Anticipatory anthropology – anthropological future study

Abstract
The author deliberates the fusion of two disciplines – futurology and cultural anthropology. She tries to indicate some anthropological tools and methods which are suitable to deduce cultural future and advances a thesis that the future is nowadays an inevitable area of study for cultural anthropology. By making the critical analysis of social threats, hopes and by critical observation of contemporary cultural trends anthropologists are able to construct the possible view of future. The project, described in the text, aims at preparing for changes and proving that anthropology enables predicting the future of the culture.

Keywords: futurology, anticipatory anthropology, anthropological future study, futurist, culture study

This article is an attempt to expand the anthropological perspective by proposing a new area of anthropological study and creating a platform for anthropological discussion. The author advocates the importance of “future” as study area for cultural anthropology, though still underrepresented. She investigates the opportunities to merge cultural anthropology and futurology as well as she demonstrates different tools and methods commonly used in cultural anthropology to study “future”. In addition, goals of futuristic cultural anthropological research and the potential of research quality are discussed.

Cultural anthropology distinguishes several approaches to the concept of time. The category of cyclical time and recurring events along with changing seasons slowly disappeared, as Christianity became a popular system of beliefs. Ultimately, time in Western culture was divided into two periods: before Christ and after, with the Last Judgment being the finale event (Guriewicz 1976). For the purpose of this paper the author makes the assumption that modern time is linear and divided into: past linked to past events, the present day linked to current per-
ceptions and future linked to hopes and fears (Nowicki 1983). Fryderyk Nietzsche wrote: “But he who discovered the country of *man*, discovered also the country of *man’s future*. Now shall ye be sailors for me, brave, patient!” (Nietzsche 1999: 150)

The quote suggests that thinking about the future is a feature that distinguishes human beings from other creatures on Earth. Having experienced the past, men think about the present as well as they look out for the future that is yet to come. The thought about future(s) allows men to anticipate change and foresee forthcoming events.

The past, present and future are directly related. As people are not able to be experiencing the future, they are forced to understand the concept of “future” on the basis of the remaining time concepts – *present* (that is directly experienced) and *past* (that is known through sensual memory). “Future is the time, when the present becomes the past” (Russell 1956: 133). All time dimensions are inter-subjective and speculative. Whereas human memory is not perfect, memories are primarily modified “pieces” of the past (Kaniowska 2003). However, postmodernist knowledge is inter-subjective and shaped by power relations (Barnard 2008: 228–231). Intuitively, people “tame” every moment of time and each component of space. This practice led for instance to subdivisions into ages. Similarly, at presence, events that at first appeared chaotic are defined and categorized in human mind. However, the future has different epistemological status. The future is continuously being tamed, as the boarders of the future are changing. Taming of the future is usually the task of futurologists and science-fiction writers. Conversely, this article argues that social scientists and, in particular, anthropologists need to take the challenge of timing the future.

What is the basis for studying the future? In his work from the 90s *Does social anthropology have future*, Raymond Firth disagrees with Keit Hart’s view on social anthropology as overspecialized discipline that is divided and estranged from society. In such view, the “estranged” anthropology neither anticipates its own future nor can anticipate the future of humanity. Firth argues that “perhaps our field is at the state of a crises, a solstice or a turning point, time for a change” (Firth 2003: 2). His view opens the debate about the future of our field and contemporary conditions for its advancement.

Currently, the anthropology practiced in Poland is at the turning point and thus this is the best time to form the vision of this discipline: think over our dreams about its future and our expectations. During the IV Intercollegiate Anthropological Conference “Ethical problems” in Łódź, Professor Katarzyna Kaniowska suggested that soon our thinking about anthropology would change.

Till now we have been asleep with a belief that we all are anthropologists, that we all know what it means to be an anthropologist – however the belief about a common identity of our discipline is no more justified. It is high time to admit that anthropology takes many forms (Wala 2010).

Boundaries of anthropology are not clear due to variety of its forms. This is an advantage of the discipline that allows contemporary scholars to move forward and explore new research areas, as well as pursue interactions with other disciplines.