

TATIANA BUŽEKOVÁ & MICHAL UHRIN  
(2023)

**TEORETICKÝ VÝVOJ  
V SOCIO-KULTÚRNEJ ANTROPOLÓGII  
DO POLOVICE 20. STOROČIA**

[Theoretical Development  
in Socio-Cultural Anthropology  
up to the Middle of the 20th Century]

*Bratislava: Stimul, 199 pp.*

The book by Tatiana Bužeková and Michal Uhrin provides an in-depth overview of the development of the first, but important half of the history of social and cultural anthropology (Bužeková, Uhrin, 2023). Although the primary focus is on the development of theoretical thinking in this discipline, the authors also reveal the broader historical context. However, this is not just a contribution from the history of the discipline. The theories of these now-classic authors are part of the essential toolkit of anthropologists and social scientists in general, not only because they are important for understanding later theoretical developments, but especially because these theories resonate in today's research. Bužeková and Uhrin provide a dense, comprehensive, and thoughtful overview of the most important anthropological theories, theoretical schools, and prominent scholars. I believe that a comprehensive textbook on social and cultural anthropology has been missing in Slovakia. Almost 20 years have passed since the publication of the first Slovak textbook of social and cultural anthropology, *Cultural and Social Anthropology: Personalities and Theories* [Kultúrna a sociálna antropológia: osobnosti a teórie] (2004) by Martin Kanovský. Not that his textbook of classical theories had somehow become outdated at that time, but its concept of addressing anthropology through individual personalities and their theories has certain limitations. Uhrin

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and Bužeková paint a more complex picture. Not only by structuring the text according to individual anthropological schools, but mainly by addressing their development, the historical, ideological, and political contexts of their emergence, and their mutual influences.<sup>1</sup>

An important part of the book is its first chapter focusing on the origins of anthropology or its predecessors in the Enlightenment and Romanticism. It covers discussions concerning concepts relating to human nature, natural law, social institutions and the development of society, as well as the influence of various philosophers and scholars on the development of the social sciences, including Montesquieu, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer. It also analyses the impact of philosophical and anthropological theories on then-contemporary ideas of national identity and political legitimacy shaped by the study of mythologies and folklore, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of Indo-European studies, with its emphasis on the link between language and culture.

The following chapters of the book are devoted to individual theoretical approaches or schools. The first is French sociology, represented by its founders Émile Durkheim and his nephew Marcel Mauss, which provides an overview of their key theoretical concepts that have profoundly influenced the development not only of sociology but also of anthropology, such as social fact, the definition of magic and religion, the functionalist approach to ritual and gift-giving, the notions of prestige and solidarity, etc., and, last but not least, the definition of the study of human societies in general as a discipline in its own right.

Most space in the book is devoted to British and American anthropology, which naturally reflects the extent of the influence of these currents on anthropology. For British anthropology, the book provides a comprehensive overview of nineteenth century but especially first-half twentieth-century anthropology, charting the ideas of influential anthropologists such as Edward B. Tylor, James G. Frazer, John F. McLennan, Henry J. S. Maine, and others to William H. R. Rivers, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown. The chapter thus covers comprehensively British evolutionism and functionalism.

American anthropology is covered by such notables as Lewis Henry Morgan, Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. The authors provide a detailed analysis of the development of American anthropology, using theories of family development and kinship systems, and cultural relativism as examples, and address the challenges of defining

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<sup>1</sup> This review is a translated version of the Slovak text, which was published in the first issue of the journal *Ethnological Debates* in 2024 (Bahna, 2024).

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culture. They do not neglect to discuss the controversy surrounding Margaret Mead's research in Samoa.

What makes Bužeková's and Uhrin's book valuable, is that they extend the dominant triad of the French, British and American schools to include their equivalents in the German and Russian contexts. The chapter on German ethnography and ethnology shows how the concepts of *Völker-Beschreibung* (description of nations) and *Völkerkunde* (general science of the cultures, languages, and peoples of the world) evolved, or how the founding of ethnographic museums contributed to the development of German anthropology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. German anthropology was defined in terms of Romanticism and humanism, focusing on cultural history rather than social science. The work of German anthropologists and geographers Friedrich Ratzel, Leo Frobenius, Fritz Graebner, and Wilhelm Schmidt influenced the development of cultural-historical ethnology in Europe. This ultimately illuminates the roots of the dichotomy between ethnology and anthropology in the Slovak environment in their classification as historical versus social sciences.

The chapter devoted to Russian ethnography shows how this scientific discipline developed in the early days in the context of the expansion of the Russian empire into the environment of non-Slavic peoples and nations. It then traces the influence of evolutionism and Marxism-Leninism on the study of Russian ethnography after the Great October Revolution. From a theoretical point of view, the most important section is devoted to the contribution of Russian structuralist linguists (the Moscow and Prague Linguistic Circles) and folklorists (Vladimir Propp, Piotr Bogatyriov).

This extension to include German and Russian contributions to ethnology/anthropology is also important because Slovak or, more broadly, Central and Eastern European ethnology has long been shaped primarily by these two intellectual traditions, and their inclusion in the broader global anthropological context is something that has been missing for a long time.

Overall, the text of the book is both an informative and engaging introduction to the field of anthropology and related disciplines. The authors provide a comprehensive overview of key ideas and theories, offering a critical analysis of them. The text is well-written and accessible, making it an excellent resource for students and scholars who need to navigate the history of the discipline. The text is well organized and provides clear and concise summaries of key ideas and discussions. I think this textbook would deserve a sequel focused well on the second half of the 20th century.

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## References

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