

**Grażyna Kubica. 2015. *Maria Czaplicka: Sex, Shamanism and Race. An Anthropological Biography*. Kraków<sup>1</sup>.**

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Grażyna Kubica's monograph, *Maria Czaplicka: Sex, Shamanism and Race. An Anthropological Biography* is unique in Polish anthropology. This anthropological biography of an scientist whose way of life and academic career did not follow the scripted path of success, is a pioneering work, which can be compared perhaps only with the *Sisters of Malinowski* penned by the same author (Kubica 2006).

Grażyna Kubica, in a lucid long-term research project, inoculates on Polish ground theoretical achievements and experiences developed in the Western history of anthropology, including innovative anthropological biographical writing. Her work on Maria Antonina Czaplicka (1884–1921) is set in very broad historical, social and cultural contexts, taking into account both the history of anthropology in its broadest sense (the history of ideas, concepts, institutions, key figures and their achievements), and complex issues of women-scholars' emancipation, the history of the circles where Czaplicka operated (Polish, British and Russian), and finally political history. It is a thoughtful and critical contextualization, expanding the limits of the biography far beyond a traditional account of the trajectory of a person's life; it takes on a universal dimension, it moves in a reader his or her personal strings and highlights the problems that are also very much on the map now. This is because the author applies contemporary anthropological questions to past contexts.

The deep methodological awareness of the author and her self-consciousness are an extremely valuable and inspiring side of the book. Chapter 1, "History of anthropology – the modern field of research" is an excellent theoretical introduction about the need for a reflexive history of anthropology and contains a critical discussion of the formative distinction between historicism and presentism. Kubica shows how biography and anthropology intertwine and condition each other; she argues for anthropological biographies to be perceived as anthropological data. She situates her own project – after

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Sally Cole – within a critical feminist history of anthropology, whose task is understood as the contemplation of theories to discover their concealed positions through a critical reading of women’s anthropological writing. Following this path, she argues that firstly, an understanding of the difficult existential situation of Maria Czaplicka as an anthropologist who was constantly threatened with marginalization and insecurity and secondly, an understanding of the circumstances behind the tragic end of her life and the fate of her papers, brings much more to the history of anthropology – and, more broadly, to the history of science – than limiting the research to the study of mainstream ideas, works and characters. In her approach, the anthropological biography turns into a new and extremely interesting genre of historical writing.

Throughout her musings the reader is accompanied by the undisguised author in a behind the scenes role. Grażyna Kubica reveals her “self” as a researcher: she recounts her motivations, objectives, weaves into her narrative a tale about the adventures of research, her search for sources, methodological difficulties and even comments upon the works of other authors about Czaplicka and corrects their mistakes. Both this continuous criticism of sources running parallel with the biographical story, closely intertwined with the personal perspective of the author, are evidence of her championing the credentials of the anthropologist and historian of anthropology.

The high level of Kubica’s professionalism is evident in her thoughtful way of contextualizing Czaplicka’s scientific biography, by giving an account of anthropological discussions on race, arctic hysteria, shamanism and the “third gender”. She critically reports them from the period of evolutionism to modern times and in her key argumentative points she discusses the ideas and findings of Czaplicka and their impact on the course of these discussions. By juxtaposing how carelessly many contemporary and later researchers have read the works of Czaplicka and how others have been inspired by her ideas, Kubica builds in the reader a conviction of the value of Czaplicka’s achievements, not only as a contribution to the history of anthropology, but also as a vivid work still open for today’s reading and new considerations based on it.

Extremely interesting are those parts of the book, which could constitute separate studies, but are woven into the context of the life and work of Maria Czaplicka giving them new unexpected dimensions while at the same time notably expanding further research perspectives. I want to draw particular attention, in this context, to the chapters on the origins of women’s participation in British academic institutions and organizations, and to Robert Marrett, a forgotten pre-functionalist, the author of observations and postulates formulated later by the functionalist revolution. Kubica’s view of Czaplicka’s book *My Siberian Year* as a work of ethnographic prose and her photographs through the prism of new approaches of visual anthropology are also very refreshing.

Grażyna Kubica’s monograph is the culmination of several years of arduous work on a biography of Czaplicka including as it does archival research in Poland, Great

Britain, USA and Russia, the many interviews she conducted and her time-consuming library queries (note extensive literature, mostly in English). Today, when the centenary of Maria Czaplicka's (famous and fascinatingly described by Kubica) expedition to Siberia has recently taken place, it is an extremely opportune moment that the book be published. I have no doubt that Grażyna Kubica's monograph marks a turning point in the Polish history of anthropology providing a new model to practice this sub-discipline. I am also convinced that in the future it will appear in English. *Maria Czaplicka: Sex, Shamanism and Race* is in fact a work, that is building bridges, not only between the history of Polish and British anthropology, but also between anthropologies here and now.

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