

TARZYCJUSZ BULIŃSKI  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7783-2268>

MARIUSZ KAIRSKI  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1031-5335>

University of Gdańsk

A brief history of Amazonian research in Polish anthropology¹

We can distinguish four distinct periods in the history of Polish anthropological (ethnological) studies of the Amazonian indigenous groups.

The first was the time of aficionados – several amateur researchers who focused on the Amazon area in the period spanning the end of the colonization era to the full-blown modernity (i.e. the 17th century up to the end of the world wars that marked the 20th century). During this long stretch of time Poles journeyed to the lowland South American areas in the Amazonian basin – most often they were military men, naturalists, engineers, quite often political immigrants, who apart from their professional endeavors were also involved in amateur observation and description of indigenous groups they met there (this was the case of e.g. Krzysztof Arciszewski, Jan Sztolcman, Tadeusz Chrostowski). Their letters, reports, journals and the very first collections of cultural artefacts they created can hardly amount to sound research data – they were indeed aficionados and not scientists. Such practices continued well after Poland regained its independence in 1918. In the interwar period (i.e. 1919–1939), the new scientific discipline called Ethnology was cultivated in five institutional centres, but in this initial period, these focused on peasant, national and ethnic cultures in Poland and in Europe. Polish researchers focusing on areas outside Europe were limited to very few scholars whose scientific careers developed outside Poland (e.g. Bronisław Malinowski, Maria A. Czaplicka). The indigenous groups inhabiting Amazonia were

¹ This text is based on excerpts from the research article: Buliński, T., Kairski, M. (2017). Polskie badania antropologiczne w Amazonii. *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia*, 3: 7–17.

then the topic to be explored by travel writers and not by Polish anthropology departments as such.

The second period (1945–1981) marked the beginning of Polish ethnological studies of Amazonia. These were first individual research projects carried out by individual scholars. Anna Kowalska-Lewicka turned out to be the trailblazer in this field, as during her 1947–1948 trip across South America she became the first Polish scholar to conduct short-term field research among the indigenous inhabitants of the Ucayali basin (mainly Shipibo). Along with the accompanying literature review, her study resulted in the first Polish PhD dissertation related to the Amazonian ethnology (Kowalska-Lewicka 1950). However, its anecdotal nature and the fact that the author later discontinued her research work on the Americas, limited its impact on the development on Amazonian studies within the Polish anthropology.

The scholar who made the most impactful contribution to the field was Borys Malkin, an anthropologist and entomologist, photographer, film maker and the collector of exhibits for museums in Poland and abroad. Educated within the American anthropological tradition under the supervision of Alfred L. Kroeber and Robert Lowie, he spent his entire professional career making research trips through which he explored the Amazon basin area. The main objective of those expeditions was to procure collections of indigenous material culture artefacts, entomological and herpetological exhibits, as well as to make descriptive, photographic and film records of the specific indigenous ways of life. In the period spanning 1957–1994, he managed to study 42 indigenous groups in South America and Mesoamerica, most of which, however, were the inhabitants of Amazonia. He often visited the same groups on several occasions, tracing material and social transformations over time. The collections he created, and their meticulous documentation are both absolutely unique in Poland, and outstanding internationally. They include nearly seventeen thousand objects representing material culture, c. forty thousand photographs and twenty-two documentaries (his naturalist collections comprise about one million specimens). Artefacts procured by Malkin are kept in forty museums around the world, with the biggest collections held by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary (Canada) and Museum der Kulturen in Basel (Switzerland). His contribution also consisted in shaping the first generation of Polish Amazonianist scholars by teaching them practical fieldwork skills, the principles of professional ethnological research documentation and artefact collections.

Malkin's contribution was essential for creating a template for fieldwork practice, but the theoretical framework for such research was developed by another figure – Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, an anthropologist and co-founder of the new turn of Polish Latin American studies in the 1970s (it involved an interdisciplinary group of scholars interested in the history and current issues related to indigenous groups inhabiting South America and the Latin America's state societies, see Buliński, Kairski 2013–2014). The turn, which was inspired, among others, by the work of Maria Rostworowska (María Rostworowski Tovar de Diez Canseco) and Maria Frankowska, brought about new conceptualizations of pre-Columbian

cultures (Jan Szemiński, Mariusz Ziółkowski), as well as colonial and contemporary indigenous social movements (Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, Ryszard Tomicki). It also provided a powerful impulse for the development of archeological, anthropological, political and geographical studies of the New World (for the review of specific individual contributions and topics see: Buliński, Kairski, Ziółkowski 2013–2014). However, Latin American studies focused mainly on the indigenous peasant societies inhabiting the areas that used to be part of pre-Hispanic empires, overlooking the lowland areas of South America. Early studies by Posern-Zieliński, exploring indigenous social and religious movements in the period spanning the 16th to 20th centuries were an exception – one third of his PhD dissertation was based on these studies and addressed the transformations experienced by the Amazonian peoples in Ecuador, Peru and Brazil (Posern-Zieliński 1973; when published as a monograph, the study did not include most of his Amazon-related material). It was his analysis (see e.g. Posern-Zieliński 1978, 1980) that became the key reference for the first generation of Polish anthropologists working in Amazonia, providing them with the model for establishing the theoretical framework enabling the analysis of their ethnographic and historical data.

The third period was marked by field expeditions to Amazonia (1981–1999) by the young ethnologists inspired by Aleksander Posern-Zieliński and Borys Malkin, most of whom were students at the Ethnology Department of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. In organizing anthropological fieldtrips to work with the indigenous groups in Amazonia these graduate students followed the model of field research developed in the 1970s and 1980s, that was then standard in Poland, i.e. research conducted by groups of researchers, spanning several months and preceded by long-term review of available scientific literature, as well as practical logistic and financial preparations. The first such expedition of Polish graduate ethnologists, under the code-name “Amped 81”, was organized to the Venezuelan and Colombian Amazon in 1981 and included ethnologists (Mariusz Kairski, Janusz Jaskulski, Jerzy Stankiewicz, Marlena Antczak and Andrzej Antczak), the interpreter Iwona Stoińska-Kairska and the camera operator Cezary Jaworski. Out of this first expedition there emerged a research group led by Mariusz Kairski and Iwona Stoińska-Kairska, later joined by Marek Wołodźka (Kinga Nemere and Magdalena Krysińska-Kałużna also joined one of their expeditions). Until 1999, the group had completed numerous ethnological field expeditions to Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador.

Their fieldwork mostly focused on the E'ñepá (Panare) in the Venezuelan Amazonia (7 fieldtrips over the period 1981–1999), but they were also involved in comparative studies or the so-called urgent ethnology research among the Cofán in Colombia and Waorani in Ecuador. Their research findings were presented in Master dissertations (unpublished: Stankiewicz 1983; Kairski 1985; Jaskulski 1985), research reports commissioned by the *Centro para la Investigación y el Desarrollo de los Movimientos Sociales del Ecuador* in Quito (Kairski, Stoińska 1984, 1995; Kairski 1996) and as a series of museum collections. Their key focus was issues related to cultural ecology, contemporary cultural status of specific indigenous

groups (E'ñepá, Waorani, Cofán) and a general overview of the anthropological knowledge related to the indigenous inhabitants of South America and Mesoamerica (Kairski 1998a, 1998b). As a natural consequence, these expeditions sparked the development of research scholarships funded by Polish or international funding bodies (UCV, Caracas, CEDIME, Quito, AIDSESP, Lima). It should perhaps be mentioned that the core members of the original research group continued their research activities in the area for over two decades. In that period, Mariusz Kairski (2008–2009, 2018) and Iwona Stoińska-Kairska, focused on ethnohistory, identity, the concepts of time and space and the language of the E'ñepá in Venezuela, while Marek Wołodźko made research trips to the Bora in Peru (2009–2017). This circle of scholars constituted the first generation of the Polish anthropologists specializing in Amazonia.

The fourth period (2000–2019) has been characterized by numerous field research projects by individual scholars or small research groups, mostly involving relatively short-term, multiple visits to the field, usually spanning several months, but also included some long-term research projects involving fieldwork lasting over a year and a half. Most of the researchers belonging to this cohort have background in ethnology, having graduated from the University in Poznań, under the watchful eye of Aleksander Posern-Zieliński and Mariusz Kairski. However, among these fieldworkers there have also been scholars from Łódź, Cracow and Gdańsk. Overall, this group of eleven anthropologists constitute the second generation of Polish Amazonianists.

The first member of that cohort is Tarzycjusz Buliński, who together with Mariusz Kairski conducted research among the E'ñepá in Venezuela (2001–2009). His work focuses on the status and role of school in the life of indigenous communities, and in particular on the way in which school is included in the indigenous processes of social reproduction (Buliński, Kairski 2007; Buliński 2010–2011, 2017, 2019). Another Amazonianist scholar from this group is Kacper Świerk, who has worked among the Matsigenka of the Urubamba basin (2001–2003, 2019) and the Wampis (Huambisa) inhabiting the Santiago and Morona basin (2004–2011). His work focuses on ethnozoology and cultural transformation resulting from the involvement of the indigenous group with the wider state society, and in particular on the relationship between specific sectors of the indigenous society that have for generations been involved in the non-indigenous world and the sectors that have been minimally involved or are currently uninvolved in it (Świerk 2007a, 2013–2014, 2020). The third important member of the Amazonianist cohort is Filip Rogalski, who has conducted research among the Arabela in Peru (2003–2009), focusing on the indigenous concept of agency manifested in both physical and symbolic action, especially involving agency-related stories and the forms in which it agency is being expressed (Rogalski 2016; Rogalski at al. 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). The fourth scholar is Marta Krokoszyńska, who has conducted research in the lower Ucayali river area (2005–2018). Her research interests initially involved isolated groups and the history of ethnonyms in that region, and later developed into long-term ethnographic research among the descendants

of the Capanahua inhabiting the Tapiche river area, focusing on the perception of cultural change in the context of local theories of kinship. She then conducted research on the local conceptualization of modernity in the mestizo city of Requena and the historical study of the Polish colony located on the Ucayali (Krokoszyńska 2008, 2015, 2019; Krokoszyńska, Fleck 2016). The group also includes Paweł Chyc, who has worked in Bolivia among the Moré inhabiting the banks of the Guaporé river (2008–2019). His research focuses on the process of cultural change resulting from big and small-scale government projects which in the past were to assimilate indigenous peoples within the wider state society, and which now affirm and promote indigenous culture in its own terms and in line with indigenous people's aspirations.

The Ethnology department in Poznań was also the *alma mater* of two other scholars who used to do their fieldwork in Amazonia, but later discontinued their scientific career or changed their research interests – Alicja Pasek (1999, 2008) and Ewa Prądkońska, who worked among the Yabarana and the Pemón in Venezuela, and Cofán in Ecuador focusing on funerary practices and conceptualization of death among the people belonging to the Caribbean language family, as well as Magdalena Ziółkowska-Kuflńska (1999), who researched the status and role of women among the the Chácobo of Bolivia.

We should also mention the Amazonianist anthropologists Monika Kujawska and Joanna Sosnowska, who for years have been working in the Tambo river area in Peru, conducting comparative research focusing on ethnobotanics and ethno-ecology of the Asháninka and the local peasant population representing the wider Peruvian society (Sosnowska, Kujawska 2014; Sosnowska et al. 2015; Kujawska 2019; Kujawska et al. 2019). The last (but certainly not least) member of the group is Aleksandra Wierucka, the scholar focusing on the Ecuadorian Huaorani and the Napo Quichua. Her research interest include identity, ethno-history and the strategies of inclusion in the non-indigenous world adopted by these groups (Wierucka 2012, 2013–2014, 2015, 2018).

The work by the second generation Polish Amazonianist scholars can be characterized by describing it three distinct aspects. First, they seem to represent a coherent theoretical perspective and research orientation. Most focus on the indigenous identity practices and social reproduction, using the insights developed within the Amazonian Studies worldwide (by scholars such as Philippe Descola, Anne-Christine Taylor, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Peter Gow, Carlos Fausto, Aparecida Vilaça and others). Their research was presented as habilitation theses (e.g. Buliński 2018), PhD dissertations (Ziółkowska-Kuflńska 2005; Świerk 2007b; Krysińska-Kałużna 2008; Pasek-Smith 2008; Rogalski 2015), including one supervised by Professor Peter Gow at the University of St Andrews (Krokoszyńska 2016).

Secondly, an important aspect of their research work is its urgent anthropology dimension, related to the determination and recognition of indigenous land rights (in many cases for groups isolating from the national society). Second-generation Polish Amazonianists have been actively involved in this work, creating a series

of reports, e.g. based on the research conducted in the Yavari Mirím river area (Chyc et al. 2009), Sierra del Divisor (Krokoszyńska et al. 2006–2007), the Kampankis mountains (Rogalski et al. 2005), the Arabela and Aushiri rivers (Rogalski, Wołodźko 2003; Krokoszyńska et al. 2009), in the Paquiría river basin (Świerk 2001a, 2002, 2004) – all of which are located in eastern Peru.

Thirdly, these scholars have also been involved in translating Amazonia-related research into Polish, the effort due to which, over the last two decades, Polish readers could become acquainted with many major works in this field. One of the significant translation projects was an anthology of the key texts related to the phenomenon of warfare among indigenous Amazonian groups (Buliński, Kairski 2006) – the volume includes translations of text by David Gross (2006), Marvin Harris (2006), Napoleon Chagnon (2006), Brian Ferguson (2006), Neil Whitehead (2006), Joanna Overing (2006), Phillipe Descola (2006), Anne-Christine Taylor (2006), Carlos Fausto (2006) and Aparecida Vilaça (2006). Relevant Polish-language translations also include work by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2000, 2013, 2017) and research reports on the isolated indigenous groups (Michael 2001, 2002).

Today, as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first graduate ethnological field trip to Amazonia, we can conclude that Polish anthropological research focusing on Amazonia is a dynamically developing field capable of making a contribution to the Amazonian Studies worldwide.

Transl. Katarzyna Byłtów

AMAZONIAN RESEARCH IN POLISH ANTHROPOLOGY (IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH)

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SUMMARY

A brief history of Amazonian research in Polish anthropology

In this short article we describe the history of Polish anthropological research in Amazonia, comprising four distinct periods: 1) the work of Polish Amazonia aficionados, 2) the trailblazers, 3) the first generation of Amazonianist scholars, and 4) the research conducted by the second-generation Polish Amazonianists. The text also includes an exhaustive list of research publications, dissertations and translations by Polish scholars belonging to that group.

Keywords: Amazonian research, Polish anthropology, history of anthropology