AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Biczó, Gábor: A „Mi" és a „Másik". Az idegen megértésének tudománytörténeti vázlata az antropológiában a 19. század második felétől napjainkig. [The "Us" and the "Other." A Historical Outline of the Concept of Otherness in Anthropology from the Second Half of the 19th Century to the Present].

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BOOK REVIEW

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Historiography comprises a vast research domain within anthropology and offers numerous works in various languages. Since Franz Boas, leading scholars have time and again faced theoretical and methodological developments in anthropological research. Today, the historiography of anthropology is a vibrant field of study. Although the study of the history of anthropology is by definition an international project, many researchers tended to focus on local anthropological phenotypes. The regionally embedded history of anthropologies (plural) in various languages provides insights into different voices, perspectives, and academic discourses in a discipline that focuses on the diversity of human societies and cultures. However, the most influential works on the general history of anthropology are almost exclusively in English.

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Gábor Biczó's current work is a bold endeavor to provide a concise general history of our discipline in Hungarian, examining the historical transformation of the conceptual tool of "otherness" in anthropology. To write a general history of anthropological scholarship for Hungarian readers may seem an unusual decision. The only other such book in Hungarian is Barbara Kisdi's history of anthropology, used primarily for educational purposes in higher education institutions. The present book, however, offers more than a summary of scholarly biographies and the enumeration of anthropological schools. Biczó Gábor's history focuses on the use (and abuse) of a single concept throughout the history of anthropology, from Edward B. Tylor to contemporary scholars, and its primary objective is not education. The question then arises: who is the target audience of such a history of anthropology?

As I see it, this book is only seemingly a concise history of anthropology; the author's actual contribution to the ongoing anthropological discourse is the discussion of two concepts: otherness and reflexivity. As the history of anthropology shows, these concepts are closely intertwined in such a way as to provide a hermeneutic circle between the other and the self, the object and the subject. Hence, this book challenges the fundamental epistemological problem of anthropology: the capacity of the (un)reflexive self (anthropologist) to perceive and study the other (informant, native, interlocutor). Consequently, the book's diachronic axis is less significant and less elaborate than the analysis of the two concepts mentioned above.

Biczó's history of anthropology consists of two defining periods: anthropology before and after "the reflexive turn." Although there were significant developments in the period before the reflexive turn – which the author consistently and consciously calls "the critical turn" – it was conceptually fairly uniform. This uniformity stems from an epistemological deficiency: that is, anthropologists did not sufficiently expand the concept of "Us," and rarely reflected on the researcher's role and position in fieldwork and in anthropological studies.

Before turning to the analysis of the concept of otherness and reflexivity, I will first ponder the author's terminological choice, calling the reflexive turn a "critical turn" in his work. The two idioms are not interchangeable, but they refer to the same period and intellectual challenge of anthropology: the *reflection on* and *criticism of* the anthropologist's position in anthropological research. As Biczó rightly points out, this criticism problematized the unbalanced power relationship between researcher and researched communities. Although a few pioneers, like Paul Rabinow in his pivotal "*Reflections on Fieldwork*," have already brought into play the relationship between "subjective" and "bjective" writing techniques, systematic criticism of the lack of the anthropologist's self-reflection gained prominence only after the Writing Culture debate. Thus, the reflexive turn is simultaneously a critical turn toward the objective, impartial tone and episteme of anthropological knowledge-production and scientism in the humanities and social sciences.

Without a doubt, the epistemological shift generated by this critical turn in anthropology had a fundamental impact on our discipline and put the credibility and authenticity of all previous research and scholars in a new light. Nevertheless, the turn's significance is slightly overemphasized, especially in light of the often schematic and oversimplified presentation of previous methodological changes and anthropological schools and styles.

Nearly half a century after the (sometimes heated) debates of the reflexive turn, a cohort of anthropologists has already studied the history and effect of anthropology's self-criticism. In hindsight of the last decades, it is increasingly difficult to assess the turn's effect on anthropology's episteme. Many anthropologists now contest the objectives and outcomes of the critical

turn. And with good reason, too. Reflexivity now imbues every ethnographic study. Issues of intersubjective reality are constantly addressed in fieldwork, analysis of material, and writing of texts. However, there is a wide range of possibilities on how the anthropologist may reflect on the researcher's self, starting from a quasi-objective, top-down viewpoint to ego-centric studies, where the researched communities provide only a blurred background for the complex transformation of the researcher's self.

Consequently, some anthropologies may even turn into autobiographies, and some ethnographies talk less about the local communities they are trying to understand and focus more on examining their role in a different society. The importance of understanding the researcher's position in a researched community is also contested by several anthropologists (most notably Donna Harris). Indeed, a relevant question is how constant self-reflection makes ethnographies any better. It is still unclear what the anthropologist can remedy by constantly reflecting on the research situation. Focusing on personal experiences may also result in dubious conclusions. There is always a risk that narratives emerging from an intersubjective reality may be imposed on the whole community. I would argue that the reflexive (or critical) turn is nothing more than one of many methodological novelties in anthropology, and it does not remedy the significant problems arising in the intersubjective context of fieldwork—only creates new ones. As a corollary, the critical turn does not offer "the solution" for the permanent problems of anthropological knowledge production and thus its pivotal role in anthropological history seems unwarranted.

The other focal concept of the book is no less problematic. The notion of "otherness" as a critical concept of anthropology has been condemned at least from two different viewpoints. I will elaborate briefly on both of these viewpoints in the following paragraphs.

The first issue with the postulated idea of "otherness" to conduct research and create ethnographies is intrinsically ethical. If we presuppose that anthropological research focuses on understanding "otherness," we have to first face issues raised by the postmodern episteme pointing at the multiplicity of possible realities. Ethnographies created in the intersubjective space of the research context and local lifeworlds can hardly be legitimized from any scientific-methodological point. Ethnographies are, in many cases, impossible to falsify or verify. Members of the researched community then rightly question the legitimacy of the representations of their lifeworlds. What makes the anthropologist's representation more valid or relevant than that of a local community member?

Undeniably, this situation has caused a crisis in anthropology and resulted in new genres and forms of anthropologies, as have auto-ethnographies, community advocates, and native anthropology. Stemming from the situation mentioned above, a second problem of otherness surfaces: in this context, a false opposition between "native" and "real" anthropologists emerges. Simultaneously, a new form of essentialism arises, contesting anthropologists' status and epistemological horizons based on their being outsiders. It is increasingly problematized whether a non-native anthropologist can ever have sufficient rapport, access, linguistic skills to provide a valid image of the researched community. These concerns demonstrate that anthropology has not yet fully overcome the "self/other" opposition—and this results in several methodological, epistemological, and ethical problems.

Gábor Biczó's unique perspective on the history of world anthropology, as presented in his book, is certainly a fundamental contribution to Hungarian anthropological scholarship, and it will be useful both in higher education and theoretical discussions. I am convinced that the book

is the most fundamental theoretical contribution to anthropological discourse in Hungarian in the recent decade. In this present review, I tried to shed light on dilemmas arising in the context of founding an anthropological history on two over/ab-used concepts: reflexivity and otherness. These concepts are probably more fragile and problematic than the author's presentation indicates.