

# 1 Introduction

## Ethnic groups, boundaries and beyond

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It was in February 1967 that Fredrik Barth organised a symposium about ethnicity, sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation. The event took place at the University of Bergen, and about a dozen Scandinavian anthropologists participated. Two years later, a slim volume entitled *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was published, modestly, by the Norwegian press Universitetsforlaget (Barth 1969a). The book, and in particular Barth's 'Introduction' to it (Barth 1969b), soon caught the attention of the anthropological community and would eventually become a standard reference in the growing literature on ethnicity and group dynamics, both within and outside anthropology; some would say *the* standard reference.

The questions raised in the present book, which marks the fiftieth anniversary of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (henceforth *EGB*), amount to a critical assessment of the main intellectual contribution of the book, its limitations and some of the ways in which the field of enquiry has moved on in the intervening decades. The contributors have been selected on the basis of their important contributions to research on ethnic relations and their engagement with *EGB*, which nevertheless varies in kind and intensity. Several of the chapters have an autobiographical element, and the present book may, accordingly, also offer some fragments of contemporary intellectual history.

This book is a broadly conceived evaluation of *EGB*, an attempt to take stock of its legacy and enduring influence, while also addressing its limitations, indicating how the world has changed, how intellectual priorities have shifted and how new perspectives have been introduced. Several of the chapter authors reminisce about their own encounter with *EGB* and how it contributed to shaping their intellectual itinerary, while others have contributed more straightforward academic chapters. The final contribution is an interview with Gunnar Haaland, who was not only a contributor to *EGB* but also a major source of inspiration for Barth in the latter's initial engagement with ethnicity.

This introductory chapter presents the main arguments in *EGB*, examining not only Barth's introduction but also the less known chapters. We situate the book within the wider context of 1960s anthropology and social

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science, identifying the debates and concerns it engages with, before discussing changes in the world, including the worlds of anthropology and comparative sociology, in subsequent decades. We then introduce some of the new themes and approaches to ethnic relations which have emerged in later years, indicating how not only empirical concerns but also theoretical developments in the social sciences always evolve as a dialogue between the academic professions and the outside world.

### **What Barth's 'Introduction' was really about**

Barth (1928–2016) had been interested in ethnic relations since his fieldwork in Swat, which took place in the mid-1950s. In his early article 'Ecological relationships of ethnic groups in Swat, North Pakistan' (Barth 1956), he had argued that there were important correlations between ecological adaptations and ethnic relations in the upper reaches of the valley. Since the ethnic identities of Pathans, Kohistanis and Gujars were largely associated with livelihoods, the territorial boundaries of the groups coincided with ecological zones and ethnic boundaries. However, his PhD (Barth 1959) had few traces of this interest and mainly focused on political strategies and competitive games among landowners in Swat Valley. In the time before *EGB* was published, Barth was already a well-known and respected anthropologist, whose theoretical position at the time (transactionalism) was known mainly because of *Models of Social Organization* (Barth 1966), a short book where the author proposes generative models enabling the comparison of social forms (Eriksen 2015: 92–93). In preparation for the Bergen symposium, he drew on both of these sources of inspiration, as well as the work of his close colleagues. Harald Eidheim's research on Sami–Norwegian relations in the far north of Norway (e.g. Eidheim 1966) used semiotics and the microsociology of Erving Goffman (such as Goffman 1959) in order to show how ethnic contrasts were signified and boundaries reproduced in a setting where phenotypical and cultural differences were modest. However, Gunnar Haaland's research in Darfur, Sudan, was arguably a more immediate source of inspiration (see the interview with Haaland in this book, also Eriksen 2015: 102). Haaland (1968) had showed not only how boundaries are being maintained but also how persons and households could cross ethnic boundaries by changing their livelihood and way of life. This 'flow of personnel' across ethnic boundaries, showing them to be penetrable and relational rather than absolute, stimulated Barth and prompted him to ask under which circumstances people could change ethnic membership, and what the mechanisms were ensuring boundary maintenance in spite of this mobility.

The 'Introduction' to *EGB* may not be as well known as is sometimes assumed. As noted by Jakoubek (this volume), citations tend to be mandatory and ritualistic, and rarely engage with its actual contents. Through the following years and decades, the reference 'Barth 1969' (Barth 1969b) virtually

turned into a kind of brand name, an empty signifier. What follows is a short summary of Barth's original arguments.

The first analytical point made in the 'Introduction' is precisely that boundaries persist in spite of the flow of personnel across them. In other words, ethnic groups continue to exist even if persons can change their identity. This basic argument would today be classified as social constructivism as opposed to essentialism.

Second, 'important social relations are maintained across such boundaries' (Barth 1969b: 10), so it is indeed contact and not mutual isolation that helps define the contrasting identities of two ethnic groups. No ethnic group can exist in isolation. Ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group.

Barth then moves on to argue against the view defining ethnic groups as 'pelagic islands' or simply culture-bearing groups. To him, cultural differences and similarities are the outcome, not the cause, of ethnic boundaries and other forms of social differentiation. Seen from the perspective of a historical *longue durée*, this is obviously true: The global cultural variation witnessed today has emerged historically and was not part of the human inventory at the time of the exodus from Africa. Moreover, he argues – in line with his 1956 article – that cultural differentiation 'exhibit[s] the effects of ecology' (p. 12). Unless ecology is conceptualised very widely and metaphorically, this ecological perspective, important throughout *EGB*, is not very helpful in understanding contemporary political, urban and migrant ethnicity, and a striking absence in the later reception of *EGB* is the near-total lack of interest in ecological niche construction and adaptation, a theme to which Barth returns several times in the 'Introduction' and in his chapter on Pathan identity and intra-ethnic cultural variation (Barth 1969c). Though there were some rare exceptions of authors who followed this line, such as Hannan (1979) and Lauwagie (1979).

The next arguments are more familiar to contemporary researchers on ethnic relations. Here, Barth defined ethnic groups as an organisational type as well as stressing the significance of self-ascription and the ascription of others as opposed to 'objective cultural traits': The features that are taken into account in regard to membership are 'not the sum of "objective" differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant' (Barth 1969b: 14). Thus, the only guide to delimit a group is identification of the members themselves and their identification by others. The fact that what is diagnostic for membership are not 'objective' differences but only those that are *socially relevant* (Barth 1969b: 15; italics added) has several effects: (1) that ethnic groups are constituted as social entities, not as cultural ones (ethnic groups and cultural units are not the same thing), and (2) that 'the critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses' (ibid., 15). Since cultural content does not define ethnic groups – variation within the group may be more marked than the systematic variation

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between groups – the social boundary is of paramount significance. Inside the boundary, resources flow and similarities are overcommunicated in order to maintain the boundary and prevent group resources from dissipating beyond control.

In the next sections, Barth discusses ‘plural societies’ (Furnivall 1944) composed of ethnically distinct groups that meet in the marketplace and are being ruled politically by a colonial regime. Here, he rightly identifies a limitation in this school of thought in that it fails to acknowledge the porousness of the boundary, but also points out that several societies are less monetised than the colonial ones studied by Furnivall and others, and thus operate with polycentric economies where different rules of exchange and transactions regulate different kinds of goods and services. Through such comments, Barth reminds us that ethnicity is not chiefly a modern phenomenon.

Returning to the ecological perspective, Barth then speaks about groups occupying complementary niches, but which may also compete for the same coveted resources. He then moves to considerations of demography, noting that groups reach threshold limits if they rely on exploiting a particular set of resources in a niche with limited carrying capacity. Again, we notice that this aspect of the Barthian perspective on ethnicity has rarely been developed further in later research.

Indeed, even in the next section, dealing with ‘factors in identity change’ (pp. 22ff.), where examples range from southwestern China to Swat and Darfur, limitations and possibilities defined through ecology are important. When Barth then raises the question of how ethnic boundaries persist, he goes to great lengths, as he does in his ethnographic chapter in the book, to show that Pathans reproduce their identity and core cultural practices across a wide range of ecological and political structures. He nevertheless concedes that it requires considerable effort to reproduce Pathan identity on the ecological fringes of the valley.

Later sections in the ‘Introduction’ concern social stratification, especially between groups, and internal cultural variation within groups. Here, towards the end of the text, the main argument for which the book is famous resurfaces: Ethnic identity hinges on self-ascription and the ascription of others, not on objective cultural traits; ethnicity is situational yet imperative and ethnicity is defined through people’s relationships to others, that is, the social boundaries. He remarks briefly on what has later become a major theme in the study of ethnicity, nationalism and identity politics generally, namely, ‘the revival of select traditional culture traits, and ... the establishment of historical traditions to justify and glorify the idioms and the identity’ (p. 35).

Finally, Barth briefly discusses variations between political regimes and speculates equally briefly on the maintenance and change of ethnic identities throughout cultural history.

A few of the Barthian notions about ethnicity have been genuinely influential in subsequent work: his emphasis on social processes rather than

cultural meaning, his emphasis on social ascription as the fundamental fact of ethnicity and his insistence on the primacy of interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, Barth's passion for ecological adaptation, niche construction and complementarity, as well as his fascination with the *longue durée* of cultural history and the historical emergence of ethnic groups, has not entered the mainstream of ethnicity research in the social sciences. The significance of putative shared descent, and contestations thereof – central to most ethnic groups and movements – is, somewhat surprisingly, not accorded much attention by Barth and his collaborators.

### **The chapters**

The subsequent chapters, covering a broad range of ethnographic cases from Laos to Mexico, are admirably consistent analytically and return to questions formulated in the Introduction, which, in turn, was revised after the presentation of the papers. Altogether eleven anthropologists from five Scandinavian universities, all male, took part in Bergen, and the languages of the event were Scandinavian, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian being mutually intelligible. Klaus Ferdinand, Peter Kandre, Axel Sommerfelt and Helge Kleivan eventually opted not to submit revised versions for the book, leaving seven contributors including the editor.

Harald Eidheim, drawing on Goffman (1959), contributes a chapter on Sami–Norwegian relations on the Finnmark coast (Eidheim 1969). Unlike in the mountainous hinterland, there is no clear ethnic division of labour, and the phenotypical differences between the groups are debatable at best. He shows how Sami ethnic identity, which is stigmatised in majority Norwegian society, is undercommunicated in the public sphere and overcommunicated privately, concluding that assimilation into the Norwegian majority identity is a likely long-term outcome. (Owing to the rise of Sami ethnopolitics from the 1970s, this would not, in the event, happen, although Sami identities were transformed in important ways.)

Gunnar Haaland's chapter (Haaland 1969) concerns boundary maintenance and transgression in Darfur. The Fur are farmers, while the Baggara are Arabic-speaking cattle nomads. Like in Eidheim's case, there is no discernable physical difference between the groups. Haaland shows how, under certain circumstances, notably the lack of investment opportunities in traditional Fur economy, Fur households may abandon the sedentary life and become Baggara nomads. He raises the crucial question concerning 'at what point does the change of identity actually take place?' (Haaland 1969: 65). His ethnography shows that the pivotal event is nomadisation and that the weakening of kinship ties with village Fur, change of language and behaviour and intermarriage with Baggara, follow later, over a number of years.

In Jan-Petter Blom's chapter, two culturally and behaviourally distinct groups belonging to the same ethnic category (Norwegians) are analysed, namely, mountain farmers and lowland farmers. The complementary

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situation between the groups may be ‘reminiscent of the so-called plural society’, and the mountain farmer category ‘has developed divergent cultural traits ... in response to adaptive requirements and opportunities provided by variations in ecological conditions’ (Blom 1969: 77). Yet, although cultural differences are visible and often overcommunicated in interaction between highland and lowland farmers, there are no sanctions on intermarriage and no boundary mechanisms with a bearing on social organisation, unlike the case with relationships between Norwegian and Gypsies; despite their cultural differences, mountain and lowland farmers share their ethnic identity. In this way, Blom’s chapter represents a mirror image of Eidheim’s: In the former case, cultural differences are marked and visible, but there are no ethnic boundaries; in the latter case, cultural differences are imperceptible in the public sphere, yet ethnic boundaries are jealously guarded.

Karl-Eric Knutsson’s chapter (Knutsson 1969) is based on the author’s fieldwork in Southern Ethiopia and compares the situation in two regions. His is the first chapter to introduce the state and its effects on ethnic identities. The 19th-century consolidation of the Ethiopian state under Menelik aimed to ‘ethiopianise’ or ‘amharise’ the non-Amhara ethnic groups, but the result was often the opposite: ‘ethnic identities became emphasized and polarization on ethnic grounds was increased’ (Knutsson 1969: 88). He indicates, moreover, how the livelihood of groups have changed owing to state policies, showing that the Arsi, formerly livestock nomads, have become sedentarised. Describing a readjustment to the new conditions, he shows how Arsi near Lake Zwai have developed a symbiotic relationship with Laki fishermen. In his other case, Knutsson describes a hierarchical relationship between lowland Arsi and highland Amhara, detailing changes in agricultural practices as a result of extensive contact, but without changes in ethnic identity taking place.

Adding several dimensions to the topics taken on in the previous chapters, Henning Siverts (1969) describes the intricacies of ethnic identity in Chiapas, Mexico. Referring, like several of the other chapter authors, to Furnivall’s model of the plural society where the discrete groups meet in the marketplace, Siverts looks at boundary maintenance and transgressions in the trading town of San Cristóbal de las Casas. There are a great number of different Indian groups, but only one non-Indian group, namely, Ladinos. Changing to a Ladino identity can be attractive for Indians, but there are several obstacles preventing this identity change. Like Haaland, Siverts asks about the conditions of Ladinisation: ‘How much Spanish does a man need to know and how much education is needed before he is able to make the jump?’ (Siverts 1969: 115). However, remaining a bilingual Indian can have its advantages, and being accepted in Ladino society is difficult. Thus, many successful Indians remain intermediate, approaching what has later been spoken of as hybrid identities or becoming ethnic anomalies (Eriksen 2010).

Barth’s own chapter (Barth 1969c) concerns the cultural diversity among Pathans, who retain their ethnic identities as Pathans in spite of

varied livelihoods and ecological adaptations. As minimal requirements for Pathan identity, he lists three criteria: Patrilineal descent, Islam and Pathan custom, including among other traits the Pashto language, hospitality, the political council and gender segregation (seclusion). The southern boundary of Pathan identity is marked by contrasting with Baluch tribes; in the west, there is competition for land between Persian-speaking Hazara nomads and Pathans, while the situation in the east and in the central plains is complex. Barth describes people who have retained their Pashto language but lost their Pathan identity as well as people migrating into the plains and being absorbed into the Pathan ethnic identity. Marginal Pathans in the north, moreover, may shift to a Kohistani identity in order to avoid being judged, and found wanting, on Pathan criteria for hospitality and gift-giving. Barth reiterates and demonstrates the argument from the 'Introduction' that the boundary is social and ecological, with the cultural markers following logically, not the other way around.

In the final chapter, Karl G. Izikowitz (1969) describes ethnic relations among tribal groups in Laos as well as their collective relationship to the politically and economically dominant Thai-speaking groups in the area. Drawing on Leach's (1954) work as well as that of the Manchester School, Izikowitz predicts a weakening of ethnic identities following urbanisation and industrialisation. Izikowitz distinguishes between internal and external markers of ethnic identity, where the latter are made relevant and overcommunicated through interaction. He also notes that in poly-ethnic systems, identification often produces segmentary systems, so that the dichotomisation between hill tribes ceases when they are confronted with a common adversary, in this case the Thai groups and the state. Like Knutsson, Izikowitz emphasises the homogenising tendencies of the state, without predicting its likely outcome.

### **The broader context of *EGB***

It can be argued that the academic discipline which usually offers the most profound insights in ethnicity is social anthropology, perhaps because of its methodology, which calls attention to interaction and social processes at the micro level. Ethnicity and anthropology have nonetheless not always been obvious partners, and it was only in the 1970s that research on the topic took off in earnest. This was largely because the early focus – shared by functionalists, culture-and-personality adherents and structural functionalists – was on homogeneity, holist integration and system maintenance in ostensibly isolated communities. This orientation diverted attention away from the elements of ethnic relations, as competition, dissent, social discontinuity (Buchignani 1982: 1–2) and complexity. This situation started to change already before *EGB* was published. The publication of *EGB* is, however, widely understood today as a partial cause and a symbol of a highly consequential paradigm shift.

A short book of about 150 pages, its contributors did not expect *EGB* to be received as a crucial intervention, much less the landmark study that it turned out to be (see the interview with Haaland). There is a tentativeness and modesty about several of the chapters, which suggests that the authors saw limited originality in their contributions. And it is true that the arguments and perspectives developed in *EGB* did not arise in a vacuum, and some had been presented, albeit in a less succinct form, earlier. Furnivall's theorising about 'plural societies' has already been mentioned. Among their predecessors in social anthropology, Edmund Leach and the Manchester School under Max Gluckman's leadership were important sources of inspiration. In the introductory chapter to *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Leach (1954) unequivocally expresses a general lack of interest in 'cultural items'. They are, to him, mere arbitrary signs, since what matters are the dynamics of social processes. His intellectual adversaries in the Manchester School (Mitchell 1956; Gluckman 1958 [1940]; A. Cohen 1969; Epstein 1992) were also relatively uninterested in the study of culture as such, but developed a strong and sustained interest in the conscious manipulation of cultural symbols, the transformations of their meaning and the social uses to which they were put (see Banks (1996) for an excellent account of the transition from 'tribe' to 'ethnic group' in the Manchester School; see also Werbner in this volume). In studies of social change in the Copperbelt, Mitchell and Epstein showed how, contrary to expectations, tribal allegiances and identities were not weakened due to urbanisation, but strengthened as members of different tribes were brought into intensified contact and began competing for the same scarce resources, such as housing, work and women.

In choosing these priorities, the Copperbelt researchers revealed their debt to an even earlier school of ethnicity research, the Chicago School (Park Robert and Ernest Burgess 1967 [1925]; for an evaluation of their contribution to ethnicity studies, see Lal (1983, 1990)), a group of scholars devoted to the analysis of the 'urban ecology' of Chicago, a city undergoing fast change and growth early in the 20th century. The cultural differences between the various groups were largely taken for granted, and research focused on social and economic processes. Interestingly, Barth studied in Chicago in the late 1940s but had no contact with this group during his studies (Eriksen 2015: 10). However, he did become acquainted with Erving Goffman in Chicago, who would later influence his work strongly. A pioneering, but sometimes overlooked, study of ethnic revitalization in the USA, *Beyond the Melting-Pot* (Glazer and Moynihan 1963), can be taken as a direct descendant of this school and sees the emergence of well-organised ethnic groups in New York as a modern adaptation, not a survival from an earlier period. In this book, Glazer and Moynihan advocate a clearly instrumentalist position, according to which ethnic groups in New York City present mainly interest groups (ibid., 17). Twelve years later, they elaborated their position in the introduction to the book they jointly edited, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Glazer and Moynihan 1975).

Among the texts dealing with ethnicity preceding the publication of *EGB*, we should also mention Michael Moerman's work, especially the debate between Moerman and Raoul Naroll concerning the Lue, a people of northern Thailand. Moerman (1965, 1968) starts with a seemingly banal question 'Who are the Lue?' while rejecting Naroll's (1964) assumption that 'Lueness' can be defined by enlisting objective cultural traits. Thus, he dismisses the notion of ethnic group as a group sharing a specific culture, that is, as a *cultural* unit, since the traits indicating a cultural group such as 'language, culture, political organization, etc., do not correlate completely', which means that 'the units delimited by one criterion do not coincide with the units delimited by another' (Moerman 1965: 1215). At the same time, cultural traits considered characteristic by members of a particular ethnic group are typically shared by its neighbours; thus, the area of their distribution far exceeds the unit they were supposed to delimit (Moerman 1968 *passim*). Given the impossibility of using objective 'cultural traits' to determine an ethnic group (i.e. to answer the question 'Who are the Lue?'), Moerman anchors his analysis in *self-identification*: 'Someone is a Lue by virtue of believing and calling himself Lue and of acting in ways that validate his Lueness' (Moerman 1965: 1222). Moerman also points out that 'The Lue cannot be identified – cannot, in a sense, be said to exist – in isolation' (Moerman 1965: 1216) and states that membership in a group is dependent upon a category of the excluded, who are nevertheless central 'for the definition of the social unit and for the delineation and maintenance of its boundaries' (Murphy quoted in Moerman 1965: 1216). Regardless of the significant theoretical component, Moerman's studies constitute first of all detailed ethnographic descriptions, or analyses of a particular ethnic group and not – as in Barth's 'Introduction' – a theoretical model.

The publication of *EGB* coincided with the release of the first batch of postcolonial studies in African ethnography and the growing realisation among Western anthropologists that the people they studied were becoming a part of the modern world. Perhaps that is one of the reasons for its impact, offering as it did an approach that suited the new conditions better than the older anthropology, which saw the world largely as an archipelago of distinct cultures. In anthropology, ethnicity became a major research topic in the 1970s, and the dominant approach to the phenomenon continues to draw on a relatively uniform and well-established theoretical framework (Jenkins 2008), although emphases have shifted in important ways. In a book published soon after *EGB*, *Urban Ethnicity* (Cohen 1974; see also Hannerz, this volume), the main focus is on the persistence and transformation of group identities formerly known as tribal, largely in Africa. In spite of fast change, groups adapted their strategies and symbols to new situations, transforming rather than relinquishing their ethnic identity. What was new, as already remarked by Mitchell (1956), was the prevalence of self-conscious boundary maintenance in a situation of intensified intergroup contact. In this way, the ethnic identity, defined through the boundary, became significant in new ways.

### Objections and later developments

Retrospectively, it can be argued that *EGB* appeared at the right time, in the turbulent years following decolonisation, on the heels of the civil rights movement in the USA and the rise of cultural and political radicalism in the West, where ‘identity’ would soon become an important term in discourse about individuals and groups. Nation-building, increased mobility and social change ensured that interethnic relations would create tensions, challenges and opportunities for a long time to come. At the same time, the book also reflects the concerns of the time in which it was researched and written. A striking feature of nearly all chapters is the concern with ecology, economic adaptations and complementary niche constructions which turn into competitive relationships under conditions of scarcity. Echoes from Barth’s early article about ecological relationships between Pathans, Kohistanis and Gujars in the upper reaches of the Swat Valley are audible here (Barth 1956), and it is worth remarking that this perspective has only rarely been followed up in later research on ethnicity. Instead, new themes and empirical foci have been introduced in the decades following *EGB*.

*The state*, only hinted at in *EGB*, has increasingly become a focal point in later studies of ethnicity. Research on nationalism, often inspired by Gellner’s (1983) and Anderson’s (1983) work, is often compatible with the Barthian perspective (Eriksen 2010) but calls attention to the large-scale processes shaping small-scale lives in communities and influencing, sometimes in authoritarian ways, how people identify and live their lives (Hechter 2001). In migration research, citizenship and the processes of inclusion and exclusion contingent on one’s relationship to the state have also become a major field of inquiry (Glick Schiller 1995; Benhabib 2002).

*Indigenous politics*, mainly represented by Eidheim in *EGB*, virtually exploded worldwide in the 1970s. Often inspired by the Barthian perspective, indigenous intellectuals (many of whom have studied anthropology or sociology) have sought to define the boundaries of their identities and criteria for inclusion, while negotiating their relationship not only to the state but also to other indigenous groups. Indeed, two of the participants in the Bergen symposium – Helge Kleivan and Harald Eidheim – would, in different ways, play a part in indigenous politics: Eidheim as a contributor to the identity discourse and lecturer in the Sami areas and Kleivan as founder of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs.

*Urban ethnicity, migration and transnationalism*, only peripherally a theme in *EGB*, has become a third major area of research on ethnicity in the past decades. Arguably, some of the studies from the Copperbelt had more to offer by way of inspiration here than *EGB*. In an urban setting, ecological and environmental constraints cease to play a part, and the different ethnic groups tend to compete for the same resources – work, housing, political influence and recognition. The Furnivallian perspective on pluralism on which several of the *EGB* authors drew, premised on colonialism and an

ethnic division of labour, is less relevant in cities where all are integrated into the same labour markets, systems of taxation and so on. Beginning in the 1970s, research on immigrant minorities in Europe has become a major academic industry (see Cohen 1997; Castles and Miller 2009; Guiberneau and Rex 2010), and while it is often indebted to Barth's insights into boundary dynamics, this research also has other sources of inspiration. Transmigration, whereby people negotiate complex lives between a country of origin and one of immigration, has spurred a lively literature on transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al. 1992), fanning out into research on kinship (Olwig 2007), long-distance nationalism (Anderson 1992) and identity (Vertovec 2009).

*Hybridity and the fuzziness of boundaries:* While there is a lively traffic in symbols, livestock, millet and people across the boundaries in *EGB*, the boundaries themselves remain intact, although the physical borders may shift. The very concept of the boundary has often been challenged in later contributions and in different ways (see Chapter 12). Let us here briefly mention four of the contributors to this book who have problematised the boundary concept in different ways. A. P. Cohen (1994), in a book where the main argument concerns the importance of looking not just at group identities but also at the individual, suggests that the concept of the frontier might sometimes be more accurate than the boundary. Frontier areas are grey zones, neither–nor and both–and, where identities segue into one another rather than being sharply demarcated. Ulf Hannerz (1987), in a seminal article about creolisation, shifts the focus from boundary maintenance to mixing, indicating that in a globalising world, boundaries are continuously being replaced by areas of contestation, both culturally and socially. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, in an influential edited book about hybridity (Werbner and Modood 1997), mobilised academics from anthropology, sociology and cultural studies to interrogate the relevance of boundaries in a whirlwind world of migration, state policies, identity politics and unpredictable cultural flows. Finally, Steven Vertovec's (2007) concept of super-diversity suggests a situation where diversity cannot be put down to group identities, since groups are weakly defined and highly diverse within in contemporary cities. Many others could have been mentioned. Yet, as the rise and continued strength of identity politics worldwide reveal, boundaries remain important, and a great deal of energy is spent on keeping them crisp and clear in the face of threatening creolisation, super-diversity and fuzzy frontiers.

And yet the interstitial, or partly overlapping, domains of cultural meaning and social processes remain a fruitful field for further research. There is no intrinsic reason that cultural mixing should necessarily lead to the merging of ethnic identities. As research on ethnicity and nationalism has made abundantly clear, it is presumptions of difference, not objective differences, that keep boundaries intact. Moreover, as Simon Harrison (2002) has convincingly argued, sometimes perceived similarities, not differences, may be pivotal in spurring boundary work and intergroup competition. Ethnic groups are constituted as social entities, not as cultural ones.

*Ethnic conflict* is almost absent from *EGB*. As remarked by Stanley Tambiah (1989) in an essay about political ethnicity, Barth's book seemed now, 'scarcely two decades later, too benign and tranquil for the study of the ethnic conflicts that rage today' (p. 339). Ranging from ambitious overviews of ethnic conflicts (e.g. Horowitz 1985) to case studies of ethnic conflict (Bringa 1996) and enforced displacement (Malkki 1995), the literature in this area is very significant. Yet the relative lack of ethnic conflict in *EGB* cannot be blamed on the contributors, but instead serves as a reminder of the rapid changes in the conflict situation in the postcolonial and, subsequently, post-Cold War world. The theoretical insights from *EGB* are no less relevant for studies of violence and ethnic conflict than in the more peaceful settings explored in *EGB*.

*Postcolonialism, xenophobia and the politics of recognition* constitute yet another field of enquiry only hinted at, as it could be observed in embryonic forms, in *EGB*. The key publication in this field is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), where the main argument, inspired by Foucault, concerns the right to identify, define and represent oneself on one's own terms, rather than being pigeon-holed into some umbrella or residual category by the hegemons. Recognition as a scarce resource had nevertheless already been researched and theorised by social scientists studying indigenous issues and religious pluralism, as well as indigenous activist-intellectuals like Vine Deloria (1970), when Charles Taylor (1992) put it on the philosophical map in the early 1990s. Influential social theorists, from Zygmunt Bauman (2004) to Will Kymlicka (1995) and Seyla Benhabib (2002), have also made substantial contributions to this central expression of what the late Ulrich Beck spoke of as the 'second modernity', which is a modernity that itself reflects on its own conditions. The shift, as Nancy Fraser (1995) has succinctly phrased it, from a politics of redistribution to a politics of recognition, has moved mainstream scholarly attention towards the nexus of political power and symbolic expressions of identity, with a focus on rights issues, cultural recognition and social autonomy in the face of state power which sometimes tries to enforce assimilation and sometimes practices policies of exclusion towards minorities. Not least in migration studies and research on identitarian groups in Europe, questions concerning who has the right to say what on behalf of whom in order to represent a group correctly have become political issues and research topics of growing significance. Echoes from *EGB* can nevertheless be heard in this research as well, since the question, whether it concerns who has the right to belong to a nation or how to frame your rights claims as a Muslim immigrant, is really about boundary work, criteria of inclusion and the quest for equivalence between hierarchically ordered groups or categories.

*The relationship of ethnic identity to culture:* Since one of the strongest, and most controversial, tenets of *EGB* was the primacy of social processes over cultural meaning, some of the most heated debates have, not surprisingly, concerned precisely this issue. In an exploration of the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland, Jenkins (2008) concludes that 'the cultural

stuff' is indeed important and that 'being a Catholic or a Protestant really means something' to the people in question. A similar view was developed by A. P. Cohen (1985) in his book on the symbolic construction of community, where it becomes apparent that the construction and maintenance of boundaries, and the production of 'cultural stuff', merge in the creation of symbols.

The relationship between ethnicity and culture is sometimes discussed in the context of social constructivism (Bader 2001; Baumann 2001). In a critique of Gerd Baumann's (1996) study of cultural complexity in Southall, Veit Bader argued that Baumann's constructivist view of culture reduces it to discourse and self-identification, thus discarding the objective, often unacknowledged, aspects of culture. The anthropology of ethnicity may thus be limited to studying people's *perceptions* of their own culture and their actions, instead of studying their culture. Baumann (2001) responded by distancing himself from cultural determinism, emphasising agency and flexibility in identification.

The debate reveals important differences: The orthodox positions on ethnicity and nationalism are informed by empiricist, analytical philosophy, while an alternative approach would take its cue from Continental rationalist philosophy. Luc de Heusch (2000: 104), in a critique of the dominant school of ethnicity studies, similarly accuses Eugeen Roosens (1989) of 'a blatant confusion between two levels: the cultural and the political', before moving to a detailed discussion of sacred kingship in African societies and its importance for intergroup relations. De Heusch (2000: 113) is concerned with understanding the patterns underlying cultural variation and insists on seeing the *ethnie* 'as a cultural unit and... a basic anthropological element' (see also Eriksen 2000). It is nevertheless a fact that very few studies of ethnicity have been undertaken within this tradition in anthropology.

The criticisms – friendly in the cases of Jenkins and A. P. Cohen, more hostile as regards Bader and de Heusch – of the instrumentalist bias in ethnicity studies need to be taken seriously. For how are societies integrated, if not through culture, which has to be understood as a shared system of communication? In Allen and Eade's (1998: 33) words, 'there is a fine line between trying to describe the value system of minorities (or any ethnicity) and suggesting that those values determine identity'.

*The relativity of group integration* has famously been addressed by another of our contributors, Rogers Brubaker (2006), albeit preceded in a brief article by Don Handelman (1977), an anthropologist associated with the Manchester School. Handelman's argument, and Brubaker's far more elaborated work on similar issues, is that group cohesion is an empirical question and that the ethnic boundary, even where it may be clearly defined, need not be particularly important in everyday life or at the level of social organisation. Brubaker shows that contrasting categorisations precluding intimacy and assimilation can be important at the personal level, and at that of domestic organisation, without requiring an incorporated ethnic group at

a higher scalar level. In other words, what is chiefly challenged in Brubaker's work is not the 'boundary' part of Barth's book title, but the term 'group'. Using quantitative methods, but also taking Barth's theory as a point of departure, Andreas Wimmer (2013) has more recently argued that ethnic identity becomes important under particular circumstances involving the allocation of resources, while it may be less socially significant if networks, power and institutions follow mainly non-ethnic lines of distribution.

Further items could easily have been added to this list of new topics in research on ethnicity. Notably, the emergence of politicised religion complicates matters: Religions of conversion are not ethnic in the sense of being based on putative shared origins, yet they maintain boundaries with many structural features in common with ethnic boundaries (see Chapter 13). Barth (1992, 1994) would himself concede that there were aspects of ethnicity that the Scandinavian group had originally underestimated (such as the role of the state) or dismissed a tad too quickly (such as cultural meaning) and that new empirical developments (such as migration in Europe) required a refinement of the toolbox. As shown in Chapter 14, the term 'ethnicity' has different connotations to scholars working in different parts of the world (see also Fenton 2010): In the USA, studies of ethnic relations have typically focused on people of European origin, while race relations and studies of Native Americans had their own literature.

The situation in the former eastern bloc is distinctive. Before the political changes around 1990, these countries were dominated by the so-called ethnos theory,<sup>1</sup> whose most prominent representative was Yulian Bromley (see Bromley 1974, 1978, 1989), the director of the Institute of Ethnography at the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow from 1966 to 1989. Although 'ethnos theory' is mentioned by some authors in their summaries of the various theoretical approaches to ethnicity alongside Western theories of ethnicity (Banks 1996; Sokolovskii and Tishkov 2002 [1998]; Eriksen 2010), it cannot be seen as a theoretical tradition that is complementary to the Western ones. 'Ethnos theory' is primordialist, with a strong evolutionist component. Given the central position of social constructivism in modern social anthropology and refusal of primordialism as a theoretical stance, the relationship between Western theories of ethnicity and the 'ethnos theory' can be described as one of 'contrasting paradigms' (Holloman 1978: 23), yet some of the authors who entered into a direct contact with proponents of this theory were much less euphemistic and might describe it as 'theoretically antediluvian' (Chapter 4). The disintegration of the Soviet Union and its sphere of power was accompanied by a greater intellectual and theoretical freedom. Not everybody, however, has made use of this opportunity. Many academics of the senior generation, who were educated in the Soviet era, have not changed their theoretical approach (cf. Brubaker 1998: 302). In spite of this fact, however, some of these scholars would redefine themselves as social/cultural anthropologists. As a result, the new discipline of social/cultural anthropology in Central and Eastern Europe brought with it the baggage

of the old primordialism of the ‘ethnos theory’. Anthropology in Eastern Europe has been characterised by the tension between this primordialist heritage and other theoretical orientations until today (Jakoubek 2016).

In Western Europe, research on ethnicity has mainly focused on either indigenous minorities or immigrant minorities, and ethnicity has chiefly been conceptualised as the relationship between the minority on the one hand, and the majority and the state on the other hand. Elsewhere in the world, the concept of ethnicity has mainly been used in research on majority–minority relations, where the minority somehow comes across as ‘more ethnic’ than the majority. Conceptualising ethnicity as relational, it is easy to understand why this would be the case: All other things being equal, a member of a minority is confronted with his or her identity far more often than someone from a majority, and accordingly, their identity as *ethnic* is being actualised more often.

### **After *EGB***

Following the publication of *EGB*, only a few of the contributors would continue to develop the burgeoning research area of ethnicity research, although many of their students would. Barth himself was already engaged in a new intellectual endeavour by the time the book was published (Eriksen 2015: 108). In 1968, he returned from fieldwork among the Baktaman of New Guinea, having shifted his intellectual focus from strategic interaction and intergroup dynamics to knowledge systems (Barth 1975). He would sporadically revisit *EGB*, notably in the volume produced to commemorate its twenty-fifth anniversary (Barth 1994; Vermeulen and Govers 1994). His monographs from Oman (Barth 1983) and Bali (Barth 1993) both addressed cultural pluralism, but without returning to the intellectual concerns of social boundary maintenance and ecological adaptations foregrounded in *EGB*.

The legacy of *EGB* nevertheless remains monumental. Although, as we have briefly indicated, new empirical fields have gained prominence, making the ethnography of *EGB* appear as somewhat obsolete, and though the central concepts of ethnicity, groups and boundaries have been challenged, some of the main insights from the book have established themselves as standard implements in the intellectual toolbox. Applying the distinction between cultural content and social relations, important long before *EGB*, to group identities has proven to be exceptionally fruitful in research on nationalism and collective identities in complex societies (see, e.g. Eriksen 2007). The emphasis on boundary work has, moreover, been applied to a variety of non-ethnic settings as well and can be helpful in making sense of gender, class, regional and other delineated identities – as well as challenging them (see, e.g. Jenkins 2007). Finally, the seeming paradox of ethnic identities being simultaneously situational and imperative – chosen and enforced – has opened a much needed space for exploring and reflecting on the possibilities and limitations of identity management at the personal level.

**Note**

- 1 Often, the 'ethnos theory' is labelled as a 'Soviet ethnos theory' (cf. e.g. Banks 1996); however, as Tamara Dragadze points out, 'in fact it has been a predominantly Russian endeavor' (Dragadze 1990: 210).

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