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Introducing the New Evolutionary Paradigm in Anthropology

At the opening of this number of Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology, I must say I am very glad we had chosen evolutionary psychology and cognitive science as the focus of this edition. Not necessarily because this focus is in line with my own recent research, but primarily because this gesture reflects an ongoing desire in ethnology and anthropology in Serbia to constantly renovate itself – which is often taken to be the key asset of our *métier*. The specific idea for this issue occurred during one of my visits back "home" to Belgrade, while I was spending a year of my doctoral studies as a OSI/FCO Chevening scholar at the University of Oxford, UK. Chatting at the Institute of Ethnography with Mrs. Dragana Antonijević, Editor-in-Chief of the journal, I had mentioned the paradigm that I was getting acquainted with at Oxford – evolutionary psychology. She immediately suggested dedicating a special issue to this topic, and offered me to serve as Guest Editor, which I was – and still am – both happy and grateful to accept.

Upon return to Oxford, I spoke to my supervisor, Professor Harvey Whitehouse, as well as Professor Robin Dunbar, who had previously been kind enough to discuss my thesis. Both gentlemen agreed to submit their papers for this edition, and those you will find at the beginning. Professor Whitehouse contributed a chapter on the evolution of belief systems, while Professor Dunbar submitted a paper based on a brilliant lecture of his I was lucky to attend, with the title "Dunbar's Number". Another Oxford colleague and fellow post-graduate student, Jonathan Lanman, was kind enough to lend a part of his doctoral dissertation to further the international side of the journal.

Next, of course, we came to the local ground. Among anthropologists in Serbia, Jelena Čvorović of the Institute of Ethnography had been the only one who had at times relied on the methodology and interpretive framework of evolutionary psychology; however, she had regrettably chosen not to contribute to this issue. Instead, looking a bit into the neighbouring disciplines, we soon discovered that archaeology had to offer a developed version of this paradigm – which you will find in the paper by Aleksandar Palavestra and Marko Porčić. Finally, my own paper is concerned with the ways in which evolutionary and cognitive anthropology may be linked to the theories of so-

cial reproduction in explaining the construction of contemporary concepts of romantic relationships.

As any other approach in the social sciences, evolutionary psychology and/or cognitive science have developed in many directions, and are thus hard to introduce briefly. Therefore, the papers in this issue have been selected so as to reflect, to a certain extent, the variety of the paradigm (or paradigms). For this reason, the reader may at first even find it hard to extract a single theoretical, epistemological, or methodological framework subsuming them all. There may even be no such framework. I'd rather say that the present text are unified in the sense of presenting a departure from "classical" anthropological (or archaeological) approaches, at least those we are used to encountering in journals in Serbia and Balkans as well.

Why evolutionary psychology now? There is a number of answers to this question. The first and the most obvious one is that this approach is, and, for some years now, has consistently been, gaining prominence in the anthropological circles. Of course, I am not talking about "evolutionary" approaches in any classical sense: not the once canonical writings of Tylor and Fraser; not the Social Darwinism that was at times (wrongly) inferred from them; much less even the sociobiological radicalization of the arguments. Nor, again, what is in anthropological traditions of the Balkans commonly associated with psychology – "characterological" approaches, or ethnopsychology. All of the above have been profoundly and rightly criticized. However, what I hope the present papers will convey are theoretical, methodological and/or interpretive tendencies that are more inclined towards cognitive science than "psychology" in the general sense.

Herein lies the second reason for the choice of this paradigm: I believe there is a general lack of understanding as to what "evolutionary psychology" actually means, and this can be a source of many misunderstandings and conflicts between its supporters and opponents. However, I am not trying to conceal that the motivation for evolutionary psychology as a framework of this issue largely came from its controversial potential, and ability to generate discussion. But, having been involved in both education and debate ever since I begun doing anthropology, and increasingly now since I stopped – I know and believe that constructive discussion and meaningful debate requires participants to know very well what they are talking about.

Hence, the final goal of this collection of papers was to inform and educate, to present a style of thinking that may already be observed with distrust and contempt, in hope that it might contribute to making anthropology in Serbia more open and flexible – which is something a study of human beings and their behavior should never cease to be. Regardless of the potential for controversy evolutionary psychology seems to carry, its presentation on the "home ground" represents a sign that ethnology and anthropology in Serbia

are remaining open and willing to adopt new perspectives. And this is no small thing, especially not in an academic community where many people still refuse to take into consideration any and all anthropological paradigms that have mushroomed since the 1960s. The endeavor that resulted in the issue of the *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* that is now in front of you, then, hopes to be a small change of direction.

In Belgrade, November 2008.