

The invented traditions of the Postmodernity rising in Poland

by Dorota Angutek

Summary

The author of the book presents the invented traditions in the phenomenon of the Postmodernity rising in Poland, as well as on the background of the tradition understood, generally, as a processual phenomenon. According to the researcher, the tradition is as dynamical as variable the very culture is, since the tradition is a pivotal component and condition of its development.

The book has an interdisciplinary character, proper for the culture theory understood as a science both integrated and interdisciplinary. Following such an assessment of the culture theory as a science, the author carries out an innovative compilation of the achievements of cultural anthropology, ethnology, sociology, philosophy of culture, non-classical historiography as well as existing selected studies on the culture theory concerning Postmodernity, so as to, using them, determine the features and clarify the historical cultural circumstances of the invented traditions forming in the last four decades in Poland. The objective is to be facilitated by the analysis (presented in the *Second Part* of the book) of the existing (primitive) traditions and phenomena partially connected with them, such as: folklorism, post-folklorism and the ideological traditionalism. The analysis shows the similarities and dissimilarities between them on the one side and the invented traditions on the other from 1977 to 2017 (the beginning of 2018 is included).

The invented traditions have already been characterized, at least to some extent, and some of them were described in detail at the beginning of the 1980s by Eric Hobsbawm and the researchers who collaborated. The researches covered the period of the years 1820–1914 in Europe, Asia and Africa. One instance was that of a tradition reaching as far as the 1970s. Now, Dorota Angutek presents the description, analysis and clarification of the phenomenon of the invented traditions as conditioned by the Postmodernity rising in Poland. A convention has been assumed that it originates in 1989. The exemption from that pattern are, to some

extent, the following traditions: the bacchanal one initiated by Germans in the 1920s in the city of (the after-war Poland's) Zielona Góra as well as the embroidery tradition in Krajna and the quasi-Piastian one in Lubrza, which began to form in the late 1970s, when the idea of regionalism returned to Poland, the one thriving at the end of the 19th century and in the 1920s before the World War Two. However, the dynamical development of the invented traditions occurred but in the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, whereas the phenomenon had disappeared in the inter- and after-war Poland.

The book by Dorota Angutek is not a unique publication dedicated to the problem of the invented traditions in Poland. Still, it studies and elucidates in an innovating manner the not yet (in major part) described instances of the invented traditions in Poland. The invented traditions attracted the attention of the Polish researchers in two ways: either theoretically or empirically. However, all too seldom were these approaches matched so as to intertwine methodologically. The book by Dorota Angutek does so indeed. The original methodological solution is the presentation of the empirical data not (as commonly is the case) with the objective to exemplify and substantiate empirically a theoretical image of the phenomenon, but conversely: the ethnographical material was presented first (*Part One*), then, the known historical cultural concepts of the types of cultures were used along with the concepts of the bonds existing in them as well as those of the social integration. The concepts were subsequently transformed so as to bring about the final elucidation and cultural theoretical interpretation of the instances of the invented traditions surveyed in Poland (*Part Four*; the last one).

The main objectives of the book are: (1) the ethnographical description of the selected invented traditions appearing in Poland from 1977 to 2017 (the beginning of 2018 is covered too); (2) the original ordering of the empirical material; its division into genera including the instances to be subsumed under the main category of the invented traditions (within, however, claiming to be a typology and that because of the processes being as yet not stabilized and their marks not peremptorily constituted); (3) the cultural theoretical interpretation elucidating the aforementioned groups of phenomena as functionally depending upon the marks of the Postmodernity rising in Poland.

The presented objectives are founded on three main theses that make up the essential basis of the book: (1) the invented traditions

are a reply of the subjects of culture to the loss of the culture's symbolic dimension in the era of the rising Postmodernity; they are "calling" for restoring the experience founded on the deep symbols relevant for the communities; (2) the invented traditions might often appear in the areas of the traditional culture effaced because of the extinction or extirpation of the indigenous inhabitants, viz. in the Northern and Western part of Poland as well in Łemkoland; (3) the invented traditions produce community bonds amongst the participants by the force of the mechanical solidarity rooted in the mythical stratum. The objective and sense of the aforementioned traditions (both happen to be reflected upon in subjective terms) are, in all cited instances, producing the community bonds that serve as a basis for realizing such values as: confidence, sociability (founded on the need for the emotional feed-back), mutual aid in many everyday matters and building the ontological security. The culture-generating functions of the invented traditions in Poland listed above are particularly significant for the postmodern society, in which (according to Emil Durkheim's terminology) the organic integration dominates, which leads, to be sure, to the autonomy of individuals, but on the other hand, to the alarming phenomenon of the individualization of the European societies. Still, the community bonds are founded on the shared sentiments and values as well as the ways to realize them. The bonds have a locally restricted character, mainly to a village, town, and localities. The importance of the invented traditions being built consists, according to Dorota Angutek, in preserving the strata of spontaneity in local communities often based on the bonds existing in the primitive groups, which re-produce the mechanical solidarity proper for the traditional culture and lost in Modernity and Postmodernity. One the other hand, the typical elements of Postmodernity, which bring about the creative, dynamical tension in experiencing and creating the invented traditions are: contingency, the spontaneous creativity (which allows individuals to express their personal diversity), consensuality (instead of commands, coercion and sanctions proper for the existing traditions), reflexivity (in the Giddensian sense), the activity proper for homo ludens as an antidote for the regime of the formal social structures at the macrostructural level, manifesting itself particularly in huge cities and in those in power.

The author divided the invented traditions of the aforementioned period into four groups using the genetic criterion (of the type of tradition

they represent) as well as the degree of the social conventionalism (in the sense proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg). Thus, the following types of the invented traditions were obtained: the conventional, the quasi-conventional, the post-conventional and the trans-conventional ones. The first ones are founded on the typical existing traditions drawn from various places and historical times, and appropriated. The second ones imitate the first, but are not (in principle) rooted in the existing traditions, albeit they memorize elements of the folk traditions selectively used for constituting them. The third ones touch perfunctorily upon the Polish home traditions, although they are rather called into existence *ex nihilo*. The last ones are made up of several phases, constituting the historical continuity over various cultural historical epochs, of whom Postmodernity is one and presented, analyzed and diagnosed by the author most thoroughly.

All type of the invented traditions albeit differing as to their contents, genesis and the degree of their conventionalization (in the sense presented by Ewa Kobylińska) allow the realization of the need for sociability more and more distinctly visible and expressed by individuals. The sociability allows resuscitating the community creative initiatives and the thirst for symbolical thinking expressed in myths and being narrations on the beginnings of all present traditions. Both the coefficients, viz. myth and the community's permanence are a return to the past; to the living tradition understood, first of all, as a phenomenon gathering people around shared values.

The invented traditions are nowadays in *statu nascendi* (an exception is the bacchanal tradition in Zielona Góra, evolving towards conventionalization, which is making it similar to the commercial simulacra at odds with the spirit of the invented traditions), so that it is difficult to forecast the possible development. Thus, its petrification and characterization in the context of Postmodernity makes the book by Dorota Angutek an all the more important scientific document of the present times.

Translated by Piotr Cysiura