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## NOTES AND REVIEWS

*Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology*. Edited by Heidi Armbruster and Anna Lærke. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books 2008, 258 pages.

Samuel Gerald Collins, *All Tomorrow's Cultures: Anthropological Engagements with the Future*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books 2008, 140 pages.

I suppose when an anthropologist goes to do fieldwork then one question he or she is generally confronted with is "Why are you doing this research? What is it all for?" This happens especially when the scholar comes from a society that is richer than the society being studied. And let's be honest, this happens in at least 80 per cent of fieldwork cases. As a student of a German research institution studying very poor people on the coast of the Arctic Ocean, people did not understand that I really want to write my PhD thesis about how they live. There is this guy who seemingly has money, at home he has everything the people in the Arctic dream of – a shower, central heating, shops, bars and clubs, but despite this, this strange guy decided to bury himself in a place without all of these 'signs of civilisation' and came to stay for a year. The purpose of the discipline is not only an issue for discussion during fieldwork but also something anthropologists are engaged with, especially in their early years and foremost during their university year. I recall that we asked the question "What is the purpose of anthropology?" in a seminar given by Georg Elwert at the Berlin Free University. His response was concrete: "The purpose of anthropology is to study different groups of people to make prognosis about social and cultural processes." There are two books, both published by the same Berghahn Books, that to a certain extent engage with both topics – anthropology as a fieldwork based disci-

pline and anthropology as a discipline that tends to create concepts for the future.

The first book, *Taking Sides*, analyses anthropological fieldwork, especially the ethics and power relationships in the field. It is not unknown that in anthropology (and the social sciences in general) several codified concepts dealing with ethics exist. The most well known is probably the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association, which "represents ethics mostly in terms of obligations" (p. 2). This document states pretty strictly what the anthropologist is allowed to do and what not. However, pleas for honesty and not hurting humans or animals have very little use when a scholar enters a community with different norms, beliefs and values, and one that is very often considerably poorer or of lower status than his or her own. As stated in the introduction to the book, "ethics and conflicts on all levels of engagement" (p. 4) are a constant part of the scholarship and have been articulated by various instances in different time periods. To solve these conflicts, researchers are often forced to take sides, i.e. build up emotional non-neutral relationship with the communities they work with. The opening chapter by Nancy Lindisfarne discusses the tendency of choosing research topic and community according one's sympathies. This is not unusual in Estonia either when we think about the beginning of the new wave of Siberian research in the University of Tartu at the beginning of the 1990s when several young and romantic scholars travelled to Siberian Finno-Ugric peoples at a time when the public polemic about Estonian cultural roots was at its peak. Several contributions to the book deal with conflicts anthropologists encounter in the field – a middle class Turkish scholar (Tayfun Atay) studying working class Sufis or a middle class Bengali woman studying experiences of sexual violence among poor women

(Nayanika Mookherjee). In both cases the sympathies of leftist intellectuals for their poor countrymen were not encountered and the first answer of the community to their appearance was sheer suspicion. It is interesting to read how anthropologists in situations like these begin to reformulate their own identities and world views, something that is not unknown to us all. The most juicy chapters of the book are probably by Panagiotis Geros and Heidi Armbruster, who talk about the dilemma of working within a community that the researcher feels enormous sympathy for, but at the same time having problems accepting some of this community's norms. The value of the book is that it avoids the abstract theorising of postmodern reflexive anthropology and in place of this tells well founded stories of real problems scholars have when entering different cultures.

Where *Taking Sides* focuses on power relationships and identity construction on an individual level, then *All Tomorrow's Cultures* moves to the larger scale discussing how anthropologists construct and see identities and power relations at the level of the group or even nation. The book itself is a beautifully written ethnography about different concepts of the future. In the introduction the author discusses how the Western concept of the future is actually anchored in the past and uses as an example the widely criticised world order of Samuel Huntington (p. 2). The author also dedicates a few pages to globalisation and how it is understood in terms of consumption – the future usually lies in the marketing and developing of new products. In short, Collins shows how the Western perception of the future is deeply anchored in understanding of the present and past and the how the future is always dependent on what we add to or delete from our history (pp. 4–8). As a matter of fact, this is not very strange because 'values' and 'civilisation' define how the world is seen in Western culture (and according to my field experiences also in other cultures). Therefore it is not

surprising that Collins dedicates a whole chapter to Chad Oliver, an anthropologist and a science fiction writer from the 1950s. On the one hand, this chapter is full of theorising on how anthropologists have interpreted other cultures in order to understand their own cultures. What is novel is the link to science fiction writing. As the author of the book states, both "1950s science fiction and anthropology shared some common assumptions about the power of technology, rational thinking, and the ultimate *telos* of humanity" (p. 60). This book follows the analysis of power relations in the social sciences of *Taking Sides*, but while in the first book the power relations between different classes, religions or ethnic groups were discussed as micro-level struggles, then here the focus is on interpretations of macro-level power relationships. In this sense the second chapter about Margaret Mead's political and social views demonstrates how scholars are engaged in macro-level future prognoses. This chapter shows the engagement of the world famous scholar in politics and social issues, and provides an interesting explanation of how these activities were connected to Margaret Mead as an anthropologist. Mead's World War II activities were fuelled by patriotic feelings of wishing to help her country by studying diet, relationships between British and American troops and so forth. Mead's post-war studies were also linked with her belief in progress, affection for youth and critical observation of US politics. This and other essays might be interesting for Estonian scholars: the legacy of historians and anthropologists in establishing and governing the post-Soviet Republic of Estonia has not been fully discussed yet.

As a summary, both books give food for thought when we try to make sense of what we do professionally and why we do it. Both books pose questions we usually do not ask of ourselves but with which we are constantly confronted. Moreover, both books give good overviews to someone unfamiliar with the social sciences and about what is going on inside anthropology.