Editorial: A half-century of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*: Time for (another) evaluation

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In February 1967 eleven Scandinavian scholars participated in a four-day symposium held in the Hotel Norge in Bergen, organized by Fredrik Barth. The outcome of this meeting was a volume published two years later that included seven adapted papers from the symposium, complemented by an introduction by Barth as editor. At the time of its publication, none of the contributors could anticipate how successful it would become.

Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference (Barth 1969a) is today generally acknowledged as an essential contribution in the area of ethnicity studies and one of the best known anthropological books outside the discipline. The work has been widely read, discussed and quoted in the social sciences. Its reputation as a key text was confirmed when a symposium was held in its honour in Amsterdam in 1994, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of its publication. Like its predecessor the outcome was another edited volume, *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries"* (Vermeulen-Govers 1994).

Since then another quarter of a century has passed in which the influence of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* has only been confirmed. Fifty years old this year, it has now become an unquestionable classic. However, classic works are very often honoured and cited – quotations being almost obligatory – but frequently these are only symbolic acts. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* has suffered a similar fate (see Jakoubek 2019). For these reasons and so that the volume does not become simply a mandatory item in bibliographies, it is necessary, from time to time, to reassess its content, relevance and impact. It is essential to reflect on its legacy and what it offers to a contemporary reader. Once in a quarter of a century seems a reasonable period for this task. We wish to thank the editors of *Anthropological Notebooks* for enabling the appearance of this special anniversary issue.

In the first contribution to this volume, *Ethnicity and the boundaries of ethnic studies,* the guest-editors adopt a rather unusual approach towards *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Marek Jakoubek and Lenka J. Budilová do not take it as their point of de-

parture but as their subject matter. For them, its renown and success constitute a research problem, a question to be answered. They look back at the time when *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was published and assess it in this historical context, that is they attempt to consider it through the eyes of its contemporaries. This procedure leads them to several unexpected findings. Early reviews and commentaries suggest that the undisputed and taken for granted status of the book as a ground-breaking enterprise was not such an obvious and indisputable fact to scholars and researchers of the period. More than a few voices claimed that there was little in the volume that was really novel or that had not appeared earlier in the work of other authors. Contrary to what we might have expected, the book gained only gradual and delayed acceptance, particularly in the USA. Moreover, it was never reviewed in any of the principal academic journals. Bearing in mind the central position of Barth's "Introduction" in the study of ethnicity, it also comes as a surprise to learn that Barth does not once use the term "ethnicity". This is all the more striking given that this term was already in common use, both in the USA and in the UK. By pointing to these and other not so well known (or already forgotten) connections, the authors in no way intend to say that *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* does not deserve the attention paid to it. Instead they seek to understand this attention not as an undeniable fact, but as something that needs reflection and study; at least every 25 years.

The author of the next contribution *The Epistemological Status of the Concept of Ethnicity* is the old stager of the ethnic studies, the author of many important texts on the topic (2000; 2001; 1993) and the author of Fredrik Barth's intellectual biography (Eriksen 2015), Thomas Hylland Eriksen. The contribution has an exceptional position with regards to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Originally, Eriksen gave this text as a paper at the event organised to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* in Amsterdam (see above). However, being just a paper in one of the panels, the text did not appear in the subsequent volume (Vermeulen-Govers 1994), which only contained the keynote presentations; its electronic copy found refuge at Eriksen's personal website for many years. There are other remarkable connections – the online version of the text included a reference to the Amsterdam symposium, but also to the (presumed) place of publication: 'Published in *Anthropological Notebooks* (Ljubljana, Slovenia) in 1996'; the reference showed that the essay was published in *this* journal. It was a mistake, and it is difficult to identify the causes. One way or the other, by publishing this paper in the special issue of *Anthropological Notebooks* devoted to the fiftieth anniversary of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* we put all previous mistakes and errors right and present the text to the reader in the form it deserves.

Eriksen focuses on the epistemological level and treats "ethnicity" as a *concept*. Using a comparative perspective, Eriksen shows the specific aspects and both the strengths and weaknesses of selected approaches to the study of ethnicity (from the naturalistic approach advocated – in his view – by Barth, through Cohen's structural-functional and Epstein's mentalistic perspectives, the constructivism of e.g., Roosens, to the historicising approach represented by the Comaroffs and Peel). The text thus offers the introduction to the main strands of conceptualising "ethnicity", beginning with Barth. It is this relocation of the ethnicity question to the conceptual level that enables Eriksen to show that most

disputes over the definition of ethnicity spring from the (methodologically incorrect) essentialist assumption that ethnicity is a "natural phenomenon", that is, that ethnicity *is* in the strong sense of the word. Therefore – Eriksen concludes – 'The question should not … be framed as 'what is ethnicity', but rather as how can we most fruitfully conceptualise "ethnicity?"' (Eriksen in this volume: 35).

The author of the third essay is Jonathan Y. Okamura. This scholar has ranked among the classic authors of ethnic studies since 1981 with his study entitled *Situational Ethnicity* (Okamura 1981). The text, part of the "golden assets" of ethnic studies, is 'a review and synthesis of the ideas of a number of social anthropologists who have all explicitly *emphasised the relevance of social situations for the analysis of ethnicity and ethnic relations'* (Okamura 1981: 452; emphasis added). The basis of the situational approach to ethnicity is formed by the assumption of 'the variable significance of ethnicity in structuring social relations', that is, the fact that ethnicity 'may be of critical relevance in some situations, while in others it may be totally irrelevant' (ibid.: 460). This conceptualisation follows Barth in one important respect – in his emphasis on *self-ascription* and how the *actor himself* perceives and experiences ethnic difference.

Contrary to Barth to some degree, Okamura's situational perspective avoids the trap of the notion that it is mainly or even exclusively the actor who voluntarily chooses his ethnic identity, and he also considers macroscopic (political, economic, etc.) structures shaping the limits of actor's choices and possibilities to act. Okamura's concept of situational ethnicity thus contains *two* fundamental aspects – *structural* and *cognitive*. The structural dimension corresponds to the *constraints* resulting from the overall ("objective") structure of ethnic relations in a society, which are encountered by actors in social situations (Ibid. 453–4). The cognitive dimension "pertains to the actor's *subjective perception of the situation* in which he finds himself and to the salience he attributes to ethnicity as a relevant factor in that situation" (ibid.: 454; emphasis added). We must note that Okamura's emphasis on *both* dimensions – on actor's *choices* and their (macro) structural *limits* – is, to a large extent, his own original contribution to the situational concept of ethnicity, which otherwise tends to give strong (and even exclusive) priority to either accenting or suppressing ethnic identity by actors. Okamura develops the central (and in principle definitional) situational line of interpretation and complements it with its necessary analytical opposite. However, the key situational assumption that *the relevance of ethnicity is situationally determined* remains unchanged.

Okamura's essay in this volume entitled *What about Racial Groups and Boundaries (and Race and Racism)?* can be read as a critical revision of both Barth's *Introduction* and his own 1981 text. According to Okamura, both works suffer from the same important shortcoming; they underestimate (the significance of) race and racism. In his view, race is 'associated with phenotype' and it is, as a signifier of identity 'much less changeable' than ethnicity (Okamura in this volume: 42–3). Being embedded in bodies ("phenotypic stuff"), racial boundaries are 'much harder to cross,' as is the possibility 'to switch racial identity' (ibid.: 43). Even cultural assimilation, as Okamura points out, 'more often than not, does not result in racial boundary crossing' (ibid.: 44). Barth's text and the whole *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* concentrate mainly on – as retrospectively acknowledged

by Barth – 'persons who *change* their ethnic identity' (Barth 1994: 11, emphasis in original), and so it does not offer a suitable interpretation paradigm for the question of race and racism. Moreover, since 'race, rather than ethnicity, is the dominant principle of social organization in many societies' (ibid.: 38), the applicability of Barth's paradigm is far from universal. As an example of a society where it is race instead of ethnicity that constitutes the dominant boundaries, Okamura presents his homeland – Hawai'i, and focuses on a case of a recently immigrating group to the islands, Micronesians. Okamura shows that both Barth's text and his own 1981 study should be supplemented by a complementary work, *Racial Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Phenotypic Difference* (ibid.: 37). Okamura does not present such a book yet, but he clearly sets key pillars for such work.

The fourth paper *Ethnic indifference – Fredrik Barth's conceptual blind spot*, written by Marek Jakoubek, introduces the reader to the Balkans, to the northwest Bulgaria of the first half of the twentieth century. The question he attempts to answer is: why did members of two religious communities which were extremely endogamous (by the religious principle) – Protestants from Voyvodovo and Catholics from Bărdarski Geran – intermarry? In the first part, Jakoubek shows that although the two communities were divided by confession, they were united (and at the same time distinguished from the surrounding communities) by faith – true, genuine faith (and the life lived accordingly). He shows that the communities were ethnically indifferent, that is, these were groups in which the us-them dichotomisation did not take place on the ethnic level, and whose members identified themselves primarily in non-ethnical terms: its main principle of belonging and its boundaries were not *ethnic*, but *religious*.

Jakoubek argues that the ethnically indifferent identities of the members of the two groups (and the concept of ethnic indifference as such) are the antithesis to Barth's influential notion of ethnicity. Barth defines ethnic categories mainly formally as empty "organisational vessels", which are not only constant and universal but also paramount – for Barth, ethnic identity is an identity superior to all other identities. Also, Barth understands ethnicity as an analytically defined domain; whether it is recognised as a separate domain by investigated societies is of no concern for him. As such, Barth's (ethnic) conceptual framework is unable to comprehend ethnic indifference. Ethnically indifferent groups and identities are, so to say, in Barth's conceptual blind spot. This, however, is not to say that Barth's approach is wrong; it is only inappropriate to the analysis of certain phenomena and processes. Thus, Barth's concept of ethnicity is not universally valid; it is a partial and particular concept, and in certain cases, we must complement it or even substitute it with other approaches.

The fifth contribution is *Nation and national identity as a boundary: English, British and the European Union* by Steve Fenton and Robin Mann. The well-coordinated team have already published on the question of ethnicity and nationalism (cf. Mann-Fenton 2017). In this context, it seems appropriate to mention also Fenton's individual work *Ethnicity* (2003), which ranks among popular introductions to ethnic studies.

Fenton and Mann start from the assumption that Barth's model of identities and ethnic boundaries can be applied to a wide-range of non-ethnic identities, especially na-

tional identity, which is their primary concern. They consequently analyse popular understandings of English identity and the construction of the national boundary among the non-elite interviewees from southern England. Their research on "class resentment and national identity" was carried out between 2004 and 2009. Since then, the United Kingdom witnessed several political events, in particular, the Scottish Independence Referendum (2014), or the EU Membership Referendum (2016) that have brought to the fore indigenous conceptualisations of nationhood. The authors argue that the Leave campaign in 2016 Referendum successfully connected to these popular understandings and achieved resonance with them.

Fenton and Mann, in their attempt to take seriously non-elite views of the nation, explore how people talk about their expectations, everyday lives, or material concerns and try to uncover their concept of nationhood. They show how the actors themselves make discursive connections between nation and various everyday situations, and how references to these situations intersect with historical and political ideas of the nation. They conclude that 'popular, non-elite talk of the nation is far from trivial and can contain themes with a historical and political meaning' (Fenton and Mann in this volume: 91). There is an interplay between political themes (self-governing, independence, or border control), historical ideas (nostalgia about empire), and day-to-day concerns (holidays or pensions). They suggest that the knowledge of these popular attitudes was used in the Leave campaign in the 2016 referendum.

The next contributor, Alenka Janko Spreizer also takes up Barth's emphasis on boundaries and boundary maintenance. In her contribution *National State Borders and Ethnic Boundaries in Istria and the North East Adriatic*, she analyses ethnic, cultural and symbolic boundaries in a micro-region within the Mediterranean area or Istria, a peninsula in the north Adriatic, geopolitically divided among Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, that is conceptualised as a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual region. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, many political boundaries were redrawn, and the aim of Janko Spreizer's paper is to explore several processes of social, cultural, political and linguistic 'boundary-making and boundary-breaking' that started in Istria. Janko Spreizer explores how anthropological, geographic and historical discourses within the border zone in the North or the Upper Adriatic and Istria are constructed.

Epistemologically influenced by border anthropology (Ballinger 2003, 2004), anthropology of the Mediterranean (Baskar 2002; Frykman 1999; Rihtman Auguštin 1999) and anthropology of ethnicity and nationalism (Eriksen 1993; Knežević Hočevar 1999; Šumi 2000), Janko Spreizer reveals the conflict over the land and maritime border zones in the Slovenian coastal area and the Bay of Piran, where the border issue is a subject of long-running processes of international and transnational negotiations, which have also led to international arbitrage. Through her long-term fieldwork and conversations with locals, Janko Spreizer was able to learn their notions of Istrian-ness and multiculturality, diversity, hybridity, and marginality, which is the result of multiple migrations and movements of people who came to this territory.

Over the past half-century, Will Guy has written extensively about issues related to Roma, otherwise known as Gypsies. In his contribution to this volume, *Roma as Ethnic*

Group, Nation or Others' Construct: The relevance of Fredrik Barth, he highlights how the ground-breaking publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969a) transformed the earlier commonly accepted way of conceptualising Roma people. This was articulated most clearly in Clébert's *Les Tsiganes* (1961), which generalised from the most common cultural pattern prevalent in Western Europe by insisting that the 'Gypsy is primarily and above else a nomad' (Clébert 1967: 246).

This essentialist stance, treating nomadism as a defining characteristic of Gypsies, resulted in denying that the much larger, long-settled Roma inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe were "authentic Gypsies". Likewise the belief that nomadism was a fundamental characteristic of all Roma led to misapprehension among policymakers and politicians when Roma began to migrate westwards after the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

Barth's contrasting perspective involved adopting people's own subjective views of their identity. In his words 'the [cultural] features that are taken into account are not the sum of "objective" differences but only those that the actors themselves regard as significant' (Barth 1969b: 14). This approach explained how specific population groups with highly varied cultural patterns, such as Roma, might nevertheless be regarded as sharing a common identity.

Earlier there had been similar discussions between theorists of nationalism, some of whom argued that would-be nations were often constructed from disparate groups. These debates are relevant to attempts by Roma activists to promote inclusive nationalism, starting in modern times with the first World Romani Congress in 1971. Although post-Communist governments in Eastern Europe reversed their Communist predecessors' refusal to grant national minority status to their Roma populations, these were only token concessions and offered Roma little protection from severe unemployment, growing impoverishment, and racist attacks (Guy 2017).

Whether very different Roma communities can be justifiably seen as a single ethnic group or even a nation, is still a highly contested issue. Some see little prospect of such an outcome while others argue that this remains a possibility.

In his contribution *After Barth: The Mexican Calós's lived identity*, David Lagunas is developing Barth's focus on boundaries by analysing the ways cultural identity is constructed among the Mexican Calós. The author attempts to show interconnections between the Mexican Calós cultural identity and the ways in which diverse notions of modernity are constructed among different Calós communities, whom the author had previously ethnographed. Author's analysis is thus based on his long-term preoccupation with various Gitano communities and fieldwork he had conducted among the Catalan as well as among the Andalusian Calós. Their sociocultural constructions of modernity represent improved ways for the incorporation of these communities into different societies. The contexts in which modernity is articulated differ, so the temporal unity that is proposed when the Catalan Calós speak of "being modern", the Andalusian Calós of "being authentic" or the Mexican Calós refer to what they became, as a group "more advanced and cosmopolitan" with respect to the other Gypsies and the Payos, should not be taken for granted. The real and pragmatic practices of complex negotiations and crossings of

borders that the Mexican Calós put into play reflect their commitment with history and open possibilities, and these practices are much more non-systematic than the generative model of Barth. Cultural identity – like all identity – is not natural and it cannot be anything other than invented and constructed. David Lagunas proposes the concept of lived identity, comprising the very life of the Mexican Calós, their love of their time and space, and the respect to their ancestors. This lived identity, according to Lagunas, comprises a set of elements such as values, tradition, beliefs, biological self-perpetuation or feeling of belonging, which are similar, although not exactly the same, to ethnic identity according to Barth.

The chapter by Petra Lupták Burzová entitled *Standard workers are from here, normal people: Ethnoracial closure and industrial organisation of cheap labour in the Czech Republic* discusses ethnoracial boundaries within the context of flexible production in the Czech city of Pilsen. She focuses on the conditions for the contemporary constitution of "ethnoracial subjectivities" within this particular context. Contrary to Barth, Lupták Burzová examines the "cultural stuff" of ethnoracial distancing, and she views "ethnic boundaries" rather as products of the former. Within the context under study, the fixing of definitions of the standard, well-behaved, economically productive Czech citizen produces the radical Other, 'the Roma' or the 'Bulgarian worker' whose otherness – as well as the definition of the 'normal Czech' – are further anchored by racialisation. This leads to social closure that might be perceived as natural and self-reproducing.

Petra Lupták Burzová shows that migrant workers hired by agencies to fill vacancies in the unskilled job market to satisfy the needs of assembly plants and flexible production have limited possibilities to integrate into the society – it is only through accepting their racialised otherness that they are allowed to leave their segregated place of unskilled work and dormitories. The author concludes with a suggestion that perhaps the boundary metaphor could be replaced – at least in these contexts – by ghetto or camp.

The concluding contribution of the volume is the interview with Prof. Thomas Hylland Eriksen titled *The magic of anthropology* conducted by the guest editors of this volume, Marek Jakoubek and Lenka J. Budilová. The interview revolves around the significance of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* for the social sciences in the previous half-century and the influence of Fredrik Barth on Scandinavian and world anthropology. As a person in decades-long close contact with Fredrik Barth and an author of Barth's intellectual biography (Eriksen 2015), Thomas Eriksen plays a role of a kind of proxy of the famous editor of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. In the final part of the interview, Eriksen evaluates the key moments of the development of the concept of ethnicity in the years following the publishing of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* and comments on his contribution to ethnicity studies.

Acknowledgements

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