

An American Perspective on a Polish View of American Anthropologists in Eastern Europe: Response to Leszek Dziegiel.

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In Volume 6, Number 1-2 of the Newsletter, we reprinted a (rather harsh) review by Polish ethnologist Leszek Dziegiel of Kideckel and Halpern's bibliographic essay on Eastern Europe in the Annual Review of Anthropology. Here is the authors' response to that critique:

Introduction: On Cross-Cultural Communication

When Bill Lockwood first informed us that there would be a critique of our 1983 *Annual Review of Anthropology* article on the "Anthropology of Eastern Europe" we were pleased at the thought of continuing scholarly exchange about the nature of East European society and culture, the substantive problems facing the region, and the uses of anthropology in their analysis and understanding. However, as we read the piece by Leszek Dziegiel we were chagrined to find ourselves confronted by a vehement polemic based on misinterpretation of many points we made, purposeful reinterpretation of others followed by critique of the reinterpreted material, ad hominem argument, argument by belittlement, critique of research without actual first-hand knowledge of that research, and a general tone that impedes rather than fosters discussion. In considering this polemic, it would be all too easy to respond in kind. However, since there are a few interesting points that Dziegiel raises, if only implicitly and usually in tandem with a host of insults, we prefer to address these. In discussing these issues we will also attempt to consider the intensity of Dziegiel's remarks and the vehemence with which he attacked our article since we also feel this significant for understanding East European cultural realities.

Dziegiel's article, after all, provides a useful case study of the problems involved in cross-cultural communication. We had not previously thought of the *Annual Review* as a publication primarily internal to American anthropology or, in a slightly broader sense, one which is internal to Western anthropology, but Dziegiel's review of our article clearly

demonstrates the reality of national-cultural boundaries within anthropology. It is significant that his article was written originally for a Polish audience and not for an international one. How else to explain his cultural myopia unless one takes a bit more Machiavellian view that his misunderstandings are deliberate (but this view may be overdrawn given the numerous problems with syntax and misspellings in the translation).

Interpreting Topical and Geographical Coverage of Eastern Europe

Whether he realizes it or not. Dziegiel's main (only?) point is one with which we agree. It is simply that American/Anglophone anthropological analysis of Eastern Europe has been marked by an uneven coverage of the region both geographically and topically. He rightfully points out (as did we) that the chief American research effort in East Europe has concentrated mainly in Yugoslavia and subsequently Romania and Hungary. Unfortunately, Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as Albania and Bulgaria, have received short shrift from American anthropologists, a situation that, for Poland at least has been slightly remedied in the few years since publication of our review.

Though Dziegiel and ourselves agree on the fact of this uneven coverage, we see its causes and significance in very different ways. In our article we pointed out both the specific history of American anthropological research in East Europe as well as the realpolitic conditions that kept/keep these nations terra incognita for contemporary American anthropologists. Regarding the latter, one of the most obvious reasons is, of course, that American researchers were simply not welcome in most of Eastern Europe until the 1970's while Yugoslavia was, at that time, relatively open to Western researchers. Statistics on the Fulbright program and IREX exchanges reflect a similar national skewing.

Dziegiel, on the other hand, avoids these realities and sees mainly naivete, ignorance, simplified reasoning or the hedonistic pursuit of touristic pleasures (clearly he's never been to an oxymoronic "Romanian resort") lurking behind every Balkan and Danubian citation. In fact, in nearly every point he makes he condemns us for pointing out what American anthropologists have not done in the region and thus fails to see that our article was simply designed to note trends, not endorse them.

Similarly, Dziegiel focuses on our lack of coverage of the indigenous literature as a major shortcoming. Now, perhaps he may never have seen a copy of the *Annual Review*, so it is not odd that he misunderstands the purpose of our article. It was not intended to be an essay about Eastern Europe and its cultures but something much more modest; a review of the work of American anthropologists on Eastern Europe. This matter is very clearly stated in the article's first sentence, "This essay presents an overview of East Europeanist sociocultural anthropological research concentrating on the work of American anthropologists." In fact, this was also the charge given us by the editors.

We also find it instructive about his purposes and about East European culture that Dziegiel's anger about this uneven coverage mainly concerns Poland. Though he makes some comment about Czechoslovakia and the Baltic states he only cites Polish sources (with one exception) and only refers to Polish conditions. In the author's words, "Poland...a country inhabited by 37 million peoples, is treated quite marginally by the students of Serbia." Clearly he is not similarly concerned about the lack of work on Bulgaria and especially on Albania.

Defining Eastern Europe

Now, to try and get beyond Dziegiel's "killing the messenger for the bearing of bad news," there is a larger issue here, i.e. how one defines Eastern Europe, the specific criteria best used to do so, and whether application of these particular criteria in any way makes "untrue and distorted" an understanding of the region. The bulk of Dziegiel's critique dealt with this problem of regional definitions. The bulk of our response will thus mirror that.

This problem of definition has generally characterized East European studies, not just anthropology. It certainly motivates Dziegiel and was also the chief point in T. Garton Ash's "Does Central Europe Exist?," the *N. Y. Review of Books* article cited in the last *EEAG Newsletter*. Both Garton Ash and Dziegiel would split Poland and the north/Baltic region from the Danubian Basin and the Balkans (though Garton Ash includes Hungary in his Central Europe). Both Garton Ash and Dziegiel see the north as distinct in terms of standards of living, urbanism, possible political independence, and culture in general. Close examination, then, of this point is particularly in order.

Diffusion, Ethnocentrism and Regional Definitions

First, Dziegiel's regional definition shows that he really has no conception about the nature of Western anthropological scholarship, otherwise he would not accuse us of "artificially" eliminating Greece, an area so well researched that it requires a separate article. Hellenic exclusivity is also reflected in the nature of specialized scholarly journals and associations in the West where studies of Greece are not part of Slavic and East European studies.

Aside from his understandable unfamiliarity with Western scholarly traditions, Dziegiel's region is based on a fairly narrow view of cultural causation and change and regional divergence and convergence. Throughout his polemic he basically utilizes diffusionist explanations and arguments from historical ethnology to document Polish/northern exceptionalism and to decry Balkan/Danubian comparisons. For him, only direct cultural contact and geographic contiguity seem to matter as he indicates in the lengthy paragraph on pp. 30-31 of the *EEAG Newsletter* which we will not quote for the sake of brevity. Like other diffusionists, Dziegiel is comfortable with particularistic regional definitions. However, any attempt at generalization or to discern research and regional patterns he criticizes by suggesting it indicates a simplistic sense of cultural homogeneity.

Underlying this Boasian notion of culture, there also appears to be certain internalized psychological-based conditions at work in Dziegiel's view of the world. For one, it is possible to detect a not-so-subtle ethnocentrism, possibly even racism, in Dziegiel's (and Garton Ash's) distinguishing the more cultured, urbane, politically conscious (fair-skinned) northerners from their (swarthy) peasant Balkan/Danubian Turkish-influenced neighbors. In fact, throughout his critique Dziegiel saves most of his invective for any comparison, actual or implied, between north and south and becomes especially animated over points where we sought to do so. Related to this unconscious racial categorization, the last paragraph of his review indicates that the heart of his critique may grow from a struggle with internalized maginality, an ambivalent feeling about one's own culture with respect to Western society:

Under the Polish cloudy skies cultural exorcism attracts at most those who are fond of political sensations....Hence if we want the knowledge of our society, history and traditions reach [sic] the centres of world anthropology at least on the scale of their knowledge of Montenegrin highlanders and Adriatic fisherman, we have to do something ourselves.

Now, we want to give Dziegiel the benefit of the doubt as to his psychological motivations and his honest appreciation of other cultures (something, by the way, he couldn't manage for our article). So, instead of stooping to the level of his critique, let's re-examine the criteria by which we defined Eastern Europe to see how they match up against Polish/northern realities.

Regional Definitions: North and South Compared

To recapitulate his argument, Dziegiel suggests that conditions characteristic of the Balkans and the Danubian states were absent north of the Carpathians or, conversely, conditions characteristic of the Baltic zone were absent in the south of the region. These contrasting conditions include: 1) inter-ethnic conflict (limited in the north though endemic in the Balkans), 2) urbanism (present in the north, limited in the Balkans), and 3) marginal status to Great Empires (not applicable to Poland, but present in the Balkans). Furthermore, Dziegiel also objects to our use of political economic conditions (i.e. state socialist institutions and related local practice) as a regional marker. In reviewing his objections, however, we've a sense that Dziegiel is placing some personal ideological agenda before regional realities. We thus consider each of these in turn.

Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Europe

Regarding ethnicity, to be sure Yugoslavia and Romania were, and are to this moment, hot-beds of ethnic antagonism; Kosovo is in the midst of serious civil disorder and the issue of the Transylvanian Magyars has now been raised to the level of policy in Hungary prompting ever more irrational and discriminatory actions on the part of the Ceausescu government. However to pretend ethnicity is not an issue north of the Carpathians is certainly ideological cant. In fact, Dziegiel's assertion (p. 31) that "the vast Polish territory served as an asylum to many nations and denominational groups which were fleeing from persecutions in neighboring countries" could be repeated with a good degree of veracity for parts of every single state in the region. But to also ignore the serious questions of inter-ethnic relations strikes us as incredibly disingenuous.

Need we remind Dziegiel of the treatment of Ukrainians in Eastern Poland, the continuing anti-German sentiment in Poland's Western Territories, the crude anti-Semitism of Mieczeslaw Moczar and followers in 1968, and similar attempts at casting suspicion on KOR and Solidarity by renewed anti-Semitic rhetoric before martial law made even this a moot exercise. All this, of course, says nothing of the Holocaust of World War II, the ethnic-based depths of Polish anti-Russian sentiment that both pre- and post-date the Soviet revolution, and the ethnic/nationalist conflicts of Poles and Lithuanians, Latvians and Germans, and Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians with Great Russians to this very day.

The City in Eastern Europe

Regarding urbanism, we have no quarrel with Dziegiel's view that we de-emphasized the role and presence of cities in Eastern Europe. Again, however, he ignored two crucial points about our focus. First, Dziegiel conveniently forgets that our basic task was to review the work of American anthropologists, which has mainly concentrated in rural areas or on contemporary problems of urbanization. (We intentionally did not include in our review the important studies of American anthropologists who are archeologists, some of whose studies focus on urban development). Thus, for Western anthropologists working in East European contexts, peasant villages tend to be the equivalent of a band or tribe and seem more congenial to the holistic approach which they have favored. For reciprocal reasons, then, cities and urban populations have not received as much attention, unless they have been former peasants.

More important than this practical consideration in shaping our approach, is the meaning and role of the city in the East European cultural environment. Thus, Dziegiel fails to see that the mere presence of urban centers does not constitute an urbanized society and that our characterization was based not on the presence or absence of cities per se, but on the relation of city to hinterland.

Though "such old cities with mediaeval traditions as Prague, Wroclaw, Gdansk, Cracow and Budapest" (and we might remind Dziegiel, other Balkan and Danubian cities such as Ljubljana, Split, Dubrovnik, Ohrid, Varna, Brasov, Cluj, Ploiesti, and Iasi) were/are prominent in East European society, their populations were frequently greatly differentiated culturally, politically, and economically, from the peasant masses in the countryside. This applies to Poland

and the north as it does to the Balkans. The *szlachta* remnants in 19th century Poland, after all, were mainly an urban-based professional and bourgeois class who differed as much from the Polish peasantry as did the Ottoman-supported princes of Bucharest and Curtea de Arges from their Romanian serfs.

Explaining Intra-regional Variation: Structure vs. Process

Dziegiel's problem with our consideration of East European urbanism no doubt grows from his fairly simplistic notion of what constitutes dependency/marginality. True to form, his rejection of our concern for World System and ecological relations as useful for understanding the region, is based on first putting words in our mouth. Thus, throughout his polemic he continuously rejects what he says is our notion of Eastern Europe as a zone of 'civilizational backwardness.' This phrase, by the way, was never used nor implied in our review.

For Poland, especially, Dziegiel wants it both ways. He rejects the idea that Poland can be understood using concepts of dependency and marginality but maintains that it should properly be considered a Great Power *at least through the end of the 18th century*. Then, in the same paragraph, he rationalizes any kind of nationalities conflicts within Poland as due, of course, to Poland's loss of independence. Poland's partitions, neo-serfdom and the grain trade with Western Europe, and the *Liberum veto*, among other phenomena, are bothersome details that have no place in the diffusionist, particularistic world view of our Polish friend.

Again, Dziegiel's purpose is clear here; it is solely to criticize and propound rather than to discuss points raised in our review article. Where he is certain about the structure of things (e.g. circumstances of national sovereignty and intra-regional standards of living) our article sought, through the concept of marginality, to point to ecological processes of cultural dominance and world system relations of dependency to uncover regional movement and change.

Both ecology and dependency are totalizing concepts that offer explanations on the dynamic rise and fall of nations and how, though whole regions may be integrated into large-scale systems in generally similar ways, there are differences in development over time and in diverse micro-regions. Thus, for example, to speak generally of East European dependency is not to deny economic and developmental diversity and intra-regional inequalities in pre-World War

II Eastern Europe. It is only to attempt to develop a heuristic that links these diversities in the same general set of historical processes.

Further, analyses of dependency relations are especially crucial today. The debt burden of Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Yugoslavia plays a definite generative role in East European social systems. Thus, Polish military rule, Romanian neo-Stalinism, galloping inflation and the increasing rift between Hungarian workers and peasants, and persisting Yugoslav regionalism, though certainly different cultural conditions, can all be partially explained by the effects of world system relations on specific national cultural circumstances.

The Role of Socialist Political Economy

In terms of the categories used to define the region, Dziegiel's complete rejection of socialist political economy as significant also strikes us as placing some personal ideological agenda before regional realities. Thus, he incorrectly assumes that socialism for us "is the most important common feature (p. 23)" by which we define the region. (Were that so, the DDR would have been included). Subsequently, he suggests that we again focus "almost exclusively (on) Yugoslavia" in our discussion of socialism but then goes on to mention three sources on Hungary and one on Czechoslovakia which we cited. Aside from one other brief mention of collectivization, the question of socialist influence is not apparent in his analyses.

We will not reiterate the ways which socialist institutions give rise to analogous structures and conditions across the region. However, we want to stress, in contrast to Dziegiel's penchant for generalization, that our article never implied that socialism is a unitary phenomenon affecting all societies equally. Instead, we reviewed work which asked how socialist policies oriented to national accumulation influence local communities, to what degree and why socialist ideology does or does not penetrate individual and group consciousness, or how, why, and to what extent common political action and identity is exhibited in East European socialist states. These questions are certainly as relevant to understanding the region as are, in other distinct ways, the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the ministries of Cyril and Methodius, and the conversion of St. Stephen.

Ethnocentrism in Action

Now, Dziegiel's disagreement with the categories we used to define the Eastern Europe of American anthropological attention, is certainly a legitimate activity (though his ethnocentrism and insults are not supportable). However, his constant use of argument by belittlement of both our article as well as much of the research which it attempted to evaluate, must not go uncriticized. This is all the more necessary since, as he himself admits (p.32), he is basically unfamiliar with the literature (though nevertheless capable to pronounce it of doubtful objectivity).

Dziegiel's criticism of the collection of *Anthropological Quarterly* articles (vol. 56, nr. 2, 1983) on political rituals and symbolism is particularly telling. Admitting that he hasn't read any of the articles, he then goes on to imply their content is concerned with issues that East Europeans (here read Leszek Dziegiel) find irrelevant and naive. Perhaps this may be so for those in Dziegiel's ken. However, the recent Bellagio conference on "Folklore and the State in Eastern Europe" with its extensive participation of scholars from both the north and south of the region, alone belies this fact.

Given Dziegiel's broadside against American anthropological research in Eastern Europe, it is not surprising that this man who reviled us for failing to include Polish citations in our article, reserves special venom for Charlotte Chase's discussion of food symbolism. the one contribution to the *Anthropological Quarterly* edition focused on Poland. Still, it strikes us as strange that, given his primary concern with Poland, he is so quick to dismiss the issues that Chase took up in detail: the symbolic significance of John Paul II's visit to Poland as galvanizing political action; the meaning and interpretation of the price scissors between luxury goods (falling) and staples (rising); and the importance of the Christmas holidays and their particular foods, for Polish identity and political action. We don't feel these issues to be the product of a "naive foreign enthusiast" but rather particularly germane to Polish politics and equally pertinent today.

Dziegiel, also seems unaware of the comparative method in cultural anthropology which, for specific purposes, can make comparisons across culture areas. Some years ago Halpern wrote several articles which tried to put together, in a rather basic way, some experiences in Serbia and Laos. Dziegiel seems to find these explorations objectionable:

In one of his papers he (i.e. Halpern) even discussed the convergences between the cultural change in Serbia and Laos [sic]. It is true that in another paper he pointed to the contrasts between the conhomy [sic] of Serbian peasants and that of Laotian peasants [I assume he means Lao since Laotian refers to the multi-ethnic peoples of Laos as one entity...JXH]. It can be seen, however, that within Eurasia the Balkan Peninsula and the Indochinese Peninsula are equally near to him.

No doubt Dziegiel would find Murdock's use of the term "Eskimo" in connection with the description of American kinship relations and nuclear family structure exceedingly strange. Closer inspection of his article reveals an arrogance combined with slovenliness. He seeks to characterize the first of us (alphabetically speaking) as one who is "concerned solely with the culture of the Serbians." Clearly he never bothered to carefully examine the bibliography which was, after all, one of the main purposes of the Annual Review article. Had he taken the trouble he would have found Halpern's name associated with writings dealing with Croatians (#17), Slovenes (#120), Bulgarians (#68) and Macedonians (#148) as well as Laotians. This is a rather minor matter but his treatment of the Halperns' editing of the works of J. Oberbski reflects what might most politely be called studied disingenuousness combined with extreme carelessness. The only reference to the Halperns' editing of Obrebski's work is given in a snide aside (p.22): In the period before 1939 they mention the Pole Obrebski, whom they present as a disciple of Malinowski, who in his studies conducted in Poland and Yugoslavia referred to the then prevailing anthropological interests in the West. They not only fail to mention Moszynski, whose disciple Obrebski really was, but do not even include in the group of Westernized intellectuals Florian Witold Znaniecki, co-author of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*.

This is errant nonsense. Had Dziegiel taken the trouble to consult the volume of Obrebski's writings which the Halperns edited, *The Changing Peasantry of Eastern Europe*, (many copies were sent to Poland and there is no reason to think that they were destroyed) he would have discovered in the Afterword by Oksana Irena Grabowicz, a detailed article on Obrebski's career, which Grabowicz divides into three stages (p.93). The first dealt with his work with Moszynski while the second was with Malinowski at the London School of Economics. To cite Grabowicz, "This (stage) indeed emphasized the break with his former mentor Moszynski who was highly skeptical of Malinowski's functionalist method (p.94)." The third stage related to Obrebski's work after he settled in the West when he did fieldwork in Jamaica, subsequently

worked for the United Nations and finished his career teaching at C.W. Post College of Long Island University in New York.

What's In A Name?

Regarding Obrebski we see another bit of ethnocentric myopia in Dziegiel's critique concerning his correction of our use of "Josef," stating that his proper Polish name was Jozef. This is, of course, correct. But Dziegiel is evidently incapable of conceiving of the effects of culture change on proper names.

Obrebski evidently used three versions of his given name depending on the time of his life and on his particular circumstances. For his London dissertation in 1933 he is Jozef, in 1961 in the dittoed copy of his paper on Macedonia (which the Halperns subsequently edited) Obrebski chooses Joseph, and in one of his last efforts in 1966 for an article on Jamaica, he is Josef. His obituaries also reflect these differences. In the *Polish Sociological Bulletin* (No. 2, 1968) he is referred to as Jozef while in the U.S.-based *Polish Review* his name is Joseph. The Halperns' writings about him have also reflected these differences.

In closing this section, we are glad that Dziegiel inadvertently brought up the issue of the significance of name changes as cultural markers which can alter in a variable way. This, again, was and is common practice across the region, from the Baltic to the Aegean, and relates directly to issues of ethnicity and nationalism, questions of socialist political economy, and the attempts at national integration within it. Thus, today ethnic Turks suffer for refusing to Bulgaricize their names much as Yugoslav Macedonians suffered for rejecting the Serbian -ic in the past. Similarly, Breslauers and Danzigers, removed from Poland's western zone at the end of World War II, would perhaps no longer recognize the streets named for heroes of Polish or international socialism or for revolutionary events in Wroclaw and Gdansk.

Conclusions

In sum, we find our characterization of the region useful and continue to find numerous analogous institutions and behaviors that enable U5 to define the region as we did for analytical purposes. However, to generalize about Eastern Europe for analytical purposes is not the same as

imputing cultural homogeneity to all areas of the region. To suggest that it is, once again, dishonest manipulation.

In related fashion (though somewhat an aside to Dziegiel) we also reject the idea that the concept "Eastern Europe" was mainly born in and is an artifice of the Cold War (though no doubt this certainly exacerbates cultural stereotyping between Europe's regions). Given cultural ecological variation and dependency relations alone, the conceptual division of the European continent long antedates Yalta. It is one, therefore, that demands continued scholarly recognition, even in a future Europe relieved of intermediate nuclear forces and anachronistic alliances and in an American Anthropological Association recently enhanced by a Society for the Anthropology of Europe.

In re-reading Dziegiel's lengthy polemic we are constantly confronted with his criticism of our not doing this and not doing that, of delving too narrowly into the role of the peasantry, of avoiding religion, of not talking about cultural diffusion, of not considering the Baltic, and so on. This is the easiest, and unfortunately, the most simplistic form of criticism. It reminds us of the scene in *Catch-22* where Clevinger, one of the soldiers, is being viciously cross-examined by an effete colonel who is demanding Clevinger tell the court what he didn't know and what he didn't do.

Such an approach in that book was uproarious. But both in the book, as well as in Dziegiel's critique, it has the same general end; it avoids serious exploration of issues in favor of groundless posturing. It offers definite answers instead of posing reasonable questions. Unfortunately, though we feel it reasonable to assume that Lech Dziegiel has considerable knowledge of Poland, and possibly of conditions elsewhere in the region, we have been denied the benefits of his knowledge in favor of his spleen.

Having written the above we hope that entering into a dialogue Dziegiel was worth the trouble. We very much need to go out of our way to maintain scholarly contacts with our East European colleagues by publication in each other's journals.

Maybe even the Annual Review should open its pages to foreign scholars writing about their parts of the world. We, however, do already have *Current Anthropology* which serves valuable functions in this connection. We hope that the EEAG Newsletter will continue for a long time and that the next article from an East European anthropologist-ethnologist will be one which abstains from ethnocentricities and focuses on articulated ideas instead of polemics.