Jakoubek's Disputation on Ethnicity

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Jakoubek, Marek. 2024. *Antropologie a etnicita: fakta, mýty a kognice. O etnicitě pro mírně pokročilé.* [Anthropology and Ethnicity: Facts, Myths and Cognition. On Ethnicity for the Slightly Advanced]. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury.

This relatively thin book (altogether 118 pages) has a very ambitious goal: to put the last dot after the debates concerning the nexus between tribe and ethnic group. The author is a well-known specialist whose edited books *Theories of Ethnicity: A Reader* (in Czech, 2016) and *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years* (with Thomas H. Eriksen, 2019) have attracted the interest of anthropologists in Czechia and worldwide. The author is also a seasoned translator of major anthropological publications from English into Czech. His other specialisation concerns the results of long-term fieldwork in Bulgaria.

This new book revolves around the somewhat mysterious non-publication of a would-be chapter by Axel Sommerfelt in the now-famous *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* edited by Fredrik Barth (Little, Brown, 1969). This would-be chapter entitled 'Interethnic Relations in Toro: Some Issues' (*History and Anthropology* 33 (5): 571–579, 2022) is rendered in a Czech translation from the original Norwegian as an appendix at the very end of the book under review. I regretted that Sommerfelt's short but 'thick' text did not appear at the very beginning of the book because Jakoubek's extensive argument is based on it.

Sommerfelt describes the relationship between the subjugated stateless Konzo (Konjo) and Amba people on the one hand and the superordinated Toro chiefdom in today's southwest Uganda on the other. Toro eventually, after British colonialists established their rule at the beginning of the 20th century, also annexed

the Bwamba forest area. The whole picture was complicated by the ivory and salt trade, and in Bwamba also by coffee plantations. These economic upheavals led to the creation of boundaries between forming ethnic groups when this no man's land was settled and exploited. Each group continued to use their ethnic languages, and the groups did not intermarry. The Toro continued as political and economic hegemons. Rutoro was the official language in the whole of the Toro 'kingdom' area. But the economic dynamics of coffee growing (especially the more valuable Arabica) led to economic differentiation and the immigration of the Toro into the highlands. Some wealthy Konzo aspired to be accepted by the Toro and started to speak Rutoro, but these strivings were not successful. Eventually, however, both Konzo and Amba wanted to be separate from Toro and towards the end of British rule sought to get their own districts administered directly from Kampala. While ethnic boundaries between the three groups were originally based on different settlements (Toro in the lowlands, Konzo and Amba in the highlands), a greater accent on ethnic boundaries developed as a result of the impossibility of what I would call the Toroisation of the minority 'tribes'. Ethnic membership became the most important criterion of identity during the ensuing political and economic conflict. In 1962, after Uganda became independent, Konzo and Amba rose up against the Toro. Sommerfelt concludes that 'mechanisms that maintain boundaries are stronger in places where boundaries are under the strongest pressure by political and economic interests linked with ethnic membership' (p. 106, translation by the review author).

Jakoubek shows that *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was somewhat skewed and that Sommerfelt's text would have made the importance of Barth's volume complete. Jakoubek argues that the paradigm shift between 'tribes' and 'ethnic groups' was best exemplified by Sommerfelt's text.

The author, though, begins his book with a 'critical revision' of Barth's seminal volume. He argues that Barth, in his famous 'Introduction' (in the Czech edition erroneously translated as 'Předmluva', though the correct term would be 'Úvod'), presents a skewed version of the history of the study of ethnicity. Further, he shows that Barth's understanding of ethnic groups and relations was not new or original but a 'well-established and generally received model' (p. 6). Why then the success of the collection? Jakoubek believes that the boundaries that are the cornerstone of Barth's theory correspond to the human cognition of bounded human groups – Brubaker's 'groupism'. The success of the model of ethnic groups 'represents an explicit formulation of the fundamental part of human cognitive apparatus common to all people, thus also to readers of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*' (p. 7). Therefore, to cite 'Barth 1969' has become a must – a kind of ritual – for all who have since written on ethnicity.

The Bergen symposium that Barth's volume emerged out of was attended by eleven Scandinavian anthropologists but only seven of them offered their revised version for publication in the collection. Barth added his introduction.

One of the unpublished papers was Sommerfelt's, which in the original was titled 'Inter-etniske relasjoner I Toro. Noen momenter'. Jakoubek discusses to what extent the inclusion of Sommerfelt's text in the collection would have reshaped it. He goes over the various reactions to the 1969 publication and provides evidence of Barth's failure to refer to earlier writings about ethnicity. Here I should mention Eriksen's remark that 'as usual Barth did not spend much space discussing other people's research, preferring to concentrate his energy on chiselling out his own perspective' (Eriksen, 2015: 103). In my view, however, authors who want lay claim to being first in some theoretical achievement often ignore to refer to works that would refute it.

Jakoubek also discusses the fact that Barth's collection became a ritualised essential in-text reference. The reason is that Barth's 'Introduction' in particular was presented as representative of all possible theoretical demarches such as the ascriptive model, ethnicity as relation, circumstantialism, subjectivism, constructivism, instrumentalism, transactionalism, perennialism etc., etc. In brief, what was appreciated was its eclecticism. The authors from the former Eastern bloc especially excelled in this decorative quoting. A short circuit was established: ethnicity=Barth 1969. Jakoubek calls this a 'hollow reference'.

Returning to the unpublished chapter by Axel Sommerfelt, Jakoubek refers to the recent trend of that unique data collected by ethnographers should be published. This is a duty towards the scientific community and the people who provided the data (also called informants and field partners). Sommerfelt's text documents that the paradigmatic shift between 'tribe' and 'ethnic group' was not yet completed or has been completed on its pages.

There is an English summary at the very end of the book, but no index. I rather wonder why Jakoubek's modestly sized but ambitiously designed book was not published directly in English. The author owes us the answer to this query.

Reference

Eriksen, T.H. (2015). *Fredrik Barth. An Intellectual Biography*. London: Pluto.

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