International Centre for Minority Studies
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URGENT ANTHROPOLOGY:
METHODS OF CRISIS RESEARCH

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The trials and tribulations in the history of the Balkans in the last decade of the 20 c. and the first years of the 21 c. have played an intriguing trick on anthropology and the scholars of ethnology. The collapse of the Communist regimes in the Balkan countries sucked societies out of the vacuum of dogmatism and restrictions, and plunged them into the chasm of changes ranging from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars, to the massive refugee and migration waves. Ideological and political patterns were also changed; identities were resurrected, neo-irredentist aspirations emerged. All this made field researchers realise that they had to reevaluate their actions and academic approach, their usual philosophy and methods of research, and their research tools. Gone were the times of prolonged scientific meditation on artifacts, ethnocultures and confessional groups that often led to exercises in pure aestheticism and exciting pleasure at doing academic research entirely for the sake of science. Gone were also the exercises in the opposite extreme notably indulging in a pseudo science subservient to ideological dictatorship and censorship. All those were replaced, suddenly and with no time for adaptation, by new approaches complying with the requirements of modern times; by new academic vistas, by geopolitical cataclysms, but above all, by acute awareness of the needs and sufferings of the humans inhabiting the Balkan Peninsula.

Balkan research in humanities needed urgent restructuring. It needed to reconsider without delay its stand, to relinquish its academic alienation and come down to earth, to abandon its guilds and forget its rivalries, and to study and analyse the ongoing dramatic developments by using methods from different social sciences. Scholars were challenged to get orientated as fast as possible in the galloping dynamics of those changes, to assist communities in the region in their painful flight from the prison of old ideologies, myths and mystifications, and to support their introduction - often forcible and involving numerous victims - into new entities characterised by haughty nationalism, political and ideological confrontation, and a restructured foreign policy that had not always been clear; to ease their plunge into so-far unknown economic conditions. It became also clear that they needed to join efforts to counter the expanding zones of conflict, and to identify and enlarge zones of compatibility and tolerance; to appease hostile ethnic and confessional communities, to preserve diverse cultures and historic inheritances; to protect human life whenever could.

Not all research communities and individual researchers conceded to carry the heavy burden of commitment to specific social functions and responsibilities. For many a representative of the historical profession, for many sociologists and anthropologists, this did not happen at all, or happened with a significant delay.

Chronology – Part One. It was in this complex environment that the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) was set up. It attracted kindred spirits from among experts in social sciences and set before them the task to analyse urgently the ruptured relations between Muslims and Christians in Bulgaria, a country with a history of decades of compatibility behind

them, as well as the violation of traditional forms and in the rules of parallel and peaceful co-existence of differing cultures.

Later on, the task was expanded in that the experts needed to focus on various ethnic or religious communities in Bulgaria and on regions with ethnically or religiously mixed population; to provide adequate arguments to the civic organizations for protection and safeguarding of the rights of the minorities, and in their humanitarian efforts to oppose and neutralize extreme nationalistic attitudes and recommend effective practices for prevention of interethnic tensions in the chaos of transition.

From academic point of view this proved a huge challenge, for they needed to understand, describe, analyse and record for the future generations all dramatic events of what amounted to a major social experiment that was radically changing the political and economic pattern of the nations in Central and Eastern Europe, to asses its impact on societies, traditional cultures, religions and ethnic characteristics and their communal responses.

When the interethnic and interreligious relations in Bulgaria had calmed down a bit and were reverting to the established centuries-old pattern of shared or rather parallel, co-existence, and to the rules and norms of multicultural tolerance, the informal, or shall we call it civilian-cum-academic community that was already shaped, redirected its attention to beyond Bulgarian borders, towards the social processes, perturbations and cataclysms occurring in the neighbouring countries and in the entire Balkan region.

In 1993, a team of historians and ethnographers armed with, at that time, still unclear theory and philosophy of *urgent anthropology* was funded by the International Center for Minority Studies to conduct fieldwork in Albania. The results were impressive but it was found out that for the sake of comprehensiveness of the research and analysis the team needed an additional professional dimension, in other words, the team needed to be supported by findings by sociologists, philosophers and political analysts.

In 1994, the European Phare Democracy Programme funded generously an interdisciplinary survey on "Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria", conducted by the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations. The research teams incorporated historians, ethnologists and sociologists who worked independently for one year, discussing their respective findings at joint working meetings. In the course of the discussions and in the preparation of the results for publication it transpired that the teams of social researchers had been working "incapsulated" in their own methods and tools and had accepted the analyses offered by the "other" researchers with some reservation, especially when the findings had to be compared. On the other hand, it became evident that the specific methods for different research areas had allowed for comparison of the empirical data, and of the final analyses which had resulted in updating of conclusions and a maximum possible degree of accuracy of findings.

From then on, all research teams conducting fieldwork in regions of tension inhabited by people of different ethnic and religious affiliation were formed solely as interdisciplinary teams, with a view of obtaining the best scientific results, i.e. empirical material and analyses of comparatively reliable long-term forecasts with an accuracy of nearly 90%.

By and by, experience taught us that research teams ought to be small-size and flexible, with their composition changing according to the region and target groups,

the specific historical experience and culture of the communities studied, and the environment.

Perhaps the most controversial and risky decision had been to include a reporter and a political analyst specializing in the Balkans, in the teams that would normally incorporate an expert on the history of the Balkans, an anthropologist, a sociologist, an expert in philosophy of cultural studies, a political scientist or an expert in economic history, and an occasional sociologist or psychologist. The difference in the approach of the journalist, the quick and aggressive reaction when asking questions from the questionnaire, the professional perseverance, even brutality, in trying to get an insight into the most intimate aspects in the life of the respondent or community, were very much in contrast with the thoughtful and sensitive approach of the researchers, their ability to patiently predispose the respondents to sincerity, and to create an atmosphere of friendliness and trust.

As it happened, the presence of journalists on the team proved to be most useful for research teams and findings alike. It made it possible to accumulate diverse information through alternative techniques and approaches. The abundant information the journalists possessed on current political events, persons and facts of the day, their cultural background and directness, had a positive effect on research and the parties complemented each other's analysis. Journalists admitted they also benefited from their participation in scientific discussions, and in the presentation of broader historic panoramas, and in sociological and philosophical interpretations of the targets, regions and cultural environment.

Ethical problems of field research. Owing to their insight into cultural environment, and with the help of their psychological skills and ability to adapt, researchers were usually able to go for in-depth studies of the target group occasionally even identifying with it. Then it would be a matter of scientific and human ethics to decide what and how much of the empirical material to analyse and what to publish from field diaries, so that no harm would be done to the target group and no one's dignity would be hurt. It goes without saying that the names of the respondents should never be mentioned in the analyses. This also holds good for secondary indicators, which may reveal the identity or thereabouts of the respondents.

In this connection, the ethics and morals of field researchers are often subject to theoretical discussion by the anthropologists' guild. For there is also the problem of the other extreme, of getting involved, even *falling in love,* with the object of research, which sometimes leads to an overlap of target group, respondents and cultural community that results in a loss of the researcher's own identity, and in alienation from his/her actual social affiliation and functions. This probability is even higher in the case of traditional anthropological research that sometimes continues for years on end. "Emergency" anthropologists, despite their short-term stay in the field, are not protected from this loss of identity either, because of the heavy psychological and emotional pressure they experience during field collection of empirical materials.

An essential segment of this new method of *urgent anthropology* is the issue of the ethics of scientific insight into the nature of field research. Researchers who have joined the scientific community freely, to acquire maximum knowledge about it, face numerous moral problems when this same community undergoes a crisis or collapses. "Emergency" anthropologists often work in crisis situations that surprise and shock them, and are often difficult to overcome. This is so because, on the one hand, researchers work in extreme conditions and are subjected to strong emotional impact as well as various pressures and insinuations. On the other hand, the

informants representing target communities undergoing social and spiritual cataclysms subconsciously supply distorted, biased information, or try to influence the perception of the researcher. To use the parlance of the field researchers, *urgent anthropology* is destined to work on *polluted grounds* where respondents and researchers often resort to manipulations - the former involuntarily, obeying their survival instincts, the latter, out of necessity and deliberately.

Moral issues of this kind are specifically complicated when it comes to researchers and leading mediators of double identity, either biological or acquired through family tradition or personal choice, who therefore belong to the culture and philosophy of the target community or group while belonging also to the research community or institute. Such a member of the research team will most probably feel uncomfortable and suffer intellectual withdrawal. Moreover that the decision whether to continue to participate and if so, to what extend, is strictly personal. In all these cases the attitude of the head of team and team members will by definition be one of discreet guidance to the intended path of research and non-interference in the personal ethical problem. H.F. Wolcutt suggests that field researchers face moral issues and try to solve them *in situ*. Very often the solution would be a compromise between personal values of the researcher, the values of the society or culture under study and the professional values of the academic institution. Eventually, the decision is the ultimate responsibility of the researcher (Wolcutt, H.F. "Ethnography as a Way of Seeing". Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 1999 and Draper, Mustafa, "Ethics and Ethnographic Research in the Context of Sufi Tariqas","Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice" IMIR, Sofia, 2000, p.77-92).

Bulgarian researchers have accumulated unusually vast experience in that aspect. For decades on end Bulgaria and the other former communist countries had funded and guided research on different cultures – minorities, ethnic, confessional and social groups - solely to use it for assimilation purposes, and to exercise unacceptable control and repressions. This practice has been usual also in social sciences under other totalitarian, oppressive regimes so the choice of the researcher has obviously never been easy.

Democratic political governments do not make it easy, either. *Emergency anthropologists* repeatedly ask themselves whom should their knowledge and empirical data serve: the community they study; the research community they belong to and with which they identify while it identifies with them; the policymakers, the military or any other formal and informal entities that fund their research expecting to use the findings to their own ends.

One cannot therefore but recall Wolcutt's sincere cynicism in that

"Altruism and research make strange bedfellows. The dark art is to get others to think that your research is for their good, and perhaps to try to convince yourself of it as well, all the while looking for anything you might do to make this really happen". Or the following outburst revealing the scientist's torment when he would rest in the evening, or thinks of questions and strategies to be used on the next day of fieldwork: "Is seduction one of our darker arts? As craftspeople, are we so crafty that others don't know when they are being seduced? Is there some ethically acceptable approach to, or level of, seduction appropriate for fieldworkers…"(Wolcutt, H.F. "The Art of Fieldwork" Walnut Creek. Altamira Press, 1995, p. 148-149)

It is worthwhile probing even deeper into Wolcutt's reflections since he, as a *guru* of fieldworkers, voices clearly and accurately the secret thoughts and remorse of every active field anthropologist: "Discomforting as it is, we must face the charge of betrayal head on. I do not subscribe to the idea that field research is always an act of

betrayal, but the possibility is ever present. …[There is] now way we can claim to be in the business of finding things out without finding things out; no way we can report what we have understood without the risk of being misunderstood". (Wolcutt H.F. "The Art of Fieldwork" Walnut Creek. Altamira Press, 1995, p.149)

Thus instructed by our teacher *Wolcutt*, we, anthropologists try to avoid accusations of betrayal by a self-imposed censorship. Of course in such cases we face a paradox in that the more experienced and talented field researcher is, the more h/she uncovers things that have not been searched for, have not even been meant to be uncovered. When to stop, and how and what to select from the newly established facts in order to announce them, and how to fight the temptation to go on and on? Resistance is difficult just as it is difficult to fight the urge to share every finding with colleagues and scientific opponents.

IMIR *urgent anthropology* teams, which for five years have worked in all Balkan countries populated with Albanians with the aim of studying their cultural differences, attitudes to national unification, modernization and prospects, have faced major ethical dilemmas, since they have had their work assessed by the very targets of their research:

First comment (a respondent working for intelligence service Y of country Z in a region with military tension, says he has been impressed by our ability to undertake a thorough search of the field effectivelly and speedily collect accurate data): "You cannot even imagine how the knowledge you have acquired and are proudly announcing as scientists in the public space may be used to different ends. Based on your publications, every interested institution and para-structure will be able to develop, for better or for worse, adequate strategies, tactics, and plans of operation". Second comment (a group of young educated Albanians in Montenegro with whom we have been talking about the possibilities for local Albanians to join the military movements of the extremists of ANA, the Army for Liberation of Kosovo): "Had it not occurred to you that you may be some kind of a catalyst of the rationalization and dissemination of our national idea for unification? You travel for years, polling for the opinions of our leaders from different countries, give meaning to them, classify them systematically, translate them into understandable language, announce them publicly in books and magazines and even discuss them with us, your informers."

Where is *Wolcutt* now, to instruct us how to carry the burden of such doubts? It is much easier to impose restrictions on yourself when deciding on the extent to which to infiltrate a community in order to curb the amount of unwanted information. It is much harder to cope with external, and internal suspicion of being an accomplice to, and a factor of, the processes taking place within the community. Such doubts may dissuade the researcher and push him/her to extreme self-control, in cases where, for example, the researcher blames himself or herself for the environmental pollution in the target communities. In such cases the researcher may even decide to give up fieldwork; this would mean essentially to give up an important part of his or her own intellectual being and the most important, his/her professional identity.

To what extent is the researcher's interference with community acceptable? Should the researcher refrain from understandable human response to crisis situations? Our colleague Mustafa Draper describes the ethical dilemma of a researcher present at a Naqshbandi Order ritual of exorcism of *jinn* possessing the body of a nine-year old child. The ritual was performed by the sheikh directly on the child's body. It involved strong physical pain and even breaking of a finger. Draper poses ethical questions without providing an answer since he has himself repeatedly witnessed similar occasions and has not been able to formulate a straightforward

response. "Should the researcher - Draper asks us, his colleagues doing field research and surely facing similar dilemmas, without adequate responses, - have intervened and protected the child? That would certainly have meant to impose cosmological and moral perspective contrary to those of the membership. Should they have informed the authorities? This would have meant imposing a differing set of legal values to the membership."(Draper, Mustafa,"Ethics and Ethnographic Research in the Context of Sufi Tariqas" Cf Antonina Zhelyazkova and Jorgen Nielsen, eds., *Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice"*, IMIR, Sofia, 2000, p.89).

"Ever mindful of both the noble ideas and the thoughtless consequences …", writes Wolcutt, - "I have no Golden Rule to propose. The guideline I try to follow is the Golden Rule restated in negation, to *not* do to others anything I would *not* want them to do to me. Sometimes that translates simply into *not* saying or *not* telling more than is necessary." (Wolcutt, H.F. Ethnography: a Way of Seeing. Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 1999, p.283). We allow no illusions; clearly, moral dilemmas have remained the same since the times of Confucius.

Chronology – Part Two. The first authentic expedition of *urgent anthropology* outside Bulgaria was conducted in the Republic of Turkey starting in 1995 and proceeding, with some interruptions, to 1998. The research was targeted at the Bulgarian Turks – immigrants in Turkey, following the forced migration of thousands; at their individual and collective philosophies, at their mentality, at their efforts to preserve themselves as identities and as individuals in the process of adaptation to a different world, after being chased away by force or fear from their homeland, at that time Communist Bulgaria. (Cf "Between Adaptation and Nostalgia", ed. A. Zhelyazkova, IMIR, Sofia, 1998).

The most complicated and in a way, most unsuccessful *urgent anthropology* work was conducted in Bosnia in 1998. The consequences of the war for the members of the three major ethnic and religious communities were overwhelming: depression, mental trauma, and disintegration of personalities; deep grief and distracting hatred. The team was touring throughout Bosnia and its members were on the verge of nervous breakdown. Upon returning from the fieldwork, we found ourselves unable to write our analyses. For the first time ever. We had lost our scientific objectivity, we were overwhelmed by emotions, we were traumatized by the respondents' tears, by the war damage, by the mine fields, and by what we saw was the most prosperous business in Bosnia at that time, masoning tombstones. The book on Bosnia was published three years later, without any field records or analyses of the empirical material. The net result was that we published a research book entitled "*Bosnia: A Case Apart"* (ed. A. Zhelyazkova, IMIR, Sofia, 2001), in which the authors hardly ever referred to memories or diaries of this painful journey.

The rare significance of *urgent anthropology* as a new method adequate to crisis situations became abundantly clear during the field observations and analyses we made on the Albanian war for independence in rump Yugoslavia. Between the Summer of 1999 and the Spring of 2003, ten field expeditions were organized in those parts of Balkan territory where Albanians are dispersed or live as indigenous population. The findings from the research were published in the two volumes of the "*Urgent Anthropology"* series (Zhelyazkova, A. "*The Albanian National Problem and the Balkans",* vol.1 and "*Albanian Prospects",* vol.2, IMIR, Sofia, 2001 and 2003)*,* to help to analyse the consequences of NATO war against Serbia and Milosevic's troops, the psychological climate, the attitudes of the Albanian refugees in the camps in Macedonia, Albania and Serbia, and later on their return home.

IMIR's urgent anthropology team endeavoured, in the course of fieldwork, to find evidence of developing pannationalism among some of the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, to record efforts to mobilize the community, despite its fragmentation throughout the Balkan region, Europe and the United States. The research of the *"Albanian"* field showed that at the beginning of the 21c. the Balkan states and the countries in Western Europe were facing the identical need to resolve the issue of Albanian nationality.

The formation and development of Albanian identity, as well as the evidence of national unification of the Albanians are yet to come for the Balkan region. The emergence of nations and the ethnic and cultural processes that had accompanied the development of other nations at the end of the 18c, during the 19c, and even during the first half of the 20c are only taking place in recent years for the Albanians in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the following dramatic cataclysms created for the Albanians the possibility to meet anew and get to know each other closely. This, only to make them aware of how much different they had become in terms of education, religion, culture and mentality, yet still inseparably related by language, ethnic memory, family connections and shared economic interests. (*"Albania and the Albanian Identities",* ed. A. Zhelyazkova, IMIR, Sofia, 2000).

What is going in the Balkans at present, and what is yet to happen by the end of the first decade of the 21c, is precisely the process of clarifying of, and affirming the awareness of the Albanian national, cultural and civil identity, as well as the approbation, through force and pressure by the national unification forces, of the spiritual center of national awakening, Kosovo. Regrettably, the process of national awakening is too often accompanied by the emergence of a unification doctrine, aggressively outwardbound through fascism-related theories such as, e.g. the theory of the "harmful" Slavdom, or through pejorative clichés for each European nation. This new ideology is also inward-bound aiming to reach the community by cultivating an attitude of national haughtiness and self-indulgence which oust the need for a culture of national dignity and tolerance towards all other communities and nations.

In a foreseeable future, their unabating demographic rise will force the Albanians to face also the problem of territorial expansion. The tradition of the Roman Empire, of uncompromising resettlement of the Albanians on grounds of extreme poverty so well described by the writings of F. Braudel on the Middle Ages, has survived through the life-span of the Ottoman Empire to the present day. (F. Braudel, "La Mediterrane et le monde mediterraneen a l'epoque de Philippe II – livre 1 also in Bulgarian Средиземно море и средиземноморския свят по времето на Филип II. Книга първа. Абагар, София, 1998).

Another problem that the Albanians are bound to face, regardless of whether or not they live in the Balkans, in Europe or in the USA, are the difficult personal, clan and social choice they need to make between tradition, ethnocentrism and isolation on the one hand, and the rule of law, humanism and human rights as part of the postmodern European values.

All this continues to figure large on the research plans of IMIR and will be followed closely and recorded in the field diaries of the *urgent anthropology* teams.

Synopsis of the urgent anthropology. "Founding Fathers" of the new method of fieldwork and analysis have been our colleagues from "Ethnologie francaise", the French academic journal for anthropology (No.3 of 2000). In the editor's note on the publication of the diary and the analysis of the fieldwork conducted in the refugee

camps in Macedonia and Albania following NATO air-raids on Serbia and Kosovo, (June 1999), the Editor-in-chief has recommended the Bulgarian research as a model urgent anthropology. This has put an end, to some extent, to a prolonged discussion among anthropologists on the required period of time and the controversial departure from the methods of the traditional anthropological school. It has also removed the predicament of the *urgent anthropologists* team head, who had suggested a descriptive, rather than terminological response, having been unable to offer a convincing formula to answer the question asked by colleagues all over the world as to which scientific field would she deem possible to classify the field findings.

Completely by intuition, *urgent anthropology* has been seeking admission to the school of structuralism of Levi-Strauss. Understandably enough however - for she typically lacked self-confidence being a researcher from an ex-communist country, only recently released from the Communist grasp, the head of the field team thought it too forward and inpropituous to encourage her researchers to identify their work with such well established school of world fame, especially when it concerned a research field that had previously been repeatedly rejected by the indoctrinated social sciences in Bulgaria and had therefore remained incomplete as a system. And anyway, in the course of intense travels when it is necessary to do in situ analyses of the crisis regions and fighting communities, the issue becomes rather academic.

Once again the field findings were valued highly outside the profession at the beginning of 2002, when, in his comments on the results of our research, published in the first volume of *"Urgent anthropology"*, Prof. Zygmunt Bauman noted that "…You have set an example for a marriage of thorough fieldwork in a broad theoretical frame, with brilliant interpretation…", and later went on to ask a question which, for the delight of the *urgent anthropologists*, he answered himself: "Levi-Strauss was speaking of two schools of anthropology: one physically close while spiritually remote, and one physically remote, yet spiritually close. Do you belong to the second school? In Kosovo you defied division and managed to benefit from the best of both worlds." (Personal correspondence, 4-15 January 2002, Z.B. to A.Z.).

The urgent need to probe into social crises leads, out of necessity, to a minimum of preliminary preparation of the teams. What Levi-Strauss saw as a shortcoming of the younger generation of anthropologists, was the stand taken by many ethnologists from this same younger generation, who prior to going to the field, deny themselves any insight into the available sources of information and reviews of regional bibliographies under the pretext that they do not want to interfere with the miracle of intuition, which should assist them to achieve immortal dialogue with their small tribe…the eternal truths of nature and the functions of the social institutions. (Levi-Strauss in French *Antropologie structurale* 1958 and also in Bulgarian - Леви-Строс, К. Структура на мита, Издателство София – С.А., с.32).

The inadequate preliminary preparation however is compensated by the presence, on the interdisciplinary team of *urgent anthropologists*, of a historian specializing in the history of the region and possessing detailed knowledge on the historic background of the target ethnic and confessional communities. The adequate selection of researchers of varying backgrounds, approaches, affiliations and personal experience is by definition crucial for success in the fieldwork. Indeed, it would be impossible, in the short periods reserved for collection of empirical field evidence, to undertake analyses and arrive at valid conclusions, without the preliminary background of a wide-scale theoretical framework and historic panoramas. To quote Levi-Strauss again, history, historic knowledge and geology are of vital importance

for the validation of structuralism as a science. They supply its truths and serve as its codes. According to him, when confined to the present moment in the life of a community, research falls victim to illusions since everything is history – what was said yesterday is history, what was said a minute ago is history. But above all, research is destined not to know the present, because only historic development allows for measuring and evaluation of the elements of the present. Better a small amount of history (for, unfortunately, this is the fate of the ethnologist) than no history at all. (Леви –Строс, Структура на мита, с.32-33).

The geographic factor becomes for the *urgent anthropology* a major element of the cognitive process on "conscious and subconscious level" (again, Levi-Strauss presents both levels as fundament of "the truth" in social sciences. See *Race et Histoire. Paris, Unesco, 1952* and also in Bulgarian - Раса и история, Изд. къща "Христо Ботев", София, 1997, с.13). In addition, for decades on end the indoctrinated rules in science have forced researchers to underestimate, ignore or at least not mention this factor when announcing their analytical conclusions.

The new methods, as a syncretic form, proved to be an exceptionally accurate research approach and a timely means of information and scientific knowledge in extreme situations, in quickly changing internal political, international, social and public paradigms. In this ephemeral span of history teeming with events, even the most lasting landmarks such as societies, communities, ethnic, religious and social groups, which in peaceful times may stay unaltered for decades and centuries, are bound to undergo fundamental transformations or turn to a necessary daily mimicry. In the face of stress situations or survival crises of individuals or communities, or of preserving civil, ethnic or cultural identities, changes and cataclysms may occur in all layers of the social hierarchy, in *potestal* models, in social thinking, or in ideological superstructures. Enter the various responses, ranging from aggressive or euphoric, to moody, deeply depressive, even maniacal

In such cases of social cataclysms, experience and knowledge, methods and methodology of the humanities cannot cope with the coverage and analysis of the entire range of predictable changes or deformations of traditional layers of society. It requires the abilities and intellectual potential of all members of a joint team of researchers working in different branches of social science with different methods, approaches and instruments. This, despite the fact that, even though it does not work among the target community while on a field expedition, such a team would actually perform the major part of the analysis while seemingly relaxing or travelling. The researchers share their observations, interpret them thanks to their intellectual potential, personal experience, against the background of research marked by specific approaches and methods. That is a "brain storming" event in which opinions are accepted, dogmatic and formalistic stereotypes are rejected, discoveries are shared, curiosity is aroused, debates on specific cases are held. In the course of these untutored debates, which help to bide the time on the long and dusty Balkan roads, new issues are shaping and any concept requiring consensus can be accepted or rejected.

To a certain extent our research approach relates to cultural ecology, allowing for analysis of the functional relations among different categories of any local culture, i.e. productive activities, kinship, political formations, etc. The descriptive and analytical strategies of the cultural ecology have proved particularly versatile as they can be applied diachronically and synchronically. This is an exceptionally usable methodology, adapted to our aims and intentions, though according to A. Baliksi,

"cultural ecology in the postmodern period turned out to be a substantial, significant but outdated theory" (A. Baliksi, In: *Cultural Ecology*, p.16, Sofia, 1997).

During the long years of studies on interethnic and intercultural relations in Bulgaria and in the Balkan region, the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations has applied a complex interdisciplinary approach incorporating a number of sciences, methods and methodologies without depriving them of their own characteristics. We have obtained excellent results and discovered unexpected opportunities for taking this type of social research beyond *ideal* academic contributions to perform important applied social functions. This had secured the place of *urgent anthropology* in the field of practice by promoting timely "integrated interventions" by civil society or state institution aiming at resolving or at least mitigating of conflicts, and at the development of preventive practices for the complex and vulnerable Balkan region.

Bitter experience in unethical use of the findings in social sciences to manipulate both target groups and target societies as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is regrettably a constant companion of *urgent anthropologists*. Therefore, when looking for support in the instructions of Levi-Strauss, we attempt to carefully assess then. With regret, we admit that in his statement that *social anthropology is not isolated from the realities*, he has had in mind a particular element of his coherent philosophical interpretation, while we, anxious not to be misled, think of completely different, potentially brutal material realities. People communicate with the help of symbols and signs; for the anthropology, which is a conversation of a human being with another human being, everything placed as mediator between two objects is symbol and sign, says Levi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale deux, Librairie Plon, Paris 1973;* see also in Bulgarian Леви – Строс, Структурална антропология II, Изд.къща Христо Ботев, София, 1995, с.17), but *urgent anthropologists* know that completely unsymbolic, unspiritual and deadly agents such as weaponry, or hatred, or perfidious forms of violence, can also constitute a party to communication.

However, in our profound disappoinment with the cruelty and violation of human values at the end of the 20 c. and the beginning of the 21 c. – the century which we had vainly hoped would be the most civilized one, that would transform human life into an utmost value - are we not exaggerating, are not actually attempting to depart from the school of structuralism? It is worthwhile to try and resume our place in this school through the melancholic philosophy of Levi-Strauss to the effect that anthropology would never manage to make a science as detached as astronomy, the very existence of which results from the fact that it observes its object from a big distance. Anthropology on the other hand results from historic development in which the better part of humanity had been in a position of subordination, and millions of innocent victims had seen their possessions plundered, their beliefs and institutions demolished before they themselves were savagely massacred, enslaved or subjected to contageous diseases against which their bodies had no immunity. Anthropology is the child of a violent epoch; and if it is now able to consider human phenomena in an unprecedented objective manner, it owes this to the epistemological advantage of a status quo where one part of mankind had usurped the right to treat the other part as a possession. (Levi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale deux, Librairie Plon, Paris 1973;* see also in Bulgarian - Леви-Строс, Структурална антропология II, с.77).

Still, prompted by the ever-present optimism in our personal and professional life and prospects, let us admit that, while cursing and overdramatizing their profession, field researchers would not survive without their patent sense of humor

and the habit to see themselves through the prism of target communities and respondents. This implied that an exchange of roles would be welcome to make anthropology more acceptable to its victim. If we allow to be *"ethnographed"* by those for whom up to that moment we had only been ethnographers, each party would in turn take the leading part and nobody will have reason to feel inferior. We shall gain additional benefits in learning more about ourselves through the opinion of the others and this reciprocity of perspective will be of use for science in general. (Levi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale deux, Librairie Plon, Paris 1973;* see also in Bulgarian - Леви-Строс, Структурална антропология II, с.76). For those practicing *urgent anthropology* such an exchange of roles proves to be an integral and ultimately necessary segment of fieldwork. It may be that this is where the reliability of our findings lies.

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