

AN UNEASY PARTNERSHIP. ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNOLOGY AND HISTORY

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Abstract

This article is intended to demonstrate that, in spite of the common perception that the role of Polish ethnology among the branches of science is deliberately played down, it is very much possible today to speak of our discipline's particular success: increasingly often, ethnology provides an inspiration for other branches and inspires their theories and methodologies. Referring to phenomena current in the Polish culture, I intend to convince my Readers that the process of "genre-mixing", and especially the mutual influence of history on ethnology and vice-versa, are indispensable to arrive at a correct interpretation of the described phenomena. At the same time, I wish to demonstrate that that sort of purism which in the academic circles accompanies the perception of divisions between disciplines – and which includes the jealous guarding of one's own little field of knowledge and denying other disciplines access to that field's academic yield – is dishonest, since ethnology, for example, draws from other fields freely and much. Taking this image of contemporary anthropology as my starting point, I put forward the question whether, in these circumstances, it is at all justified to speak of auxiliary disciplines and to draw acute dividing lines between particular sciences.

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W artykule pokazuję, że wbrew przekonaniom o umniejszaniu roli polskiej etnologii wśród innych nauk, a zwłaszcza wobec historii, możemy mówić współcześnie o swoistym sukcesie naszej dyscypliny, która coraz częściej stanowi inspirację dla innych dziedzin nauki, wpływa na ich teorie oraz metodologie. Odnosząc się do współczesnych fenomenów w polskiej kulturze, zamierzam przekonać czytelników, iż proces „mącenia gatunków”, a zwłaszcza przenikania między historią a etnologią jest konieczny, by dokonać trafnej interpretacji opisywanych zjawisk. Jednocześnie chcę też pokazać, że swoisty puryzm towarzyszący myśleniu o podziałach między dyscyplinami w środowisku naukowym, jak choćby zazdrośne strzeżenie poletek swojej nauki i odmawianie innym dyscyplinom dostępu do plonów, jest nieuczciwe, gdyż na przykład etnologia z innych nauk czerpie pełnymi garściami. Wychodząc od takiego obrazu współczesnej antropologii, stawiam pytanie, czy wobec tego mówienie o dyscyplinach pomocniczych i rysowanie ostrych linii demarkacyjnych między poszczególnymi naukami ma rację bytu.

Key words: Polish anthropology, history, discipline boundaries, historical reenactment.

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One of the main theses that characterise the research on identity is the assumption that a personal identity is constructed, recognised or pictured in an opposition to the “other” – a stranger, an alien, or at least someone who is certainly not one of us. Usually such process of self-identification was, and still is, investigated in reference to ethnic groups, nations, subcultures etc.; my observations and further reflections, however, refer to the very discipline that is wont to conduct such investigations of identity, i.e. to ethnology. To be precise, ethnology is going to stand on the side of “us” here. I am certain that my Readers who are Polish ethnologists will not have any trouble guessing who the “they” are assumed to be. This text, however, is intended to demonstrate the specificity of contemporary Polish anthropology to Readers who are not familiar with it; to them I owe a short introduction and explanation.

My assumption is that an article intended for a volume entitled *Ethnography re(dis)covered* may include reflections not directly linked with either the analysis of material or strictly theoretical reflections – quite the opposite; I assume that at least a part of it should illustrate what it is exactly that we are trying to “re(dis)cover”. The subject of the current text is linked with both the first: my research, and the second: the assessment of transformations of the anthropological theory; yet instead of focusing on these two aspects alone, I intend to present some of my own observations concerning the current condition of ethnology, as well as our discipline’s entanglement in an uneasy partnership with history. What is more, the title of the volume invites generalisations – creative ones, to be sure, but nevertheless avoiding the formulation of final answers – in order to mark certain tendencies in these two sciences. My reflections therefore are an invitation to debate; they are meant to put forward questions, not constitute unequivocal statements. The watchword *Ethnography re(dis)covered* has inspired me to write a text which, firstly, shows the local situation of the discipline I represent, secondly, is directly associated with my current interests, and thirdly, makes it possible (I hope) to, if not totally exorcise, then at least frighten away certain demons.

To begin with the general background to the issue, then. Since the day I entered the academy I have heard many indignant voices proclaim that ethnology is being treated by the practitioners of other branches of the Humanities as history’s auxiliary science, and therefore underestimated, while its achievements clearly demonstrate that it is worthy of autonomy. The era when ethnology (then known as ethnography)² was from both the formal and the practical point of view treated as, and fulfilled the functions of, a science auxiliary to history (see Jasiewicz 2004, p. 11) is gone; yet its memory lingers and, what is more, affects the manner in which our discipline is practised today. Remarks relating to this problem are still not infrequent. Not only are they uttered by the practitioners of our discipline, but also to a certain extent demarcate ethnology’s identity, the context in which research is conducted (Smyrski 2013, p. 11; Tokarska

² See Jasiewicz 2004.

2007, pp. 7–8) and even the manner in which ethnological bibliography is made (Kopczyńska-Jaworska et al. 2009). The memory that ethnology used to be ranked lower than history in the hierarchy of sciences is still vivid. On the one hand, this is a reaction to the fact that at the largest academic institutions ethnology was placed in, and still remains a part of the faculty of History, together with e.g. archaeology or history of fine arts – which not only takes away its formal autonomy, but also structurally prohibits its natural exchange with various disciplines of Social Sciences with which the practitioners of anthropology feel a kinship. On the other hand, however, it is my opinion that these remarks demonstrate a slightly archaic understanding of what the autonomy of disciplines means; this perception, however, I shall develop later on. At this point, it is sufficient to state that ethnology in Poland³ defines its identity, at least in part, with reference to historical sciences. This is quite natural, since, in addition to the above-mentioned reasons, ethnology as a discipline modelled itself on history since its very inception, originally aspiring to the name of a historical science (Faubion 1993; Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa 1948; Sokolewicz 1973, pp. 190–191). It must be added, however, that the relationship between the two disciplines, anthropology and history, was marked by a rivalry (see Geertz 1990) – a rivalry so strong that with time ethnology began to aspire to an absolute methodological autonomy⁴, which resulted in its deliberately ignoring the achievements of history (Thomas 1963, p. 3). The situation, however, has long been different, as scholars have understood that it is impossible to practice ethnology without a definite historical awareness or neglecting to ground the research subject in a historical context. Opinions equating the two sciences have been voiced again, the most famous perhaps that of Edward Evans-Pritchard, who reasserted Maitland’s argument that “anthropology must choose between being history and being nothing” (Evans-Pritchard 1962, p. 64) with the proviso that this statement worked both ways. What is more, with time also historians noticed that anthropology provided valuable inspirations for their own studies. It might seem that today history and ethnology have become partner sciences and, since each has much to offer the other, their relationship is flourishing.

Yet, looking at the practice of ethnology in Poland, it is obvious this situation has failed to satisfy scholars, causing a new wave of discontent instead. Apparently, the reason for grumbling now is that other disciplines (it must be impartially noted that this complaint refers not only to history) prey on ethnology, stealing its methodology, research method and research subject. It is my intention, however, to demonstrate that the process of drawing inspiration from the achievements of other disciplines is in

³ Polish ethnology is not alone in this; anthropology as a discipline generally constructs its identity in relation to history (Pitt-Rivers 1963; Lowie 1937).

⁴ Initially, for instance, ethnographic sources were treated like historical ones (Faubion 1993, Sokolewicz 1963, p. 191).

our case bi-directional; for instance, ethnology has acquired a research subject from history too: the broadly understood references to the past. I also wish to show that this process is beneficial and that it strengthens our discipline instead of weakening it.

HISTORY AND ETHNOLOGY:
DIFFICULT MOMENTS OF COEXISTENCE

This text, of course, refers mainly to the current situation in Poland. This, however, does not develop in isolation – it is influenced not only by the past, when local ethnological institutions were formally embedded in the historical ones, and not only by the native development of the two disciplines in question; it is also affected by the fate of anthropology worldwide, which also developed in the shadow of history. Differences between ethnology and history are an inarguable fact. To me, however, much more important are the attempts to point out the similarities between them. Scholars suggest that in the broadest-possible approach these two disciplines have the same subject of interest (Pitt-Rivers 1963, p. 254). Yet appreciation for the achievements of one discipline by the practitioners of the other is far less obvious (Pitt-Rivers 1963; Jones 1963); hence it is often observed that differences between the disciplines are underscored by pointing out the shortcomings of the other, that usually being ethnology (Pitt-Rivers 1963; Geertz 1990).

It is not my aim here to exhaust the topic of the relationship between these two disciplines since the period ethnology began to take shape; yet I would like to point out the existence of certain conflicts and convergences in their relationship, since they shed light on the problem in question. As it has already been mentioned, ethnology originally aspired to the name of a historical science and in practice, both in the tradition of the German *Kulturkunde* and in evolutionism it did have a historical character. In the early period, a scholar focused on recognition of the genesis of the investigated people; their history was an element of the research interest. Boas, for instance, perceived anthropology as a science that would show the chronological past of the people under research. In this approach, an ethnographic material was concurrently a historical material (Faubion 1993, p. 37). Lowie, in turn, in *The History of Ethnological Theory* (1937) showed the genesis of American ethnology from the German history of culture. Differences in the research approach notwithstanding, Kroeber, a disciple of Boas, also perceived anthropology within the framework of historical sciences (Faubion 1993, pp. 37–39). This approach was valid for a while longer; yet anthropology was not always treated as an equal partner in this relationship (see Thomas 1963, p. 18).

Simplifying the history of the mutual relations of anthropology and history: the change arrived still within the lifetime of the “great generation” of anthropologists. Functionalists, with Malinowski and Radcliff-Brown at the fore, were adamant in wish-

ing to show the role of an ethnologist in different categories than those of a chronicler of cultures (Evans-Pritchard 1962, p. 46; Faubion 1993, p. 39). Yet they rather radically distanced themselves from history (see Thomas 1963, p. 3), removing it from ethnology not only as a model for the practice of science, but also as a context for the investigated cultures. Currently, it is they, among others, that are blamed for the ahistoricism of ethnographic descriptions, for the “removal” of the investigated peoples from the flow of history (Clifford 1988; Hastrup 1995). Their monographs are criticised for not embedding the descriptions of the investigated cultures in history, but also for denying those peoples the right to having history and to creating their own particular “historiography”. They contributed to the emergence in anthropological literature of formations which Eric Wolf called “peoples without history” (Wolf 1982; also Guss 1993, p. 451). Yet although the classicists of Functionalism introduced an approach that made anthropology an ahistorical science, it has already been mentioned that an affinity between the two disciplines, or even their identicalness, was pointed out within the same school (Evans-Pritchard 1962; Thomas 1963, pp. 3–6).

The process which James Faubion called ‘historicisation’ (1993, p. 44) affected anthropology relatively late. History was accepted as a correct perspective in the practice of anthropology and the investigated phenomena started to be embedded in the historical context. Many cultural mechanisms were shown to depend on history, while history itself began to be perceived as an important element of the human condition (Faubion 1993, p. 44). This transformation profoundly affected the discipline.

At this point, however, it is necessary to make an about-face. This is because in the first half of the 20th century not all the relationship between ethnology and history was “fruitless”. Almost parallel to the mainstream ethnology diverging from history, its side branch took history as the main subject of its interest. As demonstrated in detail by Faubion, after the Second World War in the United States⁵ arose a group of ethno-historians who described the history of specific North-American tribes. The 1950s brought about a blossoming of ethno-history (Faubion 1993, pp. 41–44); the idea of the past as a subject of anthropological reflection, as well as the characterisation of the specificity of the perception of history in native cultures are due to ethno-historians. The realisation that the concept of history itself is to a great extent a product of our culture, whereas the tribal perception of history may be very different indeed, is a fruit of their research.

Marshall Sahlins’s conclusion that various cultures have their own methods of acting historically and their own historical practice is particularly important, not only to ethno-history, but to the entire discipline. Also, Sahlins stated that a different anthropology was necessary in order to research such course of human fate (Sahlins

⁵ It is not by accident that ethno-history emerged in the United States, as it was rooted in the school of Boas.

2006, p. 55) and showed that in the Maori culture which he had studied the equivalent of history was a myth – a myth that was continuous (similarly to history), because in his perception an actual occurrence was the final form of a cosmic myth (Sahlins 2006, p. 71). In order to orient themselves in the past, the Maori use myths; we use history. Thus, without to great a risk it can be assumed that Sahlins pointed out the direction for a “new” variation in our discipline: the interest in the past times as a cultural phenomenon.

HISTORY AND ETHNOLOGY: PERVASION

This, of course, does not mean that now we, the ethnologists, are supposed to take our revenge on historians and show them how the study of the past ought to be practised. Ethnology's long battle for independence has certainly brought results; now its discreteness and importance to science are obvious (even though Polish practitioners of this discipline do not see that independence in the framework of academic structures). Turning towards history, however, makes it possible to perfect the discipline's tools and broaden its competences. On the one hand, methodology that grounds investigated phenomena in the historical context and shows the influence of history, of concrete events in the past, on social and cultural phenomena, is currently developing. It has finally been made obvious that, instead of being an empty collection of events and dates, history is filled with cultural and social life. Both history and ethnology have benefited from this realisation. Yet this is just one aspect of the tightening of mutual relations. Additionally, it has turned out that as history began to make culture its object of study, so ethnology began to observe the past, and not only in the aspect of ethno-historical research. And although a historian investigates a past culture, while an ethnologist the signs of the past in the present, it transpires that both disciplines have much in common in this respect.

Inspirations drawn from other branches of the Humanities make history receptive and open to new subjects of study. Investigation of everyday life in the past and of bygone cultures, as well as the study of micro-histories, are growing in importance (Domańska 1999). Ethnology is currently perceived precisely as one of such sources of inspiration (Domańska 1999); yet even before historians pointed out how anthropology may enhance historical perception (Thomas 1963). What is more, some texts written by historians (Lowenthal 2011) show the past as a foreign country to be investigated; it seems, therefore, that inspirations drawn from ethnographic methodology are indeed appropriate. Although history can never take on the entire workshop of an ethnologist (since, after all, it is impossible to interview people from the past or take part in their lives), taking advantage of other research approaches it may present reflections on a subject of study that, despite the distance of time, is analogous.

An ethnologist, in turn, no longer finds pure knowledge of historical facts or certain general mechanisms of history sufficient to describe contemporary processes. In order to draw out nuances from contemporary phenomena, it is often necessary to delve deeper, reaching conceptions worked out by historians for the investigation of the past. I would like to present a concrete example of such ethnographic investigation and show that, in the case of history and ethnology, partnership indeed makes sense, whereas the postulated perseverance in clear-cut divisions between disciplines, with respect to theory as much as to the subject of study, can bring hardly any benefits.

ETHNOLOGY OF "HISTORY": INVESTIGATION OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE PAST IN CULTURE

Clifford Geertz observed that "the recent surge of anthropologists' interest in not just the past (we have always been interested in that), but in historians' ways of making present sense of it, and of historians' interest not just in cultural strangeness (Herodotus had that), but in anthropologists' ways of bringing it near, is no mere fashion" (1990, p. 333). Not a fashion but, to a certain extent, a necessity, since contemporary culture keeps the past on display in every place and tools are needed to investigate this phenomenon (see de Groot 2009). What is more, the phenomenon is of interest to both ethnologists and historians. Today, history⁶ pours out from the mouths of politicians, jumps out of newspaper pages, haunts films and television productions, parades in city streets. History, especially Polish history, has recently become exceedingly fashionable; it has been turned into something of a national treasure which everyone wishes to display as beautifully as possible. Politics turns history into a tool for defining the identity of the adherents of a concrete political option; cultural institutions and organisers of cultural activities show history as the most precious cultural (and not only cultural) legacy of the country; the cinema and television have successfully packaged history into their own forms. Finally, there are those eerie moments when we see young guerrillas or Napoleonic soldiers marching across our city, or when, visiting some castle while on holidays, we are startled by a knight in shining armour emerging all of a sudden from some nook⁷. The presence of history in the public sphere has become a fact; only at some point, regardless of whether our discipline is ethnology or history, we need to answer the question: is it really history we are dealing with?

⁶ Three different meanings of the term "history" are used in this text. Firstly, it appears as the name for a scientific discipline; secondly, it denotes the course of past events which are this discipline's subject of interest; thirdly, it is understood as the contents of contemporary cultural presentations, and thus as a *sui generis* interpretation of the past.

⁷ Of course, the process of publicising or the consumption of history is not limited to Poland (see de Groot 2009).

No-one needs convincing that a uniform vision of history does not exist and that history is subject to manipulation and interpretation depending on the purpose its presentation is supposed to serve. Similarly, it is quite obvious that history functions in culture in the form of myths, stereotypes, more or less idiosyncratic representations. History has become a subject of negotiation and interpretation. The past is in a way adjusted to the needs of the present, and the present imparts the final hue on the presentation of the past. History understood as a contemporary cultural construct, rooted in the past, but shaped at present, is thus undoubtedly a subject of study just made for anthropology. Anthropologists will indeed find a considerable range of themes here: we may analyse symbols or actions in the public sphere, social groups, secular rituals, relationships of power, all from various cognitive perspectives: anthropology of politics, gender, performance, experience etc. It is, however, impossible to come up with a reliable interpretation of “history” present in culture without making a reference to the achievements of historians.

It is possible to lock oneself in the circle of exclusively anthropological studies and to analyse phenomena solely by means of political anthropology, the interpretation of myth or symbol and so on – and such study may bring many interesting results. The question, however, is whether without making a reference to the analyses of historians it is possible to ascertain what precisely we are dealing with and in what order of phenomena the given one ought to be placed. This is because to determine the nature of today’s citations of history in culture is of paramount importance. The assumption that they are cultural constructs, apart from being very general, touches upon only one aspect of the issue. Concurrently, historians increasingly often reflect on such issues as the extent to which this is history, how it is created, whose authority stands behind this process, to what extent such history results from an academic vision and to what extent it is created at the grass-roots level, or who is entitled to creating history in the first place (de Groot 2009). In this very place ethnology and history find a very special common point, since ethnology has tools to analyse cultural dissemination of knowledge (in this case, historical knowledge) or creation of particular “versions” of history, but shall not move far in the relevant analyses if it does not accept that behind it all stands history as the fundamental source of information regarding the past, and as a science which carefully watches and, from the point of view of methodology, constantly updates its own approach to the manifestations of history in the public sphere (de Groot 2009; Lowenthal 2009). The “publicisation of history” must in this case be understood in a twofold manner: on the one hand, history enters the public sphere and its presentations are increasingly more visible in that sphere; on the other hand, it becomes a *sui generis* public property, and hence historical discourse is created not only by scholarly authorities⁸. In these circumstances, cooperation between ethnology and history is most desirable indeed.

⁸ The process of constructing cultural heritage is a good example here (see Lowenthal 2009).

HISTORY'S INPUT INTO ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY.
THE EXAMPLE OF THE ENQUIRY INTO HISTORICAL REENACTMENT

In this section of my article I intend to demonstrate that in the case of ethnological enquiry into cultural phenomena which refer directly to the past, referring (constructively) to historical theories is deeply justified. To demonstrate this, I shall use the example of my research interest: historical reenactment, a cultural phenomenon which provides a focus for the relationship between the two disciplines in question. On this example I shall show at which points in the course of ethnographic research a reference to theories proposed by historians may change the direction of that research, affecting the character of the enquiry in a manner which is, in my opinion, beneficial to it. Historical reenactment⁹ is exceedingly popular in Poland; in order to analyse it, however, it is not sufficient to focus on ethnological theories, because the context in which this phenomenon unfolds cannot be defined in full solely by those theories.

I am convinced that only history offers the correct definition of the term 'reenactment', and this, as it turns out, affects the determination of the reenactment's place in a definite order of cultural phenomena. It is crucial to, firstly, determine the relationship between reenactment and history as an academic discipline, because from that springs the issue of authenticity, the key issue in the study of reenactment. Secondly, reflection on the very process of reenacting positions this phenomenon in relation to cultural phenomena which otherwise would not readily occur to an ethnologist as a background to the study of historical reenactment.

Commencing my research on historical reenactment, I was obliged to answer the question how the history shown by the reenactors, and the reenactors' workshop, relate to academic history. It was obvious that the past shown by the reenactors is a particular construct encompassing very many aspects, including cultural ones (see Piątkowski 2011, pp. 117–122), because academic history itself is a similar construct (see Domańska 1999, p. 29). Yet in order to answer the questions: to what extent that construct corresponds to the scholarly reflection on history; whether the reenactors are in possession of adequate tools to reconstruct history; and, finally, whether reenacting itself is a method capable of disseminating knowledge about the world in the past¹⁰, it is necessary to make use of the achievements of historians. Yet they, in turn, seem to disagree not only whether the reenactors are sufficiently competent to conduct their own type of enquiry regarding the past, but even whether reconstruction of bygone times in itself does open a path

⁹ Impossible to fully present in the space available here, this phenomenon involves, among others, recreating and publicly reenacting events and phenomena from the past. More on the phenomenon of reenactment in Poland, although without an in-depth analysis of details, in Kwiatkowski 2008; Szlendak et al. 2012.

¹⁰ In some sense, the key issue in the enquiry into reenactment is whether it tells us more of the past or of the present.

to the knowledge of the past (Agnew 2004; Bogacki 2010; Cook 2004; Gapps 2009). It must be noted that opinions voiced in this debate are extreme, ranging from an adamant negation of the reenactors' right to participate in the academic discussion of the past (Bogacki 2010), to a guardedly optimistic concession that reenacting does seem to have a great potential (Cook 2004; Gapps 2009). To me, those debates provided an impulse to a more considered and sober analysis of the educational aspect of reenactment (so eloquently underscored by some reenactors and by the media) – because there, after all, a measure of factual reliability is more than necessary.

The potential for getting to know the past which is (or is not) inherent in reenactment results in one more important issue. As it is generally known, the research method, scientific theories, as well as results obtained with their aid are constantly re-examined and verified. Hence historical knowledge is not constant or homogeneous; it too undergoes changes. The question arises whether reenactment may contribute anything of value to this process – and whether the striving for authenticity professed by the reenactors is a peculiar way of “researching” the past or just an amateurish, unsystematic and arbitrary selection of contents from historical sources. After all, veracity, and authenticity guaranteed by veracity, seem to be key concepts in considerations on the subject of history and, in spite of being called in doubt (Domańska 1999), they still crop up in the debate. And this is a debate which is veering from the field of history to include the level of reenactment and thus, by determining the framework for the considerations upon the experience of the past, determines also the direction of ethnographic research on this topic. Whether the authenticity (or lack of it) of such an experience is supported by the authority of a historian or whether it involves the opportunity of the grass-roots development of “their own” vision of the past by the reenactors, is after all of crucial importance.

What the reenactors wish to show is the “real” history, the “authentic” one; but the authorities that guarantee this authenticity vary. The reenactors are aware of the obvious limitations: the fact that they must use replicas of artefacts, that the scenery of events is different, that the people have changed physically (see Gapps 2009, pp. 400–401); yet they are attempting to show the past as faithfully as it is only possible. Anthropology is in possession of all tools necessary to interpret not only this striving for authenticity, but also cultural processes that influence, or may influence, the ultimate character of the presented history: national myths, political ideologies, aesthetic patterns of popular culture etc. However, only academic history offers tools to ascertain whether we are still within the area of reflection on history or just of its imaginary image, and whether reenactment should be treated as a serious partner in the debate on history or only as a complex form of entertainment reflecting no more than the current needs of participants in culture.

Contemplation of reenactment as a potential sub-discipline of history leads also to determining phenomena that are parallel to reenactment. The key to their selec-

tion as viewed by historians is the very broadly understood process of reconstructing the past. Historians connect and compare historical reenactment with other types of reenactment: documentaries and feature films, reality shows or religious theatre (Agnew 2004). In my research, I was tracking social movements, or forms of expression in public space, similar to reenactment; only the historians' reflections upon this phenomenon permitted me to discover a broader range of phenomena analogous to reenactment, which are the evidence of a *sui generis* fashion for history, and to single them out from the huge range of contemporary methods of "consuming history" (de Groot 2009). Finally, it must be noted that it was precisely historians that began the debate on the cultural aspects of reenacting the past (see Gapps 2009) thus, in this particular case, paving the way for anthropologists.

CONCLUSION: TOGETHER OR APART?

The main aim of this text is to note some transformations occurring in the practical functioning of ethnology: from a science growing in the shadow of history, it has become a complete, discrete branch of the Humanities and history's partner. Yet the autonomy of ethnology must not be perceived as its disengaging itself from other sciences, or as complaints that other disciplines are appropriating anthropological methods (and such criticism is heard more than occasionally); its autonomy is realised in the ability to engage in a dialogue with other sciences and to make use of their achievements in such a way as to fortify its own theory or its own research. Anthropologisation of other disciplines is increasingly more visible (see *Zanikajće granice* 2009), but this process seems balanced by the fact that ethnology is drawing inspirations from other sciences. Boundaries between disciplines are increasingly fluid, genres are becoming blurred¹¹, but in my opinion this process ought not to be interpreted as the loss of particular sciences' identity – at least not in the case of ethnology. Although one's perception of one's own discipline is often stereotypical (for instance, the relationship between ethnology and history is still burdened with the erstwhile perception of the former as an auxiliary science of the latter), to exceed the stereotype may be in many ways beneficial. Those benefits can be direct, for instance the application of conceptions developed by one science in the practice of the other, or indirect – influencing the evolution of the discipline's identity, for instance by provoking debates crucial to defining that identity. The debate on ahistoricity of ethnology (Clifford 1988; Hastrup 1995) is a case in point.

As I have already written, ethnology and history are, in practice, drawing on each other's achievements – to mutual profit, it seems. On the example of my own research

¹¹ I borrow this phrase from Clifford Geertz (1996).

I have demonstrated how references to the studies of historians may enhance the reflection on contemporary cultural phenomena. It is thus possible to make the assumption that the happy and fruitful relationship between ethnology and history is hindered by the practitioners of those two disciplines, entangled in stereotypes originating in bygone times on the one hand, on the other – jealously guarding the boundaries of their own discipline, although those boundaries have long been breached. It seems to me that a reassessment of its identity is what ethnology currently requires – paradoxically, not on the level of scientific practice, because this is getting on very well, but on the level of the perception of the discipline by its own representatives. It is important for ethnology to enter into a partnership with other sciences without the burden of preconceptions and antagonisms. Formerly, erudition and knowledge typical to a “Renaissance man” were an integral part of scholarly ethos; today, it may seem that practitioners of ethnology esteem specialisation solely within the boundaries of their own discipline, instilling this attitude also in their colleagues and students. In many cases, it is true that this hunt for an “other”, in contrast to whom identity is defined – usually history or sociology – is caused by the organisational structure of the academia, namely by the fact that ethnological divisions are attached to larger units presided over by other sciences. However, it would be worthwhile to separate animosities springing from structural and organisational issues (animosities which are, unfortunately, surprisingly strong) from the academic achievements of those “alien” disciplines, and to spare a thought for what those disciplines can offer. Whereas for identity it would be better to look to the scientific worth of the discipline, and to its ability to engage in a dialogue with processes occurring within other related sciences.

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