unified anthropological tradition can be viewed as a special case) have made me suspicious of utopian planning. I am well aware that many scholars trained in national ethnography are suspicious of the Anglophone anthropology that has appeared on the scenes in recent years; and with good reason. Equally, if no adherents of the newer forms of anthropology are ever considered for appointments, it is easy to understand that they will lose patience with the ethnographers, and that even those intellectually more open to cooperation will reach the conclusion that separate institutionalization is the only way forward. But these, I argue, are phenomena to be expected during a period of transition. In the long term these two intellectual communities should not remain separate: they need coach other. The comparativist who lacks a detailed grounding in the traditions of his/her own society is as impoverished as the ethnographer whose expertise is limited exclusively to his/her own region or nation. The relationship should develop beyond mere co-existence under a common departmental roof. Cross-fertilization could be mutually beneficial – not least in the theorizing of what has the potential to become the foundational concept of a unified anthropological tradition, namely tradition itself.

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Lyginamoji socialinė struktūra ar vietinė liaudies kultūra? Suvienodintos (unifikuotos) antropologinės tradicijos Eurazijoje link

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Santrauka

Straipsnio autorius, remdamasis savo asmenine patirtimi, siekia palyginti dvi intelektines paradigmas. Pirmiausia tai socialinė antropologija, kurią jis studijavo Britanijoje. Iš esmės tai lyginamasis, apibendrinamasis socialinis mokslas. Antra – tai „tautinė etnografija“, kuri vyrauja Rytų Europoje, daugiausia partikuliarinė ir nukreipta į ikimodernią tautos liaudies kultūrą. Kadangi autorius nuo XX a. aštuntojo dešimtmečio atliko lauko tyrimus Vengrijoje, pavyzdžiai antroje straipsnio dalyje yra iš Vengrijos *néprajz* (etnografija. – Vert. pastaba) atvejo. Pagrindinis argumentas yra tas, kad dvi paradigmos yra vienodai svarios antropologijos formos; pageidaujama, kad, užuot konkuravusios

viena su kita, pretenduodamos būti visiškai atskiros disciplinos, dvi šakos susijungtų bendruose akademiniuose departamentuose.

Argumentuota kelis kartus sugrįžtant svarstyti tradicijos sampratos. Atrodo, kad ji nėra „teorizuota“ nė vienoje šakoje. Tradicijos nepaisymas mažiau stebina socialinės antropologijos atveju. Dėl Malinowskio padarytos įtakos joje vyravo lauko tyrimų metodai. Pagrindinis interesas buvo šiuolaikinių socialinių santykių dokumentavimas. Nors diachroniniai tyrinėjimai ilgainiui tapo gana įprasti, vis dėlto mažai domėtasi istorija ir mažai dėmesio kreipta į kultūrinio žinojimo perdavimą. Susidomėta tradicijos tema palyginti neseniai ir daugiausia akcentuojamos „išrastos tradicijos“. Paties autoriaus atlikti lauko tyrimai Vengrijoje atitiko šią paradigmą: pirmiausia jie buvo skirti nagrinėti kasdienio gyvenimo realybės socializmo laikotarpiu. Vengrų etnografai, priešingai, tyrinėdami tą patį regioną, daugiausia orientavosi į kapitalizmo ar socializmo nesuardyto kaimo gyvenimo aprašymus. Įdomu, kad jie, atrodo, taip pat nedaug padarė plėtodami teorinį tradicijos supratimą, nors aišku, kad gilus tradicijos supratimas yra numanomas jų empirinėje praktikoje.

Žvelgdamas atgal, autorius mano, kad nors jų tikslai buvo gana skirtingi, jo projektui būtų buvę naudinga, jei jis būtų kreipęs daugiau dėmesio į Vengrijos etnografijos rezultatus. Pastaraisiais metais dvi šakos vis labiau suartėjo. Tuo metu, kai bent kai kurie socialiniai antropologai gilino savo ryšį su istorija, kai kurie „tautiniai etnografai“ tyrinėjo šiuolaikines socialines permainas (ne tik kaimo vietovėje) ir taip pat susidomėjo tradicijos išradimu. Autorius, pateikdamas pavyzdžius iš jo atlikto kaimo tyrimo, teigia, kad tradicijos samprata galėtų tapti pagrindu naudingai bendradarbiauti dviejų paradigmų mokslininkams, kurie ir dirbdami kartu neturėtų prarasti savo tapatumo esmės. Posocialistinė era atvėrė naujas galimybes, tačiau taip pat grasina naujais pavojais. Visi antropologai, užuot toliau fragmentavę discipliną, turi bendrą interesą pažinti, ką jie turi bendra, ir tvirtinti bendrą tradiciją, ir visai nesvarbu, ar jie daugiausia domisi gimtuoju kraštu, ar kitais.