

SYNNØVE K. N. BENDIXSEN AND EDVARD HVIDING (eds.) *Anthropology in Norway: Directions, Locations, Relations*. Canon Pyon, UK: Sean Kingston Publishing. The RAI Country Series, Volume Three. 2021. 152 pp. ISBN: 978-1-912385-30-0 (paperback); ISBN: 978-1-912385-38-6 (E-book); DOI: 10.26581/B.BEND01 (E-book)

Anthropology has taken different shapes in all corners of the world, where its followers inquire about the meanings attached to culture. This inquiry was primarily directed towards faraway places outside the ‘Western sphere’. Anthropology in Norway, interestingly, developed in two opposing directions: one as an old-fashioned view looking for answers in remote places; and the other focused on answering those questions on Norwegian soil. These two sides have raised questions around all of the components of anthropology as a science: its methods, applicability to the ‘outside world’, and the ethical dimension of conducting fieldwork. With these premises at the core of each section, this compilation reflects what the anthropology in and of Norway has given to the global landscape of the social sciences.

The compilation begins with a preamble by Synnøve Bendixsen and Edvard Hviding, in which they describe the peculiarities of anthropology in Norway, situating the country in the West, albeit, from the periphery position of anthropology as a science that emerged in universities in the United Kingdom and the United States. According to this logic, anthropology in Norway was founded by scholars trained academically in those countries, to develop this scientific field through the study of cultural minorities in Norway (the Sámi and, more recently, immigrant populations) rather than in far-away places. This approach prompts the authors to examine the ethical side of

anthropology in its early years, specifically how it perpetuated inequalities in national societies rather than combating them. This reflexivity proposes a reformulation of reciprocity between researcher and informants and how science can be used to benefit those who are studied. From the foundation of the Centre for Sámi Studies at The University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway to the participation of Norwegian anthropologists in the peace processes in Sudan, this compilation brings together a variety of perspectives regarding how anthropological knowledge can engage with those social processes it studies.

Following the preamble, the discussion continues with a historical overview by Olaf H. Smedal, who sketches the emergence of this discipline from the early years at the Ethnographic Museum in Oslo, the years following the Nazi occupation when Fredrik Barth brought the influence of American and British Anthropology to establish academic departments across Norway, the relationship between anthropology and the research group for Sámi studies at the University of Tromsø that later emerged as the Centre for Sámi Studies (suddenly linked with the self-determination movement of the Sámi people in the 1970s) to the current fieldwork interests of Norwegian anthropology departments both in their own country and afar.

Smedal (2021: 27) uses Barth’s concept on ‘transactionalism’, viewing societies as processes

constantly reinventing themselves, showing the interconnections between anthropology and historical processes. Anthropology in Norway has come hand in hand with national changes and ideologies that shape the different forms of knowledge, which have been intertwined with social movements, the foundation of academic departments, and the question of how this science can benefit society in applied matters. One of Norwegian anthropology's most significant contributions to the landscape of this science has been the development of fieldwork within the national borders of the country. Given the lack of resources available to undertake fieldwork overseas during a long period of time—from the post-war age to well into the 1980s—ethnography was seen as a step in the national surroundings. This resulted in innovative works such as Marianne Gullestad's (1984) study of young working-class mothers or the work of Barth (1963) on entrepreneurs in Norway.

Undertaking fieldwork in Norway opened up discussions on the methodological steps throughout the research process, questioning the necessary length of time one needs in order to perceive locals' viewpoints. Signe Howell, in 'The fieldwork tradition', compares the time frame parameters between Norway and the UK in the 1970s: while 9 months in Norway was the norm, 18 months in Oxford was viewed as necessary. According to Howell, this shorter fieldwork period demonstrated that ethnography could be carried out efficiently when there is a theoretical basis supporting the quest for answers, no matter how far and wide the space and time are. Howell (2021: 37, 38) argues that anthropological research in Norway was primarily driven to sustain a theory on 'the field'. For example, the Anthropology Department at the University of Bergen, or the so-called 'Bergen School', was established in 1962 from

Barth's influence on transactionalism. Fieldwork, therefore, continued to have a specific scope in a theory depending on the department, until the present time when there is more variety in perspectives and places to go.

In a historical description of what fieldwork is, Halvard Vike in 'No direction home: Anthropology in and of Norway', questions the notion of places of belonging as a key element for anthropologists to choose their field site of interest. A sense of belonging that anthropologists share relates to how far away we can go for our fieldwork experience, with further deemed better. However, this principle does not always guarantee fulfilling the 'anthropological experience' nor is it a compulsory step towards coming of age vis-à-vis the personal experience in ethnographic research. Vike provides a number of examples from Norwegian anthropologists who have questioned the cultural differences between themselves and their informants by carrying out fieldwork in and on Norway. As mentioned by Marilyn Strathern (1987: 16) in her discussion of 'auto anthropology' within this essay, doing anthropology 'at home' is not primarily about how exotic the cultural attributes of those studies seem to be, but rather how they construct knowledge. That said, doing anthropology 'at home' means that both the ethnographer and the subjects of study build knowledge in an equal manner, and, thus, question the cultural patterns they both share.

Gunnar M. Sørbo in 'Norwegian Anthropology and Development: New roles for a troubled future?' explains the relationship that anthropological research holds with international development. By providing a historical overview of the intervention Norwegian aid provided in Sudan for more than 50 years through an academic agreement between the University of Bergen and the

University of Khartoum, Sørbo shows that anthropological research affords an innovative understanding of how conflicts operate across different layers of political interests that the international development apparatus oftentimes dismisses. Norwegian foreign aid in Sudan enhances a deeper understanding of how conflicts run at the local, national, and international levels.

In a different yet eloquent narrative, Thomas Hylland Eriksen in 'The unbearable lightness of being...a public anthropologist in Norway' explains the challenge of anthropologists to demonstrate the relevance of their knowledge. Given that anthropologists work for a variety of entities, whilst also criticising institutions that might impose power relations in society such as the government and central banks amongst others, it is difficult to see the 'societal assignment' (*samfunnopdrag*) of this discipline (Eriksen 2021: 74). Eriksen (2021: 78) even calls anthropologists the 'anarchists of Western academia' given their inclination to always talk publicly on the 'heavy side of things'—that is, the problems a nation might face or crises that people experience from structural inequalities in today's world. According to the author, anthropologists need to find novel, innovative tactics to make clear why the critical and sensitive viewpoint of anthropological knowledge is as relevant as any other social science discipline.

Next, Synnøve Bendixsen provides a historical overview of the survival of anthropology in Norway in 'Disagreement, illumination, and mystery: Towards an ethnography of anthropology in Norway'. Through this summary of the ups and downs of anthropology across the four universities where it is located (Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, and Tromsø), Bendixsen focuses on the issues

of academic funding to conduct research and develop the discipline as a component of educational programmes. She outlines one of the reasons why anthropology has remained alive in this country: academic funding has never been heavily impacted by global crises. In addition, anthropologists have ventured into public debates in the media and at events, making anthropological knowledge more accessible to the public. Bendixsen mentions that even though the discipline has gone through a number of changes in Norway recently, it is still well positioned in comparison to anthropological communities elsewhere.

Lastly, the book finishes with a panel discussion on Norwegian Anthropology Day, through the participation of discussants from the four anthropology departments in Norway, followed by an editor's note by Marilyn Strathern on 'Norwegian Anthropology: Towards the identification of an object'. According to the discussion, anthropology in Norway is a social phenomenon intertwined with the changes that Norway faces as a country. It is through this statement that the book traces the discussion regarding what direction(s) anthropology could take in the future within and beyond Norwegian soil. By taking Norway as an example, this book provides a well-explained picture of what anthropology is and how it needed to position itself in academic settings as a science in its own right. Nonetheless, further discussion needs to be placed on where anthropology is situated within the job market today, and how to use anthropological knowledge to solve problems happening in the here and the now.

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