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SLAVIC INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY AS A SCIENCE ABOUT THE SLAVIC SOUL

This article presents a research project that aims to reconstruct Slavic indigenous psychology drawing on an analysis and interpretation of data that was gathered from folk culture (such as myths, rituals, customs) and treated about a distinctively Slavic way of perceiving and experiencing the reality, in particular a Slavic vision of a man and his psyche, which is psychological anthropology. The idea of the soul is a central concept in Slavic psychology and resides at the very foundations of academic psychology, yet has been abandoned and shunted aside by contemporary scientists. Therefore, the research perspective that has been applied for the purpose of this project refers to, on the methodological level, arrangements and achievements of cultural-historical psychology, critical psychology and real psychology, and on the subject level to cultural psychology of religion.

Key words: *Indigenous psychology, critical psychology, real psychology, cultural-historical psychology, psychological anthropology, cultural psychology of religion, the Slavs, the soul*

Introduction. Contemporary mainstream psychology, adopting the principles and methods of the natural sciences, is practiced mainly in a universalistic style. It focuses on searching for mechanisms of human functioning alone, neglecting the context of specific cultural contents in which they are immersed, or attempts to grasp them with the employment of the external objectivistic perspective that simplifies their meanings. However a complete understanding of a person, its feelings, needs or ways of perceiving the world, is not possible without acknowledging cultural-historical dependencies as well as one's subjective standpoint. Therefore, in the light of these considerations, there is a need to establish a research perspective that would generate data and conclusions which are complementary to those achieved by a positivistically (universalistically, naturalistically and psychologically, therefore reductionistically) oriented academic psychology.

For many years, psychological research has been limiting its samples to Western society's populations, especially to American society (Budzicz, 2015, p. 131-136). As a result of that, there is a deficit of psychological knowledge that refers adequately at least to the population of the Middle East Europe, that is (simplifying) to the Slavic people. Although some attempts have been made to describe the Slavs' psychological specificity on the level of particular nations (e.g. Drogosz, 2005; Jakubowska,

Skarzyńska, 2005), they lack the acknowledgment of the subjective perspective and the historical and cultural contexts (cultural patterns, experiences and traditions, values, myths, symbols etc.) that are shared by all the Slavs. The division for nations (or countries) hinders the possibility of reaching out to the deeper layers of cultural contents that contain the Slavic mentality which is combined also with a linguistic community.

In recent times, the need for interdisciplinary approach in the Slavic studies and research is being signalled (Borowiec, 2012; Piontek, 2013). This kind of approach, however, does not take into account the psychological perspective – the subject of Slavic psychology is practically non-existent in a scientific discourse. This gap in knowledge in the area of psychology (and to a certain extent in history and cultural studies) requires to be filled with some data accurately reflecting the specificity of psychological functioning of the Middle East Europe's inhabitants based on the products of material and spiritual cultures in particular, which is not an easy task due to the lack of historical sources (Szyjewski, 2010, p. 8-11).

The aim of this article is to present some assumptions, theoretical perspective and preliminary conclusions within the research project's framework that heads towards filling in blank spaces on the map of psychological knowledge through the (re)construction of Slavic indigenous psychology. Proposed conception has a significant potential to increase a degree of understanding of the psychological aspect of human functioning through the multiplication of theoretic perspectives, description and explanation of the specifically Slavic displays of psychological life. The importance of studying the Slavic way of perceiving and experiencing reality is evident noticeably due to the growing interest in the Slavic culture that can be observed in a mounting of communities of Rodnovers (Kośnik, in press).

Theoretical background. The (re)construction of Slavic psychology requires referring to theoretic perspectives which will enable to “free from the weight/distortion” of mainstream psychology. Our strategy is not about denying achievements of universalistic psychology, but about precisely supplementing it with contents immersed in the cultural context. In this research project, several research perspectives are being applied: indigenous psychology, critical psychology, real psychology and cultural-historical psychology; and thematically the project is embedded within cultural psychology of religion.

The indigenous approach assumes the anti-universalistic character of psychological knowledge and gives it a status of social construction (Danziger, 2002, p. 179-197; Grobler, 2006, p. 267-273). Slavic indigenous psychology is a local psychology build on Slavic concepts and perceptions of psychological phenomena experienced by a man. The task of creating indigenous psychologies allows increasing an accuracy of description of a

particular society through the application of the web of meanings which were created by it, but also permits a comparative diagnosis of mainstream psychology; similarly a deeper understating of human nature was possible thanks to the research on deviants (in a statistic not a normative sense) that were conducted in clinical psychology (Şek, 2005).

Understandably, the (re)construction of Slavic psychology requires a reformulation of statements included in folk psychology in such a manner that they meet scientific criteria – if not, it will be impossible to transfer it from “under a thatch roof” into a university, that is in a sense making it non-native and unrestricted by locality.

Flourishing in the West, but absent in Polish scientific discourse, critical psychology rejects realism of scientific knowledge, instead recognising idealism. In accordance with statements of critical psychology, mainstream psychology fails to understand psychological mechanisms that govern a man because of the assumption that knowledge refers to objective, universalistic reality and is cumulative. As follows from critical psychology, knowledge contains socially created constructs which have an influence on the social world; therefore scientists should take a responsibility for their viewpoints. Mainstream psychology’s mistake is to focus on isolated (often literally – in a laboratory) items or a human being as such instead of looking at a person as a social being with a whole richness of one’s cultural-historical, biographical and family contexts which allows to discover and describe a meaning of psychological experiences of a person; not only explain but predominantly understand them (Brybaert, Rastle, 2012, p. 354-355; Fox, Prilleltensky, Austin, 2009).

The other important point of reference is real psychology (*Realpsychologie*) – an unknown branch of psychology that is being reactivated in the spirit of real psychology according to Baader, Dilthey and Spranger and continued in an original form by Andrzej Pankalla. Real psychology is a science about a real psyche – contents of the soul which are characteristic psychological entities interconnected with a cultural-historical context and man’s life story. The richness of the inside world of a man is approached using a category of experience in accordance with suppositions of historicism, culturalism and holism as well as with the employment of analytical-historical methodology. The task of real psychology is to recover deficits of objectivistic psychology and act as a binder between psychology and cultural studies.

In the presented approach, the research aim is to analyse, describe and interpret, and finally understand a human psyche, not just explain its mechanisms. “Realism” of psychological states is about levelling the importance of human life (objective facts) with knowledge about experience (subjective facts), and in such a way making a stand against the deprecation of the last (Pankalla, 2015).

Although Wilhelm Wundt (the father of modern dichotomous psychology) at the beginning of the 19th century assumed that cultural-historical psychology (*Völkerpsychologie*) will become the dominant branch of psychological research, nowadays it stands in the opposition to mainstream psychology that continues the well-established tradition of Wundt's experimental psychology. Cultural-historical perspective, conceptualised in a neutrally holistic style, takes into account in its investigations on human nature the source data provided by history and cultural studies, placing an individual in the context of religion, mythology, customs, and language of a particular ethnic group. Widening the scope of psychological research with contextual factors allows focusing on person-society interactions and abandoning an illusory belief about the only possibility of explaining person's behaviour by using its individual properties (the mistake of methodological individualism) or universalistically created laws of behaviour (the mistake of behaviourism, its newest version – neobehaviourism and cognitive psychology; that is broadly speaking mainstream psychology). Cultural-historical psychology refers to mental processes which manifest themselves in cultural products. This research approach does not make a reference only to contemporary cultural patterns, but also to laying at the foreground of modern civilisation traditional cultures that were being developed in the prehistoric times (Pankalla, 2014; Stachowski, 2010, p. 43-46).

From the synthesis of the presented above psychological standpoints emerges a research picture of the perspective that is heading towards creating Slavic psychology which does not claim the right to be an objective and universal psychology, but subjective and local (with rejecting pejorative connotations of these descriptions). Indigenous psychology of the Slavic people that is being created based on products of the Slavic culture since before an epoch of globalisation forms a path of access to a specific, for the inhabitants of the Middle East Europe, way of perceiving and experiencing the reality. Slavic mentality can be only understood through the process of going deeper into a micro world of their subjective meanings.

Research problem. The idea of this research project is to interpret psychological phenomena employing the abandoned in contemporary psychology concept of the soul, which used to be the founding stone of this scientific discipline (psyche – the soul; psychology – the study of the soul; “On the Soul” – the classic work by Aristotle). This term has been conceptualised in various ways – from a substantial being to a totality of inside experiences of a man that is treated using a subject category. On top of philosophical-scientific ways of understanding the soul, it is required to add the Slavic perception of it that differs from academic vision.

Reconstruction of Slavic interpretation of the soul brings along a number of difficulties. For the purpose of analysis, application of historical

sources and works on the Slavs and Slavic cultural products requires clarification about who the Slavic people are. Using only the outside (objectivistic) perspective at least four criteria can be distinguished: historical (written sources), archaeological (products of material culture), and ethnographic (tradition of ancestors) as well as linguistic (the Slavic languages) (Barford, 2001, p. 27). The psychological approach would consider additional subjective perspective, which is an important aspect of cultural identity of an individual – a sense of being a Slav. However this perspective is insufficient because of the fact that the Slavic identity was born in the period of emerging in Europe of national identities, in the epoch of Romantics (Michalski, 2013). The solution to this problem lies in reaching to folk culture of the Slavic nations, which was developing in a specific isolation from “high culture” and preserved primitive cultural contents and the Slavic mentality amongst the people that were participating in it until the first half of the 20th century (Moszyński, 2010).

Slavic psychology can be understood in two ways. One way to understand this issue proposes that the Slavic people are the subject of psychological research; analogically psychology of religion studies deep religious phenomena from a psychological perspective. This kind of approach is also being applied to cross-cultural research, although only on the level of particular nations (e.g. Hofstede, Hofstede, 2007). These types of investigation allow for a comparative analysis and discovering an ethnic specificity of particular social groups in comparison to other groups from the world's population.

The second way of understanding psychology of the Slavic people being constitutes the essence of this research project; it refers to the Slavic perception of psychological phenomena. In other words, psychology of the Slavs is an attempt to answer a question: “how would psychology look if it was written by the Slavs?”. Obviously, psychology was and is created also in the Slavic nations, a good example of it being the Lvov-Warsaw School (Rzepa, 1997; Rzepa, Dobroczyński, 2009). Nevertheless, it is a product of “high culture” that changes faster than folk culture during processes of borrowing, exchanging and making common contents. Therefore it is important to dig out the essence of Slavic orientation and psychological phenomena aggregated in a shape of folk sayings, beliefs or myths.

Information on the topic of Slavic perception of psyche and its expressions comes from historical-ethnographic sources, which rarely openly refer to the research problem. An exemption is here a fragment of a research work by Kazimierz Moszyński who in the interwar period collected in a monumental work some important data regarding folk culture of the Slavs, including their knowledge about psychological phenomena (Moszyński, 2010, p. 71-97). However, in other cases, it is necessary to distinguish psychological contents relating on an analysis and interpretation

of other products of the Slavic culture, which are not openly psychological testimony of the mentality of representatives of this ethnic group.

Slavic Soul. Building Slavic indigenous psychology requires defining the concept of the soul which is central to it. In the Slavic languages exist two interchangeable terms with similar etymology: “dusza” (a soul) and “duch” (a spirit) (Gieysztor, 2006, p. 259). The conception of the soul encloses a wide scope of psychological phenomena, at the same time being a separate substantial object forming a man as well as animals’ essence. As noted by Moszyński (2010, p. 97), the Slavic perception of the soul significantly differs from the scientific approach, binding with folk beliefs and being “a refreshing source” for it.

Understanding of the Slavic soul consists of three basic aspects. First of them, identifies the soul with the self. In this approach, the soul would be responsible for cognitive processes as well as to some degree for affective processes and correspondingly is localised mainly in a head or heart. In associating the soul with basic mental processes of a man, it is important to mention a connection with anthropomorphism and ascribing its experiences independently from the soul’s owner. “The soul can also be subject of the activity of various forces, it may be moved by something or get frightened and go away for some time, it may be attacked by demons of illness, and as a consequence become distressed and feel hurt, it may also scream” (Szyjewski, 2010, p. 202).

Another aspect of the soul is seen in its life-giving function that shows itself in a belief about relation between the soul and breath. For the ancient Slavs, making a pause in respiration was equal with dying that is abandoning a body by the soul, which was always happening by a mouth. Cellular death due to necrosis was interpreted as abandonment by the soul a specific fragment of a body.

Death of a man was revealing the third aspect of the soul, which is existence beyond a material body. During its after death journey, the soul could take a visible form as a spook and remain in an interaction with the world of the living as a protective being that looks after householders or as an unfriendly and bringing danger demon (depending on person’s temporal experiences and the way of death). Undesired resurrection from a grave used to awake fear amongst the Slavs and motivated them to undertake remedial measures that were taking form of rituals performed over the dead body (Pelka, 1987). Therefore in the Slavic approach, the soul is a substantial being that exists inside of a human body, which is responsible for the majority of psychological processes (cognitive and affective) during a man’s life. The soul through her presence was giving life to a body which was dying when she left. Biological death was only a moment of transition of the soul to another way of functioning while preserving her old properties that make up the essence of a man.

Human development according to the Slavs. According to Slavic beliefs, death is not the only occurring moment of qualitative change in the way in which a man (and his soul) functions. Every type of change is accompanied by an initiation ritual that is a rite of passage between subsequent stages of an individual's life (van Gennep, 2006). Following rites of passage and giving them a meaning connected with their myths allows for reconstruction of the Slavic conception of human development in a life cycle, which is analogous to Slavic developmental psychology. To analyse and interpret, the following Slavic rituals were chosen based on their initiative character:

1. Bribing the Midwives (Oblaskawianie rodzanice) – a ritual three days after the child birth that was about “bribing” rodzanice (three female fate demons), so they would bless a new-born with a happy and prosperous life;

2. Cutting It Short (Postrzyżyny) – a ritual of ceremonial haircut of a child in a seventh year of his life. A child was becoming a fully-fledged family member and was receiving his proper name. Sons were passed under their fathers' protection. Children were beginning to learn from same-sex parents their everyday tasks (a future profession);

3. Werewolves (Wilkołaki) – an initiation ritual of the youth (probably only males between 12 and 15 years of age) practiced by dressing up in wolves' skins – symbols of strength and skill that were a testimony of the warriors' value;

4. Kupala Night (Noc Kupały) – an annual celebration of fertility related to the summer solstice. The initiative character of this ritual can be seen in its contents – allowing a young man to participate in a fertility rite (probably between 12 and 15 years of age) meant that he is ready to undertake a reproductive role;

5. Swacba (Swaćba) – a rite of wedding (until around the 18th year of age) which was connected (in a case of women) with a prohibition of any further participation in Kupala Night;

6. Funeral – a ritual of burial or holocaust of the dead. It was associated with a moment of leaving a body by the soul and beginning of an after death life – at least for some time amongst the living family and relatives;

7. Dziady – an annual feast to commemorate the dead. The initiative aspect of this ritual is evident in an uncertainty in regards to a place of dwelling of the soul of a dead person, which had to cross over an obstacle in a form of river so it could reach to Navia (the promised land of the dead). Each Dziady could be the last one for the soul before it left the earth or it could help her in this trip (Gieysztor, 2006; Szafranski, 1981; Szyjewski, 2010; Voytovych, 2002).

The analysis of the above rites of passage allowed distinguishing six stages of development experienced by a man in the Slavic world:

1. Childhood Stage (from birth/Bribing the Midwives – a period of remaining under mother’s protection, in which a child is not a fully-fledged family member (a child is called by a temporary name).

2. Family Participation Stage (from Cutting It Short) – a period of learning professional (craft) activities that were connected with child’s sex and social position of a family.

3. Warrior Stage/Maturity Stage (from Werewolves Ritual/access to Kupala Night) – a period in which a man is fully mature and ready for a sexual initiation and can fulfil parental roles, in a case of men also military functions;

4. Parental Stage (from Swaćba) – a period of getting into couples, procreating and bringing up the offspring, which is a beginning of the new developmental cycle for a new generation;

5. Afterlife Stage (from death/funeral) – a period characterised by lack of a physical presence, but a spiritual presence occurs in providing some assistance and support to the living family and relatives;

6. Existing Beyond Stage (from Dziady/crossing over to the other world) – a period in which does not exist anymore spiritual presence and all the interactions with the earthy world are finished.

Slavic Cognitive System. Distinctively Slavic perception of the reality has been preserved mainly in religious – mythological cultural contents, which belong to a cognitive system that is characteristic for an ethnic group and understood as “...a conglomerate of specific elements of knowledge matched using a similarity criterion, which allows an individual to understand surrounding him reality and processes occurring within in. It is developed through time by a particular society/social group and undergoes gradual changes in accordance with the cultural evolution” (Kośnik, 2014, p. 70). The understanding of explanatory ways of natural phenomena by the Slavs, and as a consequence also the Slavic mentality, is possible through accessing those cultural contents. Basic Slavic cognitive categories that have a significant explanatory power are: cosmology, pantheon and bestiary.

Preserved fairy tales and fables show that the early Slavs believed in a metaphysical dualism. As an example may serve a myth about being fished out, in which two antagonistically positioned supernatural beings (in a Christian version God and devil) must cooperate to be able to create the world by pulling it together out from the sea depths (Tomicka, Tomicki, 1985, p. 24-25). In the Slavic mentality ruled the principle of balance between two contradictory forces because domination of one of the antagonists was making impossible achieving the creation work. Similarly was with human procreation, which was not able to take place and finish with a success without the presence of a woman (symbolised by water) and a man (symbolised by fire).

An important element of the Slavic explanation of the reality was the world axis (*axis mundi*) presented usually as the Cosmic Tree (*arbor mundi*) (or world tree, world pillar, cosmic axis). It symbolised a connection between the sky (a sphere of god), the earth (a sphere of human) and the underworld (a sphere with the souls of the dead). The world axis was describing the reality structure through pointing at its division into three ontological levels that perform different functions. Moreover, it was explaining a matter of celestial bodies' movement (the Northern Star as a point on the axis) or after death life (the underground land – Navia as a place of man's residence after leaving from the world of the living).

Slavic deities constitute an essential element of the pre-Christian cognitive system with symbolic personifications of the world governing laws (Campbell, 2013, p. 217). Alongside less significant deities, three basic centres of spiritual force can be distinguished. First of them (and probably the most important) is Perun/Świętowit – he is the ruler of thunder and lightning that performed military functions and also provided people with fertility and prosperity (cornucopia) what shows his dualistic nature (life and death). Another deity is Veles who inhabits Navia – he is the care taker of the souls of the dead, magic, craft and art; in his competence was to provide prosperity to the people (understood rather pragmatically and materialistically in comparison with Perun). The triad of the main Slavic deities is closed by a fire-ruling Swaróg/Swarożyc – in his jurisdiction was the life-giving Sun and blacksmithing – a craft connected with fire (Gieysztor, 2006; Szyjewski, 2010).

In comparison to the other Indo-European areas, the Slavs can be proud of its exceptionally rich bestiary. It is a testimony for an important role of monsters and beasts in the Slavic cognitive system. Primary and the most obvious function of the creatures from the bestiary were to evoke a sense of fear amongst the people. Each creature was associated with a precise, assigned to it object, and as a consequence people were urged to avoid such an object. It is noticeable for instance in a case of water nymphs (*rusalki*) or water spirits/*vodniki* (*utopce*) that symbolise the danger of drowning associated with unknown, remote water reservoirs. Another interesting category of monsters are those that refer metaphorically to human fate. As examples may serve a woodland spirit (*borowy/leszy*), who was attacking or helping people that were wandering in forests depending on his mood (a symbol of change and unpredictability of fate), and also a forest spirit (*dobrochoczy*), who's behaviour depended on individual moral properties of a man, killing only wicked people (a symbol of the just fate). To creatures strongly connected with a human fate belonged also mentioned earlier, while discussing the rites of passage, midwifery spirits (*rodzanice*) who had the power to decide about a child's fate after birth (Kośnik, 2014).

Conclusions. Presented above insight into Slavic psychology is only a prelude to a more detailed and complete work on an indigenous conception of a man that is being prepared by the authors of this research project. Issues connected with indirect folk knowledge about affective processes and Slavic sexual practices, in relation to a contemporary psychological knowledge about them and quantitative approach to the Slavic nations, still wait to be analysed and interpreted. The final results of this project will be announced in a monography with a draft title “Slavic or Slavish Psychology”.

The map of knowledge about the Slavs contains many white spaces that exist due to the lack of historical sources. Hopefully, the picture will be completed thanks to interdisciplinary and international research that uses variety of perspectives and have access to different data. To understand one's ethnic past allows fuller apprehension of the present and effective shaping of the shared future. It will also enable the process of building local psychological knowledge (in a Geertz's sense), psychology or anthropological psychology, that is adequate in historical, cultural and personal aspects, and therefore able to precisely describe and reconstruct the world of experience of a human being that exists realistically in a given biographical context and in a specific system of references/cultural patterns. In a wider sense, the authors have an ambition to signalise an unrelenting need for real psychology, in other words for psychology of human life.

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