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Research article

Fredrik Barth's Saxon ancestor and anthropology of Europe

Marek Jakoubek, University of Hradec Králové, ORCID: 0000-0001-7235-5327

Abstract

Fredrik Barth, the editor of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), was a descendant of a Saxon. This means that the act of crossing the ethnic boundary and the change of ethnic membership – structurally the same as in an iconic case described by Haaland when Fur became Baggara – happened in his own ancestral family, amidst Norwegian society. Barth's own ancestry thus contained potentially all that was necessary for analyses of the kind that form the core of the paradigm-shifting work of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Barth and other authors of the volume, however, based their theoretical model of ethnic groups and relations on materials from faraway, typically non-Western societies, and thus confirmed anthropology as a science of exotic groups and peoples. By placing the venues of trans/formation of ethnic identities into exotic locales, the volume also conduced to "exoticization" of these processes. As a consequence, the volume contributed to dismissing of Europe as a proper place for anthropological fieldwork and discriminating against the anthropology Europe as a relevant discourse. The author tries to decolonize social anthropology and promote the anthropology of Europe, by pointing out to the fact that the same phenomena may have been observed in Europe, in the very societies and strata, of which anthropologist are a part.

KEYWORDS: ethnicity, ethnic groups, Fredrik Barth, anthropology of Europe

Prologue: Norwegian Fredrik Barth and his Saxon predecessors

In the very first sentence of his intellectual biography of Fredrik Barth, Thomas Hylland Eriksen writes that "The first Barth on Norwegian soil was a mining engineer from Saxony" (Eriksen, 2015, p. 3).[1] Thus, perhaps the most renowned Norwegian anthropologist

[1] Although "Barth" is a German name, it is not rare in Norway, and it is not (any more) perceived as foreign in origin.

is a descendant of a Saxon; nothing surprising within the context of Norwegian history. The statement—or more precisely the phenomena and processes it refers to (i.e. a change of ethnic identity)—contains potentially all that is necessary for analyses and conclusions of the kind that form the core of Barth's most well-known work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. The *Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Barth, 1969a), whose main conceptual theme is precisely the change of ethnic identity. Yet neither the author of the sentence, T. H. Eriksen, nor the readers paid virtually any attention to the fact. As Eriksen admits, even Fredrik Barth himself did not pay attention to it (Eriksen in Jakoubek & Budilová, 2019a, p. 171-172). Ignorance of the statement and the facts to which it refers can be viewed as very important. In fact, overlooking the referred phenomena and processes is not a mistake, it is, rather, an expression of a relatively clear and stable approach, and it (therefore) says something very fundamental about social anthropology, and particularly about the anthropology of Europe, its character, orientation, and mainly about the status of this subdiscipline within the broader disciplinary context.[2]

Ethnic Groups and Boundaries - how it began

On February 23-26, 1967 in Hotel Norge in Bergen, eleven Scandinavian scholars participated in the symposium organised by Fredrik Barth and funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation. The output of this event was that two years later, in 1969, a slim (153 pp.) volume was published consisting of seven chapters and an introduction titled *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*.

Today, fifty years later, we know what was unsuspected by the authors of the book at the time of its publication—and what nobody would dare to anticipate—that the impact and influence of this volume would lead to the "paradigm shift" (Buchignani, 1982, p. 5; Wimmer, 2009, p. 250) and "the transition to a new era" (Vermeulen & Govers, 1997, p. 1) in ethnicity studies; and that the book, and Barth's *Introduction* (1969b) in particular, became one of the most-cited publications in ethnic studies and one of the best-known anthropological works beyond the discipline (Banks, 1996/1999, p. 45-46; Eriksen, 2015, p. 96).

Since quotations and references do not necessarily prove good familiarity, and especially with regards to classics—and *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* indisputably reached the status of a classic over the past five decades—they often turn into empty ritualization (Jak-

[2] This text deals with the publication *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* and its editor Fredrik Barth. In the spirit of social science fair play, it should be noted that it has no connection with the intentions (of the editor and authors) of the book. It is a rather specific interpretation, in which the book and its editor serve as an example or object of interest, not, as one might expect, as a source or model for interpretation.

oubek, 2019; 2022a). It would therefore be good to recollect a little the contents of the book, the conditions of its origin, the main line of argumentation, and—in retrospect, enabled by the half-century long distance—its contribution.

Seven out of eleven participants of the Bergen symposium adjusted their papers into book chapters which, together with Barth's *Introduction*, constitute the body of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Barth, 1969d; Blom, 1969; Eidheim, 1969; Haaland, 1969; Izikowitz, 1969; Knutsson, 1969; Siverts, 1969).[3] Unlike Barth's "Introduction", which presents the conceptual position and the fundamental theoretical model for the whole volume, and which is definitely the most quoted and most famous part of the book, the status of Barth's own chapter on the retention of Pathan ethnic identity despite varied livelihoods and ecological adaptations (Barth, 1969d) is much more complicated. This is due to the fact that argumentation presented in the chapter contradicts the theoretical position presented in the *Introduction*—as has been already mentioned by several authors, while in the *Introduction* he is subjectivist, in the chapter, he takes an objectivist stance (Fardon, 1987, p. 185; Gulliver, 1971, p. 308; Lockwood, 1984, p. 3; Okamura, 1981, p. 459).

It is Gunnar Haaland's chapter, which describes the change of ethnic membership in the cases of the transformation of the settled agricultural Fur into nomadic Baggara (Haaland, 1969), that presents perhaps the best "application" of the general theoretical model we today associate with *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Considering the genesis of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, the fact that the chapter by G. Haaland is the best illustration of the analytical model outlined in the *Introduction*, is in no way surprising. The general theory of ethnic groups and relations, which brought the volume into fame, was actually inspired by the ethnographic material collected by Haaland in Darfur, especially by the changes of ethnic membership among the Fur and the Baggara and the problem of their ethnic-boundary crossings (Nielsen, 2008, p. 435). As Unni Wikan recalls, F. Barth "always underscored […] that Gunnar Haaland's contribution had been particularly significant for developing the theory" (Wikan, 2019, p. 27), and as G. Haaland put it himself:

> … Barth was very excited, when he read my field report at a research seminar in Bergen. When he, in 1966, as my supervisor, came to visit me in the field, the first thing he asked for was that I took him to a camp of Fur living like Baggara. I remember as we were walking around in a camp he commented: "They have not only changed occupation; they have taken over a whole culture pattern." I sus-

[3] Of the four papers that were discussed at the symposium in Bergen but were not included in the final publication, Axel Sommerfelt's contribution "Interethnic relations in Toro: Some issues" has a specific fate, which was published more than fifty years late in 2022 (Eriksen, 2022; Jakoubek 2022b; Sommerfelt, 2022; cf. also Sommerfelt, T. 2022).

> pect that it was then that the idea about the ethnicity symposium started to grow in his mind (Haaland in Jakoubek & Budilová, 2019b, p. 204).

T. H. Eriksen confirms the suspicion as well as the fact that the key idea—the idea that eventually led to Bergen symposium and thus to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*—was that "it was possible to cross the [ethnic] boundary, so that a Fur become a Baggara" (Eriksen, 2015, p. 102), and that, generally speaking, ethnic boundaries are penetrable and relational rather than absolute and that they exist despite people crossing them by changing their ethnic membership.

With regards to the link between, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth's "Introduction" and Haaland's chapter, let us add one more comment: in respect of F. Barth, we can today read, rightly so, that

> Barth pioneered what later became known as "constructivism": the claim that ethnicity is the product of a social process rather than a cultural given, made and remade rather than taken for granted, chosen depending on circumstances rather than ascribed through birth (Wimmer, 2008, p. 971).

In other words, Bart is today often considered a pioneer of social constructivism, its *avant la lettre* advocate.[4] Within the context of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, the iconic act of a social construction is crossing the ethnic boundary and the (consequent) change of ethnic membership. And the best example of such an act, within the publication, is the process of "Baggarization" of Furs depicted by Haaland. Haaland's chapter thus constitutes, besides the "Introduction", one of the central pillars of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

Gunnar Haaland on changes of ethnic membership: Fur becoming Baggara

Indisputably, Eriksen identified and formulated the fundamental idea of Haaland'a chapter ([that] "it was possible to cross the [ethnic] boundary, so that a Fur become a Baggara") correctly. After all, Eriksen excels at the art of reproducing a complex work/problem/topic in a simplified form. Yet, the above formulation obscures a little the fact that Haaland's line of argumentation is quite far from being self-evident since he draws upon specific theoretical/analytical assumptions.

Primarily, although Haaland argues and documents that the Fur are becoming Bagarra, this applies exclusively to their ethnic membership. In Haaland's chapter, ethnicity, eth-

[4] Barth himself thinks the same as he writes that: "[in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*] we certainly argued for what would now be recognized as a constructionist view" (Barth, 1994, p. 12).

nic groups and ethnic membership are defined in clear, but also relatively particular (and theory-laden) ways. Thus, we should not forget that the process of "Baggarization" of the Fur is, besides its narrow ethnic sense, very complex and long-term. As Haaland himself puts it, it may be accomplished fully and, in all respects, only in the next generation (cf. Gil-White, 1999, p. 809). Since if we considered the Fur, who are undergoing the process of nomadization, "in terms of the inventory of objective cultural traits", we would not be able to classify them unambiguously as either the Fur or the Baggara. In this respect, they are persons "in an intermediate position exhibiting traits associated with both of these ethnic groups" (Haaland, 1969, p. 68). The persons in question at the same time (still) call themselves Fur.[5] Nevertheless, and that is important, the fact that the term "is applied to a nomad in this context does not necessarily imply that social situations in which he participates are structured by the codes and values applying to a person of Fur identity" (Haaland, 1969, p. 68), and that is *the key criterion for ethnic classification* if we approach ethnicity "as a principle of social organization, as a categorization defining what can be made relevant in interaction between persons of the same and persons of different ethnic identity" (Haaland, 1969, p. 69; emphasis added). Classification of persons as Baggara or Fur depends "on how their participation in social situations is defined, what status sets are mobilized, and what standards are applied in judging their role performance" (Haaland , 1969, p. 69).

As it is clear from the brief sketch, Haaland's line of argumentation, including his definition of ethnic membership and its potential changes, draws upon a particular theoretical model, the basis of which is the conceptualization of ethnicity, ethnic groups and relations, thanks to which *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* became famous. This conceptualization is most explicitly expressed in Barth's *Introduction* to the volume.[6] On these grounds, we now turn our attention to this text. We should not forget that there is a distinct dialectic between Haaland's chapter and Barth's *Introduction*, since the proto-version of Haaland's chapter inspired Barth's *Introduction* (ibid.), and, in turn, the latter helped Haaland in writing the final version of the former.

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[5] The Baggara in this connection view "Fur" as a category of the same order as other Baggara tribes; it is a term referring to "the ancestry of the person" (Haaland, 1969, p. 68).

[6] In other words, Haaland surely presents facts, but these stem from a particular theory, and this applies to his depiction of the "Baggarization" of the Fur as well. Can we thus say that, as Eriksen puts it, "a Fur becomes a Baggara"? If we wish to maintain an epistemologically valid position, we can only say that any serious answer to this question must begin with "That depends…" (cf. Goodman, 1978/1988, p. 91). This interesting and important discussion goes, nevertheless, beyond the scope of this article.

Ethnic Groups and Boundaries quintessentialized

In the former parts of this paper, we dealt with the question of the genesis and composition of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, and with the chapter by Gunnar Haaland, which was, on the one hand, the key source for Barth's *Introduction* and, on the other, its best exemplification. Let us examine now the essential general theoretical contribution of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, as we view it retrospectively fifty years after its publication. Its theoretical positions received their best formulation and presentation in Barth's *Introduction*, which became, over the past fifty years, a kind of representation or concretization of the whole publication to the point that it is often difficult to establish whether the reference "Barth 1969" relates to the whole book, or to its *Introduction* (Jakoubek, 2019); likewise, we will not distinguish between the two aspects of the publication.[7]

Ethnic Groups and Boundaries questioned the assumption that ethnic groups are characterised by a shared culture (Wimmer, 2013, p. 22); ethnic groups do not "possess" a distinctive culture that makes them distinctive. Put differently, ethnic differences do not correspond to cultural differences (Eriksen, 2015, p. 102); ethnic groups are constituted as social entities, not as cultural ones. The reason is that the features that are taken into account with regard to ethnic group membership are "not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant" (Barth 1969b, p. 14; italics added). In other words, "only those differences that are made relevant contribute to defining an ethnic relationship" (Eriksen, 2013, p. 294). Thus, one of the main arguments of (the *Introduction* to) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* is that ethnic identity hinges upon self-ascription and the ascription of others, and not on objective cultural traits. What follows is that the only guideline for delimiting an ethnic group is the identification of the members themselves and their identification by others. Ethnic distinctions result from the actor's marking and maintaining ethnic boundaries irrespective of objective cultural differences (Wimmer, 2013, p. 22); that is, ethnic groups exist because individuals identify, and are identified, with them. From this point of view, since cultural content does not define ethnic groups, the crucial focus of the investigation "becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth, 1969b, p. 115). The key point regarding ethnic boundaries, then, is that "boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them" (ibid.). In other words, ethnic groups continue to exist even if persons change their memberships, i.e. their (ethnic) identity. This also means that ethnic boundaries, groups (and membership and identities) are socially

[7] Unless indicated by direct references to other sources, I draw, in the following summary, on Eriksen & Jakoubek, 2019a.

constructed, not primordial and inborn. Another crucial thing regarding ethnic boundaries is that to describe a boundary is not only to describe a group that it encloses but to imply that there is at least one other that is excluded (Lockwood, 1984, p. 4). As Banks puts it: "the boundary does not bound 'something' off from nothingness, but, rather, it distinguishes between two (or more) 'somethings'" (Banks, 1996/1999, p. 12).[8] Said generally, ethnicity is people in contact. No ethnic group can exist in isolation. Ethnicity is, essentially, an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group.

Ethnic Groups and Boundaries consists of seven case studies. But it was the general theoretical model applied in these case studies and presented in an abstract form in the editor's *Introduction*, that brought the book to fame. The model, or paradigm, consists of a several interrelated theoretical proposition. However, most authors, including Barth himself (1994, p. 11), agree that the role of *primus inter pares* is played by the principle of ethnic identity change; that is, the assumption of ethnic boundary crossings and changes in ethnic identity (while the ethnic groups in question continue to exist). It is precisely this notion—not an empirical fact, but a theory-laden statement (see above)—that forms the basis of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* chronologically (in terms of its genesis) and in terms of its argumentation.

Culture and/versus ethnicity: Fur & Baggara/Saxons & Norwegians

The impact of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, and especially of Barth's *Introduction* was (and still is) enormous. An "eye-opening" experience for many readers, the text helped them see things in a completely different way, and, in many cases, in such a way that we perceive natural today.[9] However, the publication, and its "Introduction", has also faced a variety of criticisms (for important moments of the critique cf. Cohen, 1994, pp. 120-122; Eriksen & Carey, 2015; Hummel, 2014, p. 53; Okamura, 2019).

Although the core of this paper may also be read as a critique of a kind, our arguments do not concur with those mentioned above. We will not try to challenge the logic of Barth's line of argumentation; nor we will attempt to show that his model may be incomplete. We accept the model of ethnicity and ethnic relations as presented in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Indeed, we do not wish to criticize the work at all. We, rather, want to point out that everything, or anything (conceptually) necessary for the model and theory of ethnic relations, ethnic membership and identity—that is, anything impor-

[8] Banks presents the phrase as a quotation from Barth (1969a, pp. 14–15); however, such a formulation does not seem to appear in the "Introduction" and could be considered Banks' own phrasing.

[9] For many reports of such experiences see Eriksen and Jakoubek (2019b).

tant for the conceptualization of ethnicity proposed by Barth and *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*—could be deduced from the fact that the ancestor of Norwegian Fredrik Barth was Saxon, (so there was a change in ethnic identity in Barth's family) as well as from the other analogous phenomena and processes that have taken place in Norwegian history.

In the early modern period, while Norway was a province in the Danish state (like Greenland, Iceland and other possessions), many Germans, Dutchmen and others settled, often as traders or specialists, along with representatives of the Danish colonial state. Some Southern European fishermen also settled in coastal communities. The arrival of Saxons was associated with a change in the structure of the Norwegian economy, which was taking place around the middle of the 17th century in connection with the development of mining (Hroch, 2005, p. 96). Contrary to forest economy, one of the dominant forces of the Norwegian economy of the previous period, mining required considerable investments as well as expert knowledge. Norwegian mines thus witnessed Danish and Dutch investments and Saxon experts (ibid. 97; Nagel 1994, p. 137, 143). This contact with Saxony was far from new in the sphere of mining. The first mining laws, introduced in 1538–1539 by Christian III, had been modelled on Saxon regulations (Eilu et al., 2012, p. 22; Nagel, 1994, p. 137, p. 143). The grandson of Christian III, Christian IV, issued a call for miners from Saxony (Goody, 2012, p. 139) who helped him open the first silver mines in 1623 (Eilu et al., 2012, p. 22).

Saxons who arrived within the migration flows probably did not change their personality immediately after their landing in Norway (similarto how newly nomadized Fur did not change their personality immediately after having established themselves as nomads; Haaland, 1969, p. 71), and they were not able to act like Norwegians in many situations (perhaps in the very same way as the newly nomadized Fur were often not able to act as the Baggara (ibid.). We may also assume that they kept identifying themselves as "Saxons" (just as the newly nomadized Fur identified themselves as "Fur", ibid. 68). A crucial point here however, is that they were invited and hired as miners, a segment missing in the Norwegian society. What follows is that, concerning these individuals, the "status set mobilized" (to use Haaland's wording), was that of miners and "standards applied in judging their role performances" were again that of miners, and as miners, these individuals are part of Norwegian society, i.e. Norwegians. So, to paraphrase Haaland (Haaland, 1969, ibid. 68), the fact that the term ("Saxon") is applied to a miner in this context does not necessarily imply that social situations in which he participates are structured by the codes and values applying to a person of Saxon identity.

Though we lack this evidence from Norway, we may make use of analogy from other parts of Europe, where Saxon miners were also introduced (for the very same reasons as in Norway) and where "the concepts of 'Saxon' and 'miner' became almost equivalent" (Goody, 2012, p. 139); that is, "Saxons" were understood as a part of the society in question defined by their specific profession (mining).

Especially with regard to "the inventory of objective cultural traits", the situation of the first generation of Saxon immigrants in Norway remains ambiguous, while they represent "persons in an intermediate position exhibiting traits associated with both groups" (in the very same way as in the case of newly nomadized Fur; Haaland 1969, p. 68; Barth 1969b, p. 29). The full change comes with the next generation: their descendants learned Norwegian instead of German (as the descendants of the "Baggarized" Fur learned Arabic instead of Fur; Haaland, 1969, p. 65), they appropriated Norwegian, and not Saxon, culture (as the descendants of the "Baggarized" Fur learned Arabic instead of Fur culture; ibid.), they married Norwegians (as the descendants of the "Baggarized" Fur got spouses from Bagarra communities; ibid.) and became representatives of disappearing lines of Saxon genealogies (as the descendants of the "Baggarized" Fur constitute disappearing lines of local Fur genealogies ibid.). Norwegian Fredrik Barth, descended from a Saxon, personifies this transformation. Within the perspective of the theoretical model of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, the processes of the "Baggarization" of the Fur and the "Norwegianization" of Saxons are structurally analogous; they are variations of the same process—the process of ethnic boundary crossings and changes of ethnic membership. Thus, one of the key arguments of this paper is: we argue that the outlined ethnic processes, the symbol of which could be the transformation of Barth's ancestors' Saxonness into Barth's Norwegianness (i.e. a change of ethnic identity), offer sufficient material for formulating the concept of ethnic groups, ethnic identity and membership as presented in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

We can even say that, in some aspects of the argumentation of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (in aspects which are truly crucial) the case of changes in ethnic membership and the crossings of the Saxon–Norwegian ethnic boundary would serve even better than the cases used in the book. This is due to the deep cultural closeness between Saxons and Norwegians. If your conceptual aim is to "liberate ethnicity from culture" as Verdery (1994, p. 41) put it poetically, that is, if you want to claim that ethnic groups are a form of social organization based on self-identification and identification by others, not cultural-bearing units i.e. that ethnic groups and cultural units are not the same thing, and if you (therefore) assume that ethnicity and ethnic relations are not about the

sum of "objective" cultural differences but only about those that are made relevant by actors themselves, so that ethnic identity and membership is, and can only be, based on self-ascription and the ascription of others, then the use of examples from such culturally different groups as the Fur and Baggara could be counterproductive, or even misleading, since the distinct cultural difference between the groups would turn attention to culture instead of ethnic membership. After all, Barth himself, at least at the beginning, let himself be mislead in the case of the Fur/Baggara. As Haaland recalls (see above), Barth commented on a camp of nomadized Fur: "They have not only changed occupation; they have taken over a whole culture pattern", and one can hardly resist the feeling that the author of the statement assumed that they have taken over "the sum of objective differences". This example shows very well that to think in terms of ethnicity (instead of culture) is very difficult and that to "think ethnicity" is a very counterintuitive enterprise. The more distinct "objective" cultural differences are, the more they attract attention at the expense of ethnicity. That is why Saxons and Norwegians are a better, and more instructive, example in the interpretation of ethnic identity and membership changes than the Fur and the Baggara (indeed, perhaps the best example would be Norwegians and Swedes; i.e. groups almost identical in terms of culture/objective differences). If we want to study ethnicity and ethnic membership, it would be optimal not to have to deal with cultural differences too much.

With regards to the observations mentioned above, we face a fundamental question: Why did Fredrik Barth not draw inspiration from his own origin (and country) – the key element of which is a change of ethnic belonging while maintaining the existence of boundaries and groups in question – but from ethnographic material collected by Haaland in the distant Sudan, which concerned two rather unknown (compared to Norwegians and Saxons) ethnic groups. Why, too, has any author, including T. H. Eriksen, not reflected this omission? Why have anthropologists perceived as natural the fact that Barth based his analysis on exotic (in relation to Europe) ethnographic material? Why is it that we can even assume that anthropologists expected such a stance? These are the actual questions this text seeks to answer.

Anthropology in/of Europe versus "event-density" and "event-richness" of remote areas

If we pose a question, why did Barth, with regards to problems he set out to resolve in the field of the conceptualization of ethnicity, deal with the Fur and the Baggara, rather than with processes quite common in Norwegian society and history? Why did Fredrik

Barth not instead concentrate on (the anthropology of) Europe? In the following chapter, we will briefly overview the establishment of the discourse and its potential links to Barth's work.

From the very beginning, social and cultural anthropology defined itself as a discipline focusing on non-Western, non-European "exotic" societies. Only a handful of anthropological research projects had been conducted in Europe before the Second World War. We can mention here field research conducted by anthropologists Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball in western Ireland (Arensberg, 1937; Arensberg & Kimball, 1940) or research carried out by Philip Mosely in the Balkans (Byrnes, 1976).[10] The most studied Balkan country was Albania, where researchers concentrated on the clan structure or the problem of honour killing in the mountain areas in the north of the country (Durham 1928; Hasluck 1954; Whitaker 1976). All these cases concerned economically and politically marginal regions (the Balkans, inaccessible areas of northern Albania, and Irish Gaelic speaking western Ireland). It is clear that these fields met the anthropological notion of "the otherness". In other words, when anthropologists conducted field research in Europe, they would choose a region, field and topic that were as remote as possible to the educated urban middle classes, to which anthropologists most often belonged.

Similar development can be traced in American cultural anthropology of the pre-war period. American anthropologists of that period mostly focused on the study of the native inhabitants of North America, or on exotic societies of the Pacific. As in Europe, as regards to the study of one's own society, the first groups at the forefront of attention were agrarian communities, which corresponded the best to the idea of (putatively) simple, small and "exotic" societies. Research among Mexican farmers conducted by Robert Redfield in the 1920s and 1930s proved to be pioneering in this respect (Redfield, 1956, p. 40–59).

Among analogous pioneering studies, which contributed to the consequent development of "community studies" in Europe in a similar manner as did the above-mentioned ethnographies of Ireland, count research conducted by the Oxford anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers, who did his fieldwork in Andalusia in 1949-1952 (Pitt-Rivers 1954). His monograph became a classic of anthropology and it is often viewed as a milestone in the development of the anthropology of Europe (cf. Goddard et al., 1994, p. 5). In the 1950s, Greece found its place on the anthropological map and became a favourite destination for anthropological research, where two particularly important anthropological

[10] It is worth mentioning that Barth's "first introduction to social and cultural anthropology was with an American soldier passing through Oslo in 1945, Conrad M. Arensberg" (Lewis, 2017).

research projects were conducted.[11] One piece of research was carried out by the American anthropologist Ernestine Friedl in the village of Vasilika in continental Greece (Friedl, 1962). The other produced a classic monograph on Sarakatsani, the transhumant herdsmen of northern Greece, authored by British anthropologist John Campbell, student of E. E. Evans-Pritchard (Campbell, 1956).

After the Second World War, the city attracts the attention of anthropologists for the first time. Urban studies were significantly developed by authors of the so-called Manchester School, who concentrated on colonial and postcolonial Africa (Mitchell, 1966). If we look at Europe, for instance, in 1947–1954 a group of anthropologists from the London School of Economics, under the supervision of R. Firth, conducted fieldwork on family and kinship in the London working class (Firth, 1956).

Yet, research in complex Western societies did not become part of the anthropological mainstream until a long time afterwards. Anthropologists continued to search for their "Others", the most different, exotic and remote societies, such as Melanesian or African villages. They discovered societies of that type in the marginalized, isolated and "backward" agrarian areas, such as the regions of western Ireland or the European Mediterranean. Also, countries of the Eastern bloc gradually started to attract attention, as they were easily grasped as – using the formulation of Verdery – the embodiment of the Communist "Others" (Ballinger, 1999, p. 6).

The position of British anthropologists who studied Europe remained secondary for a long time. Research in Europe was not viewed as traumatizing, dangerous and physically exhaustive like research in Africa, South America or Oceania. In other words, many did not consider such research "true fieldwork". The situation was very similar in the USA. American anthropologist John W. Cole writes that in 1972 an anonymous text was published in the bulletin of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) mocking anthropologists who study agrarian societies in Europe, pointing out that their findings are often banal (what kind of a transistor radio is favourite in a Serbian village?), and such research is relatively comfortable, since there is no danger of a bite by a poisonous snake, nor of any tropical disease, but researchers can, on the contrary, go swimming in mountain lakes, Alpine skiing, and, even go to the opera from time to time (Cole, 1977, p. 353). American anthropologist Susan Parman, who conducted research in Europe herself (Parman, 1990), writes that despite clear developments, many view the collocation "anthropology of Europe" as an oxymoron, since the subject of anthropological interest

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is still, implicitly or explicitly, non-Western society. American anthropologists in particular, consider research in Europe as a pretext for a holiday; hardship and exoticism are still viewed as a necessary part of anthropological initiation (Parman, 1998b, p. 1). This brings us to the question of whether an anthropologist studying Europe can be called anthropologist at all. However, according to Parman, Europe plays an irreplaceable role in anthropological thinking, not as the research subject, but mainly in the fact that Europe has always existed in anthropological imagination as a conceptual contrast, as a tool of occidentalism delimiting the boundaries of the West (Parman, 1998b, p. 2).

* * *

Some argue that the situation within the discourse of the anthropology of Europe is different today (cf. Kockel, et al. 2012). Be that as it may, it is evident that, at the time of writing of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, most anthropologists shared the "idea that distance lends enhancement, if not enchantment, to the anthropological vision" (Ardener, 1987, p. 38).[12] From a broader scope, Edwin Ardener writes that "in the social space, not everything that happens is an event" (1987, p. 49). Within the space, events are defined by what Ardener calls "significance" (ibid.), and as he shows, anthropologists of that time (and we can add that still long afterwards) drew upon an (implicit) assumption that "remote areas are event-rich, or event-dense" (ibid.), while the large stable systems of dominant central areas are "event-poor" (ibid.), so anthropologists did not consider them fit for their study (1987, p. 38).

If we consider the composition of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* from this perspective, we can see that the selection of locations where the authors carried out their research fully corresponds to the scheme: Sudan, Ethiopia, Mexico, Afghanistan and Laos; and, yes, twice, Norway. However, the Norwegian groups—the Saami and Norwegians of the northernmost area of Norway, Finmark (Eidheim), and two rural populations in southern Norway (Jan-Petter Blom)—fully confirm the orientation towards the remote and the exotic of the period's anthropologists, as well as the above-mentioned statement that if anthropologists conducted their research in Europe at that period, they had to choose a region, a field and a topic that were as remote as possible to the educated urban middle class, to which anthropologists most often belonged.

If we pose a question of why did Fredrik Barth, in his attempt of a general analysis of the establishment and endurance of ethnic groups and boundaries, study the Fur and

[12] Many shared the idea years afterwards, cf. the title of a publication by the co-author of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* K. Izikowitz (1985), Compass for fields afar: Essays in social anthropology, which still equates social anthropology with "fields afar" (i.e. remote areas).

the Baggara instead of Saxons and Norwegians (that is his own origin and society), and the processes inherent and common in the Norwegian society in general, a (partial) answer within the context of the establishment of the anthropology of Europe would be that ethnic processes associated with Barth's origin (although being structurally identical with the processes taking place in Darfur) did not represent a legitimate event in the anthropological imagination of that time. In other words, with regards to the selection of research interest, and therefore of the source of data and findings, these processes and phenomena stood obscured in anthropologists' thematic blind spot. This led to a double lack of interest—both from the authors of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* and its readers. That is to say, anthropologists did not even think to either write, or read about these processes (i.e. about changes of ethnic identities taking place in their own societies, and even in their own family histories).

Conclusion

Historians David W. Sabean and Simon Teuscher (2007) point to a growing significance of kinship in Europe in the 19th century, where the changing society, emerging class hierarchies and rising affluent entrepreneurial strata were accompanied by the rehabilitation of kin marriages, which became a tool of social mobilization in the growing middle class. Although the mobilizing wealthy middle classes used endogamy as a tool for establishing important alliances and securing family property, the newly established anthropology pushed endogamy to the realm of the primitive and the exotic, or to the ancient European past. In anthropologists' visions, marriages between cousins or other close relatives were, for a long time, peculiar to remote, exotic and primitive societies. Curiously enough, as both historians point out, one of the pioneers of kinship studies, Lewis Henry Morgan, who examined systems of kinship terminologies among primitive ethnic groups around the world, and who was the father of the evolutionist notion that cousin marriages are characteristic for the lowest period of development, was actually married to his first cousin, and he also witnessed his son entering into a marriage of a similar kind. This was not unprecedented: for instance, at the same time, on the European side of the Atlantic, Max Weber entered into a "traditional" marriage with his cousin after he refused two other cousins as wives (Sabean & Teuscher 2007, p. 23). Generally speaking, anthropologists of that time were unable to notice an obvious fact that the phenomena they were writing on are endemic also to their own society, and even to themselves, and they continued to ascribe their existence (exclusively) to exotic, either temporally or spatially remote societies.

We witnessed an at least very similar situation within the field of anthropological thematization of ethnicity. Anthropologists who authored the most influential publications of ethnicity studies set out to diverse corners of Africa, southeast Asia, South America, and to remote rural areas of Norway, even though in order to reach the conclusions presented in the book, they could very well have stayed in Bergen and studied the history of the city, or even the origin of some members of their group, starting with the organizer of the event, and editor of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Fredrik Barth.[13] It did not take long until American historian Gary B. Cohen proved in his monograph on Germans in Prague (Cohen, 1981) that the analysis of ethnic processes in urban elite strata—that is, the strata to which anthropologists belong—could easily produce the same findings as *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. This, and other subsequent works (Bauman, 1996; King, 2005, 2002; Sanjek, 1998), thus show very clearly that as far as the topic of ethnic identity and its changes are concerned, remote areas do not take any priority over locations, where anthropologists are at home, be it in history or nowadays.[14]

* * *

During his talk at a symposium dedicated to the half century anniversary of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Professor Miroslav Hroch, a historian of Europe—who is, by the way, also the co-author of the Czech edition of the history of Norway (Bakke, Hroch & Kadečková, 2005) and had published repeatedly on the process of the formation of the modern Norwegian nation (Hroch, 1985/2000, 1986)—noted, on behalf of the volume, that he finds many of the issues on ethnic boundaries, identity and their changes its authors were dealing with, self-evident.[15] As an anthropologist myself, I considered the statement insulting and outraging; the argumentation of the ground-breaking and paradigm-shifting work of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* is described as self-evident!? However, when I returned repeatedly to Hroch's perspective, I realized that the processes of changing collective identities, including ethnic ones, were quite common throughout the history of Europe, and that a historian of Europe, who studies the processes of European nations' formation, including the Norwegian, inevitably does not view the formation and transformation of collective identities as something extraordinary. Moreover, for

[13] The history of the city of Bergen is closely connected with The Hansa (the German Guild of Merchants). In 1350 the Hanseatic League established its office in Bergen and the presence of German Hanseatic merchants had a far-reaching impact on the city for next 400 years (the office was closed in 1754).

[14] Also, there were some works published earlier, Glazer's and Moynihan's Beyond the Melting Pot (1963) being a prominent one among them. We should also not forget works of the Chicago school (though its members did not use a concept of "ethnicity" yet, writing about "race relations").

[15] March 22, 2019 "50 Years of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*", organized by the Department of Ethnology, Charles University, Prague.

many centuries, the processes of ethnic identity changes had seemed quite natural to the actors of these processes, the inhabitants of Europe, including Norway (at least as natural as to the Fur and the Baggara). It is then hard to avoid questioning why anthropologists have treated these phenomena as so extraordinary? (In describing them, Barth even writes about "discoveries" (Barth, 1969b, p. 9)). While trying to answer this question, another one was imposing on me: haven't *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* played a role in this?

Barth and his colleagues did certainly manage to attract the attention of anthropologists to the question of ethnic identity/belonging, and their changes. At the same time, however, they (probably unwittingly) considerably "exoticized" these phenomena and processes. It seems that one of the sources of this exoticization was the focus and location of their fieldwork, which constitute the basis of their contributions. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* gave the impression that in order to document and describe the phenomena of ethnic boundary crossing and ethnic identity changes, it was necessary to set out to remote parts of the world to reach exotic or marginal groups. One of corollaries of using examples from research in "remote areas" was that anthropologists read the phenomena and processes examined in the volume as unusual and exceptional. If a prominent Swedish anthropologists Ulf Hannerz writes that *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* deal with "the anomalous fact [!] that people could change ethnic identity" (Hannerz. 2019, p. 213; italics added) or when a chief author on ethnic processes, Andreas Wimmer evaluates Barth's finding that "a boundary can be stable and continuous even if individuals shift from one side to the other" as "a substantial insight" (Wimmer, 2013, p. 205; italics added), we should read these assertions as a telling testimony that readers of the book got convinced (precisely as a consequence of reading it) that a change of ethnic identity is an extraordinary and anomalous phenomenon.

Ethnic Groups and Boundaries did inspire a radical paradigm change, or even a revolution, in our understanding of ethnic processes. On the other hand, the publication continues to be conservative in that it still presented anthropology as a science of exotic societies (and this, perhaps, against the will of the authors). Although this book is among those credited for the key shift "from tribes to ethnic groups" (Jenkins, 1997/2011, p. 18), it could be argued that for the authors, ethnicity was (only) what they, be them remote peoples or minority groups, have. So the qualitative distinction between "us" and "them", associated with the (study of) "tribes" endured. To change this perspective, anthropology itself had to change. However, at the time of the publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, such a shift was only a question of the future.

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Povzetek

Fredrik Barth, avtor in urednik dela *Etnične skupine in mejnosti* (1969), je bil potomec Saksonca. To pomeni, da sta se prehod etnične meje in sprememba etnične pripadnosti – strukturno enako kot v ikoničnem primeru, ki ga opisuje Haaland, ko je ljudstvo Fur postalo Baggara – zgodila v njegovi lastni družini, sredi norveške družbe. Barthovo saksonsko poreklo je potemtakem vsebovalo potencialno vse, kar je bilo potrebno za analizo, ki tvori jedro prelomnega dela *Etnične skupine in mejnosti*. Barth in drugi avtorji tega zbornika so svoj teoretski model etničnih skupin in odnosov zasnovali na gradivu oddaljenih, običajno nezahodnih družb, in tako antropologijo opredeljevali kot znanost o eksotičnih skupinah in ljudstvih. S postavljanjem prizorišč trans/formacije etničnih identitet v eksotična okolja, je omenjeni zbornik prispeval tudi k t.i. »eksotizaciji« teh procesov. Posledično je vsebina zbornika prispevala k zanikanju Evrope kot ustreznega prostora za antropološko terensko delo in k diskriminaciji antropologije Evrope kot relevantnega diskurza. Avtor tega članka skuša dekolonizirati socialno antropologijo in promovirati antropologijo Evrope z opozarjanjem na dejstvo, da so enaka družbena in identitetna gibanja opazili tudi v Evropi, v tistih družbah in slojih, katerih del so tudi antropologi.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: etničnost, etnične skupine, Fredrik Barth, antropologija Evrope

CORRESPONDENCE: Marek Jakoubek, Institute of Social Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, Rokitanského 62, 500 03 Hradec Králové III, Czech Republic. E-mail: marek.jakoubek@uhk.cz