

the field affect shaping the voices that will eventually form “the archived truth”. It strikes you what a complex arena creating ethnographic-folkloristic source material is. There are no shortcuts to be taken on this meandering path!

For an archivist like myself the anthology provided many insights and it will certainly serve as a helpful and inspiring textbook for students attempting to use the “voices from the archive” as research material – or indeed create new archive material themselves.

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Analysis of a Childfree Life

Tove Ingebjørg Fjell, Å si nei til meningen med livet? En kulturvitenskapelig analyse av barnfrihet. Tapir Akademisk Forlag, Trondheim 2008. 110 pp. Ill. ISBN 978-82-519-2352-1.

■ In the preface to the book “Saying No to the Meaning of Life? A Culture Analysis of Childfree Life”, Tove Ingebjørg Fjell points out why she became interested in studying women who had decided not to become mothers. In her previous work she had studied reproduction and interviewed women who were involuntarily childless. Many of them told her that they did not understand why other women could choose not to have children of their own. This made Fjell interested in women who had decided not to have children. In her new book she has now focused on the childfree life in general and, more specifically, Norwegian women’s experience of choosing a childfree life. This very interesting topic can say something about contemporary views of both heteronormativity and the cultural meaning of having children.

In the first chapter the issue of the study is presented and discussed. What ideas of childfree life are presented among ordinary people and in the media? What reasons are given for choosing a life that is childfree? How are the childfree women perceived by other people? Does a childfree life challenge the conventional understanding of gender? A childfree life is then taken as an empirical ground for studying questions about gender and the cultural meaning of the nuclear family. The questions of the study are discussed in relation to the situation that fertility in Norway and Europe is de-

creasing. Tove Fjell has conducted interviews with younger women and with women who became adults when free birth control became available in the 1960s and 1970s. A questionnaire on the theme of “voluntarily infertility” has also been distributed in Norway. As a final category of material, Fjell has used the Internet and studied how international organizations for childfree people present themselves and discuss this theme.

In the second chapter the analysis focuses on how the discussion about childfree life is also a discussion about what the normal family is and what it is not. Fjell points out that new reproduction technology creates possibilities for more couples to have children but, at the same time, put more pressure on couples who have decided to live a childfree life. Having two to four children is something that is seen as something normal and natural, and something that all couples should strive for, with or without reproduction technology. At the same time there are groups that the society accepts choosing a childfree life. In the third chapter the discussion of a childfree life is given a new perspective through media and how books and forums on the Internet bring together people who are interested in topics concerning a childfree life. Here Fjell looks at both a European and an American context. This international perspective is fruitful and gives the analysis new insights on childfree life. It also puts the Nordic context in perspective.

After the third chapter we meet the older women who obtained free birth control in the sixties and seventies and could control their reproduction on their own with legal contraceptives. This gave the opportunity to choose not to have children. The women’s different reasons for making this choice and deciding not to get pregnant are discussed. One reason was the debate about overpopulation, which was a hot issue at that time. One woman thought that one should help the children in the world instead of having children of one’s own. Another reason was that the woman felt that she did not have the capacity to become a mother. The women felt some pressure from people around them when they announced that they had decided to live a life without children.

In the fifth chapter the focus is on women who have taken the decision not to have children in the twenty-first century. Having children today, Tove Fjell points out, is more of a project through which

the family can constitute itself. In this way the children have a new status in the family, where they are an emotional resource and not so much an economic resource. The chapter begins with a discussion of how the women reason about why they don't want to have children. The reasons are that the women want to have their individual freedom or that they have not found the right man. The author also discusses the comments these women get from other people when they say that they have chosen a child-free life. One of the women has noticed that her male colleagues who have also decided not to have children do not get comments about their choice. The chapter also examines how the women create different techniques to disguise their decision for other people. The chapter ends with a discussion about the difference between the two generations, focusing on how the women of the younger generation experience greater pressure from other people. Tove Fjell's conclusion is: "It seems that the new reproductive technologies and the child's new status in the last few decades have pushed the childfree women further to the margin of the nuclear family ideal, and further out into the periphery of heteronormativity" (p. 84).

In the last empirical chapter the focus changes and Fjell discusses how the childfree women hit back and respond to the ideal of the nuclear family. The interviewed women discuss pregnancy as something normal and natural but, at the same time, they think that they have the possibility to let culture overcome nature. In this perspective the women see the childfree life as something positive; they can focus on work and a good relationship to a man. Instead the women talk about mothers and think that these women are worn out and stressed from having both a career and children to take care of. At the same time, Fjell points out that the childfree women include themselves in normality and identify themselves out of the role of deviant. In this way they use the culture of heteronormativity to categorize the childfree life as something positive for the women. In the last chapter this perspective is very precisely summed up: "The childfree women have risked their femininity, but have managed to create new forms of femininity by being aware of a core femininity and also being a part of traditional heterosexual relationships" (p. 101).

This is a book that succeeds very well in capturing a contemporary cultural phenomenon. It is

also positive that the book is short, well written and quickly comes to the point of the study. The material that Tove Fjell uses gives new and interesting perspectives on heteronormativity. What is heteronormativity in our society today? How do people relate to heteronormativity? And how do they use heteronormativity to define themselves as "normal"? These are important questions that are discussed in a clear and instructive way in the book.

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Local Cultural Patterns of Ill Health

Jonas Frykman & Kjell Hansen, I ohälsans tid. Sjukskrivningar och kulturmönster i det samtida Sverige. Carlsson Bokförlag, Stockholm 2009. 235 pp. Ill. ISBN 978-91-7331-217-2.

■ At the beginning of the second millennium, Sweden had the highest rate of ill health in Europe in the age group 15–65. Thanks to their welfare state, Swedes are entitled to sickness benefit when they are too ill to work, but this national insurance can be very costly when the nation is Number 1 in ill health.

The health insurance is nationwide, but the practice of granting sickness benefit is determined locally by doctors and social secretaries, a fact which seemed to have a certain impact on the number of sick-listed people, since the rates of sickness absence were very different in different parts of Sweden. In order to study local variation and the meaning attached to the impact of being too ill to work, ethnologists went out into the field. Their aim was to find the *ethos* of the local communities, which – inspired by Gregory Bateson – connotes the *perceived and practised community*.

The two authors chose five different localities in Sweden, three of them with a lower percentage of sick persons than the Swedish average, the other two with a very high percentage.

The methodology and interpretations in this study are impressive, inspiring, and creative. The collected material consists of field notes from observations, photographs, interviews, policy statements and local area presentations, tourist brochures, sculptures, architecture and town plans. According to the presentation of the methodology, the people