

Introduction

Emancipation and Engagement over the Years¹

TOON VAN MEIJL & FRANS WIJSEN

This collective volume has been compiled to celebrate that 75 years ago the foundation was laid for the Department of Anthropology and Development Studies at Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The contributions to this volume exemplify the evolution of the academic disciplines of anthropology and development studies at Radboud University in the course of its history. Radboud University itself celebrates its centenary in the year 2023. Originally this university was established for the emancipation of the Catholic population in the Netherlands – until 2004 its official name was the Catholic University of Nijmegen. Emancipation continues to be a distinctive feature of the university's policy, also of the scholarship as it is conducted in the department of anthropology and development studies. Needless to say, however, that the concept of emancipation has acquired a different meaning over the years; the target groups have changed, while as a goal of policies and research it is also approached from a variety of different angles. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to offer a comprehensive discussion of the different meanings of emancipation and its historical transformation, but some notes on the development of the department are necessary to provide a historical setting for this festive volume.

In 1948, the first chair in cultural anthropology, then still labelled 'ethnology', was established at the Catholic University of Nijmegen with the appointment of Bernard Vroklage. This first professor had been trained in the Anthropos Institute of the missionary congregation the Society of the Divine Word (*Societas Verbi Divini*, SVD), led by the renowned and influential priest and scholar Wilhelm Schmidt. Vroklage had done field research on Flores and Timor in Indonesia (at the time still part of the Dutch East Indies). Since he was an ordained priest, his research

1 We are very grateful to René van der Haar for his editorial assistance in compiling this collective volume.

was interconnected with missionary activities on the understanding that “anthropology... should contribute to the pastoral task of the missions” (see Willemsen, this volume).² In view of his background, it may not be surprising that the first chair of cultural anthropology became part of the Institute of Mission Studies at Radboud University.

Professor Vroklage died of a tragic accident in 1951³ and was succeeded by Richard Mohr, who held the chair in anthropology until his retirement in 1970. Mohr had also been trained in the tradition of the SVD and had previously served as priest in the diocese of Trier. He had extensive experience in Africa, both as missionary and as anthropological fieldworker. Since Indonesia had become independent, it was considered an advantage that he had special expertise in East and Central African societies, with which the Netherlands had no colonial connections (Meurkens 1998: 32).

The blurred boundary between anthropology and missionary activities in the work of Vroklage and Mohr would nowadays be considered problematic, but the similarities between the two occupations frequently intersected in the past. After all, both missionaries and anthropologists are professional strangers in foreign societies, with a shared interest in non-western culture that is grounded in a western type of rationality. In the ‘field’, anthropologists and missionaries sometimes operated rather independently and could treat one another with respect, but in other situations their relationship was characterized by contempt and mutual distrust. As a corollary, relations between anthropologists and missionaries have been characterized as ambiguous in an extensive debate about their resemblances (Van der Geest 1987; Bensen, Marks and Miedema 1990; Borsboom and Kommers 2000). In a historical review of relations between anthropologists and missionaries, Pels (1990) pointed out that, with the professionalization of the discipline of cultural anthropology within the academy, their relationships have become more detached. This insight also applies to the evolution of cultural anthropology at Radboud University.

Throughout most of the 1950s, Professor Mohr was the only member of staff in the discipline of cultural anthropology. In 1956, his chair was converted from ‘ethnology and religion studies’ into cultural anthropology, although he continued to be part of the Institute of Mission Studies until a separate Institute of Cultural Anthropology was set up in 1958 (Meurkens 2002: 497). In 1959, a new member of

2 See also: <https://www.ru.nl/ftr/actueel/ftr-100-verhaLen/@1308989/1948-missie-alphons-mulders/>. Interestingly, oral tradition has it that his missionary background had hampered an appointment as professor at Leiden university (see also Meurkens 2002: 497).

3 See: <https://www.ru.nl/ftr/@1340581/1951-doodsmak-kwakkenberg/>.

staff was appointed: Leo Triebels, the first graduate in anthropology of Radboud University. He became the first non-clerical member of staff. It was the beginning of a new era, which gathered some momentum with the establishment of a Faculty of Social Sciences in 1963. The Institute of Cultural Anthropology was transferred to this faculty and expanded with two positions, a 'lector'⁴ in social anthropology (Albert Trouwborst) and a 'lector' in folk law and legal development in non-western societies (Geert van den Steenhoven). Soon they were accompanied by professor Elisabeth Allard, who since 1958 held an extraordinary chair in non-western sociology in the Faculty of Arts, but who also transferred to the new Faculty of Social Sciences, in which her chair was converted into an ordinary chair. The total of five staff members exceeded the number of students until 1966, when student numbers suddenly increased from four in 1965 to seventeen in 1966 (interview with Ad Borsboom, 2023). The various types of expertise among the professors and lectores generated a debate about the shared focus in the Institute of Cultural Anthropology, which was rebranded in 1966 with the awkward label of United Institutes of Cultural Anthropology and Non-Western Sociology (Triebels 1979, 33).

The subdiscipline of non-western sociology might be regarded as an early precursor of development studies in the Netherlands, focusing on the development and modernization of formerly colonized societies (Schenk-Sandbergen 2002). It emerged in the 1950s at a number of universities in the country, including Radboud University. Here it was initially also intertwined with the missionary goals of the first chair, Professor Allard, who was a member of the Catholic congregation Women of Bethany (Meurkens 1998: 41). The lack of attention in this field for inequality and injustice in development processes, however, became a cause of concern among the growing student population at Radboud University in the late 1960s. Rising student numbers coincided with widespread opposition against the central pillars of society after the Second World War, particularly churches (Janssen and Voestermans 1978). At Radboud University, a radical student movement emerged, taking inspiration from Marxist epistemology and demanding the democratization of teaching and research. A recent study argues compellingly that this transition may be considered as a conversion from the predominance of Catholic orthodoxy to the dogma of Marxism (Willemsen 2022).

In this context, the curriculum of cultural anthropology and non-western sociology was soon also considered to be overly conservative. Resistance against

4 The position of 'lector' no longer exists at Dutch Universities. They were the equivalent of Reader (in the United Kingdom) or Associate Professor (in the USA). In 1980, all 'lectores' became full professor.

cultural anthropology was part of the rising awareness that the discipline had emerged during the colonial era, which required reflection on its assumptions and aims in postcolonial times (Asad 1973; Thomas 1994). Apart from struggles within the department and its repeated occupation by students advocating for radical change, this movement also led to the establishment of the Third World Centre in 1973 – 50 years ago in the year 2023! The founding father of this centre, Gerrit Huizer, had conducted extensive fieldwork in Latin America, where he had been inspired by liberation theology. Against that background, he criticized anthropology for collaborating with colonialism and argued that scholars should demonstrate more solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in the Third World (Huizer 1975). It may also explain why his collaboration with the Department of Mission Studies at the university was so close. At the time, Mission Studies had emancipated itself from the paradigm of conversion and mainly studied theologians in the Third World who were advocating for the liberation of the ‘poor’ and a dialogue with the ‘Others’. Initially, the Third World Centre was located off-campus, but over the years its position on the periphery changed. It was increasingly accepted as an important part of the university, which began with recognition of its main course (“Processes of change in the Third World”) as an elective, that subsequently was extended to a minor and later also a major.

In the meantime, the department of anthropology also expanded and changed under the influence of time. Student numbers skyrocketed in the 1970s, paralleled by an enormous increase in staff. Non-western sociology was incorporated in the curriculum of anthropology after the retirement of Professor Allard in 1969, when the institute also changed its name into Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology. Professor Mohr retired in 1970. The main figureheads in the years to come were Professor Trouwborst (social anthropology), whose ‘lectoraat’ was changed into a professorship in 1971, and Professor Blok (cultural anthropology), who was appointed in 1973. For many years, the department was divided into two sub-sections: social anthropology, predominantly inspired by the British tradition, with a focus on the study of symbols and social organization; and cultural anthropology, that introduced historicizing anthropology and figurational sociology as articulated by Norbert Elias into the curriculum, and also the regional specialization of European anthropology, the Mediterranean area in particular. Students continued to struggle towards adaptation of the teaching program that was considered apolitical, if not colonial. At the same time, the emergence of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s inspired female students to advocate for the appointment of a female staff member and the inclusion of ‘women’s studies’ in the curriculum (see Jansen, this volume). In the early 1980s, Marxist anthropology

was incorporated in the curriculum, while the specialization of economic anthropology was added to the department with the appointment of Willem Wolters to a chair in that field in 1985.

Since in this brief introduction we cannot reconstruct the history of the department in more detail, we may synopsise that in the mid-1980s the situation became more stable in terms of student numbers and staff composition. However, Blok moved to Amsterdam in 1986, while Trouwborst retired in 1989 (Trouwborst 1999). The different chairs of social anthropology and cultural anthropology were combined into a new chair of cultural and social anthropology, to which Frans Hüsken was appointed in 1990. Hüsken had studied non-western sociology at Radboud University, where he wrote a master's thesis on the student movement in postcolonial Indonesia in 1971. After his graduation he had been employed at the University of Amsterdam, where he also completed his doctorate on social differentiation in a peasant community on Java, Indonesia (Hüsken 1988). His doctoral dissertation testified to the 'anthropologization' of non-western sociology over the years (cf. Schenk-Sandbergen 2002), which appeared not only from his approach but also from his focus on poverty and inequality. This background may have contributed to the development of cooperative relations between the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology and the Third World Centre in the course of the 1990s.

The final decade of the previous century may also be characterized as the heydays of the anthropology of Oceania at Radboud University. This regional specialization began in 1975, when the first austerity programme in higher education requested anthropology departments in the Netherlands to focus on particular thematic and regional specializations. In addition to the thematic specialization of economic anthropology, Nijmegen was allocated the region of Australia and Oceania, later to be called the Pacific. Initially a small centre for the study of Australia and Oceania was set up, which was renovated and rebranded in 1992 as Centre for Pacific Studies on the occasion of its organization of the First European Colloquium on Pacific Studies. This large international conference resulted in the establishment of the European Society for Oceanists and put Nijmegen on the map (Van Meijl 2018). In the 1990s, three scholars (Otto, Van Meijl and Venbrux) were awarded a prestigious research fellowship by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, while Borsboom was appointed professor of anthropology of Oceania in 1997. It created some critical mass in the anthropology of Oceania for several years to come, with numerous MA and doctoral students conducting research in the region (see, e.g., Borsboom et al. in this volume).

In 1999, the Faculty of Social Sciences decided to merge anthropology and development studies into one program. Initially, however, this only implied a joint first semester during the first year, after which students chose to continue in either one of the disciplines (Meurkens 2002: 509). The distinction between anthropology and development studies remained institutionalized for some time. In 1999, for example, Leo de Haan was appointed to the chair of development studies, and rebranded the Third World Centre into the Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen (CIDIN) during his inaugural address (De Haan 2000). Cooperation gradually advanced over the years, e.g. when a joint bachelor program was developed with the introduction of the Bachelor/Master structure in 2004. The integration of the disciplines of anthropology and development studies was finally completed in 2016, when distinct trajectories also disappeared in the master's program. Since then, anthropology and development have been fully integrated in teaching and research. The first joint research program, developed over the past decade, focuses on the question of how diversity and various forms of inequality influence and perhaps reinforce each other. During the most recent research assessment in 2020 this program was assessed as 'very good'.

In 2023, then, we celebrate that the foundation for the Department of Anthropology and Development Studies was laid 75 years ago, and that we have a history of 75 years of anthropology and 50 years of development studies at Radboud University. In view of this anniversary, we reflected on the common denominator in both disciplines over the years at this university in Nijmegen. Indeed, emancipation was a key concept in the mission of the university at its establishment a century ago, which was also embraced by the first generation of anthropologists at Radboud University. At a later stage, Catholicism and religious emancipation were disconnected from the professional "purpose of anthropology... to make the world safe for human differences" (Ruth Benedict). From the late 1960s and early 1970s, emancipation was translated in terms of sympathy for the underdog or disenfranchised groups in societies in which scholars in the fields of both anthropology and development studies conduct their research. Indeed, it is in this tradition that anthropology and development studies are collaborating at Radboud University: we share a concern for the dignity and rights of all humans, we aim at changing livelihood conditions in order to create more social justice and we are committed to mobilizing the results of our research for constructive interventions into politics (e.g. Gardner and Lewis 2015; Kirsch 2018). As such, emancipation and engagement are key concepts in the disciplines of anthropology and development studies at Radboud University. For that reason, too, we have elected to focus in this anniversary volume on the various meanings of the concepts of emancipation and

engagement in the practices of anthropology and development studies at Radboud University since its inception in 1948.⁵

We invited all colleagues in the department and all former professors who are still alive and kicking to contribute an essay on the meaning of engaged scholarship in their own work, especially in relation to emancipatory issues.⁶ We also encouraged them to collaborate with former colleagues, including PhD students or postdoctoral fellows. In addition, we encouraged them to reflect on changes in approaches of emancipation and engagement over the years, and to do so in a style that makes this volume accessible to a wider readership. The outcome is a rich variety of contributions centering on a clear focus: the tension between engagement and scholarship in the disciplines of anthropology and development studies.

We start this volume with three historical narratives about disciplinary developments in Nijmegen: a biographical essay on the first professor of anthropology about whom very little was known to date (by Willemsen), an account of the emergence of gender studies and its ongoing struggle (Jansen) and a brief history of Australian Aboriginal Studies in Nijmegen (Borsboom et al.). Next, a series of essays are included that describe personal journeys in the disciplines of anthropology and development studies, reflecting on the authors' development in relation to scholarship and engagement (Davids and Guadeloupe, Hoebink, Mutsaers, Van Teijlingen and Wolters). Koster, Van Meijl and Widlok also contribute an essay in this genre, in which they reflect explicitly on the methodological and theoretical implications of the dilemmas entailed by engagement in field research. Last but not least, some essays are presenting and discussing case-studies, with some based primarily on empirical research (Beuving, Van Kempen et al., Wijzen), while others add conceptual reflections (Vollebergh and Van Stapele) or discuss also shifting paradigms in anthropology and developments studies over the years (Kamanzi et al., Ruben et al.). With their different points of departure and styles, the various contributions provide a clear and colourful picture of the development and contemporary state of the art in anthropology and development studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen.

We should like to finish by pointing out that this volume is part of a publication series that emerged under the auspices of the Nijmegen Interdisciplinary

5 Incidentally, both concepts were also prominent in the valedictory lecture of the founding father of development studies at Nijmegen (Huizer 1999). See also the *Festschrift* that was offered to him on that occasion (Hoebink, Haude, and Van der Velden 1999).

6 In addition, we invited Marie-Antoinette Willemsen, a graduate of the former Institute for Cultural and Social Anthropology, to contribute a paper on *Vroklage* because of her expertise in this field of research.

Centre for Development and Cultural Change (NICCOS – ‘Nijmegen Instituut voor Comparatieve Cultuur- en Ontwikkelingsstudies’). This institute was established in 1989 to advance interfaculty cooperation between anthropology, development studies, mission studies and other disciplines with an interest in the Global South. It also launched a publication series that has existed for more than 30 years, with more than 50 books and volumes, although under the imprint of several publishers. This volume, co-edited by the present authors who are currently also editors of the NICCOS series,⁷ is the first that is published by the newly established Radboud University Press.

References

- Asad, Talal, ed. 1973. *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Bonsen, Ronald, Hans Marks, and Jelle Miedema, eds. 1990. *The Ambiguity of Rapprochement: Reflections of Anthropologists on Their Controversial Relationship with Missionaries*. Nijmegen en Rotterdam: Focaal en de Nederlandse Sociologische en Antropologische Vereniging.
- Borsboom, Ad, and Jean Kommers, eds. 2000. *Anthropologists and the Missionary Endeavour: Experiences and Reflections*. Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik.
- De Haan, Leo. 2000. *Livelihood, Locality and Globalisation*. Nijmegen: Nijmegen University Press, Inaugural Address.
- Gardner, Katy, and David Lewis. 2015. *Anthropology and Development: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*. London: Pluto.
- Hoebink, Paul, Detlev Haude, and Fons van der Velden, eds. 1999. *Doorlopers en breuklijnen: Van globalisering, emancipatie en verzet*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Huizer, Gerrit. 1975. “The A-Social Role of Social Scientists in Underdeveloped Countries: Some Ethical Considerations.” In *Current Anthropology in the Netherlands*, edited by Peter Kloos and Henri J.M. Claessen, 63–72. Rotterdam: Anthropological Branch of the Netherlands Sociological and Anthropological Society.
- . 1999. *Engagement, Emancipatie en sociale wetenschappen in een mondiaal perspectief*. Nijmegen: Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, Afscheidscollege.
- Hüsken, Frans. 1988. *Een dorp op Java. Sociale differentiatie in een boerengemeenschap, 1850–1980*. Overveen: ACASEA.

7 Apart from the fact that the second author is also editor of the NICCOS series, it should also be mentioned that for many years he served as head of the Institute of Mission Studies, which provided a home to the first professor of ‘ethnology’ between 1948 and 1958.

- , 1998. "Cultuur als conflict." In *Veld Winnen: Drie inauguraties in de antropologie*, edited by Ad Borsboom, Frans Hüsken and Willem Wolters, 37–69. Nijmegen: Vakgroep Culturele Antropologie/Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies.
- Janssen, Jacques and Paul Voestermans. 1978. *De vergruisde universiteit: Een cultuur-psychologisch onderzoek naar voorbije en actuele ontwikkelingen in de Nijmeegse studentenwereld*. Meppel: Krips Repro. PhD dissertation.
- Kirsch, Stuart. 2018. *Engaged Anthropology: Politics beyond the Text*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Meurkens, Peer. 1998. *Vragen omtrent de mensheid: Culturele Antropologie in Nijmegen 1948-1998*. Aalten: Fagus.
- , 2002. "Between Nostalgia for the Past and Ethical Enthusiasm: Half a Century of Anthropology in Nijmegen, 1948–1998." In *Tales from Academia: History of Anthropology in the Netherlands*, Part 1, edited by Han Vermeulen and Jean Kommers, 493–513. Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik.
- Pels, Peter. 1990. "Anthropology and Mission: Towards a Historical Analysis of Professional Identity." In *The Ambiguity of Rapprochement: Reflections of Anthropologists on Their Controversial Relationship with Missionaries*, edited by R. Bonsen, H. Marks and J. Miedema, 77–100. Nijmegen en Rotterdam: Focaal en de Nederlandse Sociologische en Antropologische Vereniging.
- Schenk-Sandbergen, Loes. 2002. "What Are we Teaching for? A History of Non-Western Sociology at the University of Amsterdam." In *Tales from Academia: History of Anthropology in the Netherlands*, Part 1, edited by Han Vermeulen and Jean Kommers, 315–340. Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik.
- Thomas, Nicholas. 1994. *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Triebels, L.F. 1979. "Een geschiedenis van het Instituut voor Culturele en Sociale Antropologie aan de K.U. te Nijmegen, 1959-1979." *De Pottiekijker* 4 (5): 8–47.
- Trouwborst, A.A. 1999. *Van Arctic tot Pacific: Herinneringen aan 25 jaar culturele antropologie in Nijmegen (1964-1989)*, 2nd, revised edition. Nijmegen: Instituut voor Culturele en Sociale Antropologie.
- Van der Geest, Sjaak. 1987. "Antropologen en missionarissen: Verborgene gelijkenissen." *Antropologische Verkenningen* 6 (4): 1–18.
- Van Meijl, Toon. 2018. "Europe and the Pacific." *Pacific Studies* 41 (1/2): 1-14.
- Willemsen, Cees. 2022. *De marxistische erfenis van het Aggiornamento: Socialistische Uitgeverij Nijmegen 1969–1983*. Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Roelants.