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1 The Meaning of 'We'

Some words typically used to characterise our present age – Western or non-Western – are flux, mobility, identity politics and multiculturalism, hybridity and the ongoing contestation of social and cultural boundaries. Issues taken on in the present volume include minority rights, citizenship, the dilemmas of multiculturalism in liberal societies, the often fraught relationship between state and civil society, and questions to do with the identity of the *demos* of a democracy. From this cluster of contentious and intellectually challenging questions I take my cue, and will use this opportunity to reflect on possible meanings of the word 'we' in the contemporary world.

The word 'we' is situational in that it can refer to a variety of collectivities depending on the context. It implies both inclusion and exclusion: by logical extension, the word 'we' implies 'they'. Of particular interest is the question why certain ways of delineating a collective identity become empirically predominant while others are forgotten. This is not an issue of mere academic interest in a world which witnesses the upsurge of ethnic, religious and national identities – sometimes from below, in opposition to the state, sometimes from above, in defence of the state – while other forms of identification (based on, say, place or class) tend to be less visible. Regarding the contemporary state, the issue at hand concerns who is to be included in the state, and what it entails to be included.

In the following, I shall approach the question of 'we' from three perspectives. First, I simply ask what a society is. Secondly, I consider some kinds of dominant relationships that may lead to exclusion within a given society. Thirdly and finally, I distinguish between different forms of integration. As a result, it may be possible to explore questions of societal boundaries and collective identities slightly more accurately in the future.

1.1 What is a society?

'What is a society?' asks the anthropologist Maurice Godelier (2009:137) in a book that discusses Melanesian village societies and modern state societies in a comparative spirit. The question has been raised many times before. It is, in fact, much older than social science. In our era, this simple, but complex question has developed new meanings, and perhaps a more acute character than usual in human society. Rapid processes of change and enhanced mobility have made the boundaries of societies and their content less obviously clear than before.

When the classic sociologists, from Tönnies and Durkheim to Simmel and Weber, discussed the nature of society, they wrote against a backdrop of dramatic social transformations, that is the shift from agrarian to industrial society. In the decades

around the last turn of the century, frantic industrialisation and urbanisation took place around Europe and North America, closely interconnected with the consolidation of colonial empires in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Formerly autonomous tribal societies were incorporated into colonial empires, at the same times as millions of Europeans moved from rural areas to towns. During the 19th century, the industrial capitalist took over from the feudal landowner as the engine of economic processes. International migration was widespread then as now, but the main currents went from countries in the north to European settler colonies such as Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. Actually, a significantly higher proportion of the world's population lived outside their country of birth in 1911 than in 2011 (Castles and Miller 2003), although absolute numbers were lower. In 1911, the total population of the planet was 1.7 billion; it has been quadrupled in a hundred years, in other words.

Like most social scientists in our century, Godelier writes against a backdrop of globalisation processes, but his vantage point is not the Northern metropoles. Instead, he takes his point of departure in his own long-term research among the Baruya, a people in the New Guinea highlands who number roughly two thousand individuals. Before the Australian-British colonisation of Papua New Guinea reached the lands of the Baruya in 1960, they doubtless constituted a society, according to Godelier. They were an autonomous group, which stood in contact with other autonomous peoples (with whom they traded salt and other goods), but who were themselves in charge of their social, cultural and ritual institutions. Following the Australian and later Papuan incorporation of Baruya territory into a state formation, it is increasingly debatable whether the concept 'society' is appropriate for them. For a society is not merely an aggregate of persons with certain formal traits in common (e.g. language or religion), or simply a state or otherwise delineated territory. More is required for the term society to fit. Godelier formulates his question like this:

> *What are the connections – political, religious, economic, kinship, or other – that have the capacity to bring together groups and individuals who thereby form a 'society' (with borders that are known if not recognized by the neighbouring societies) and so fuse them into an all-encompassing whole that endows them with an additional, overarching, shared identity? (Godelier, 2009:142)*

The Baruya have been integrated into a social system at a high level of scale (the nation-state Papua New Guinea) and partly into an economic system at an even higher level of scale (global capitalism). They have lost their sovereignty over 'their mountains and rivers, and over their own selves' (Godelier, 2009:142), and have been subjected to the power of a state - an institution totally alien to them. From being an independent society, they have been re-defined as a 'local tribal group' that forms part of a larger regional ethnic group (the Anga) in PNG. The system boundaries have become unclear. The state has redefined the Baruya language into a dialect. The word 'we' has become ambiguous and contested. This kind of historical process has been common in many parts of the world, and some of the results can be observed first

hand in Native American reserves (where violence and alcoholism are endemic) or in Australian cities (where most homeless are Aborigines). The changes in question are not primarily cultural; they do not chiefly pertain to changes in language, clothing or food habits. Anthropologists tell of communities in the Amazon that, on first contact with Europeans, happily don Manchester United T-shirts and dance to Western music without considering any of this as a threat to their culture. However, changes in their social relations and kin patterns, as a result of wage work or enforced migration, or subjugation by the law and other institutions of the state, would be perceived as a grave threat. The history of modernity is the story of the transition from the concrete to the abstract, from small to large scale. Autonomous communities have been incorporated with or (usually) without their consent into mighty states and empires. Many have been erased from history, while others continue to exist, now as local communities or ethnic minorities within a state. Godelier is aware that he cannot write about the Baruya today independently of globalisation processes – or, rather, the tension between the global and the local, the big and the small, the abstract and the concrete. No society, small or large, governs its own destiny fully and is defined by sharp, uncontested boundaries. Even the most isolated, most closely-knit community has porous boundaries, but in our time, the currents connecting societies and relativising their boundaries are stronger and more comprehensive than ever before. Autonomy becomes a question of degree, just as internal cohesion or integration. In his analyses of the Baruya, Godelier emphasises the 'politico-religious' as the foundation of society. Put differently: Political power and economic integration are essential, but a system of symbolic meaning is also necessary in order to provide the members of a society with an 'overarching shared identity'. In most of the societies we know from anthropology and history, religion and rituals constitute the most important symbolic foundation for integration. The separation of religion from politics was established late if at all; in Europe, the Treaty of Westphalia from 1648 is often mentioned, but a few countries, such as Norway, still have a state church, and it was only in 1945 that Emperor Hirohito was forced to concede that he was not of divine stock, following the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The question is, accordingly, which shared basis of identity, which can also legitimise political power, is possible in a country with no shared religion. In much of the 20th century, nationalism largely took the place of religion as a secular alternative to it, but it has increasingly been shown to separate as much as it unites; not only because the growing numbers of minorities feel uncomfortable with the nationalism of the majorities, but also because many members of the majorities orient themselves in other directions than inwards and backwards. Whereas Godelier writes from one of the outposts of globalisation – the mountain valleys of New Guinea – the chapters in this book deal with a less marginal area. Although Finland and the other Nordic countries may be geographically peripheral and climatically hostile, they are in other respects typical rich countries in the era of globalisation, seamlessly integrated into global economic processes, which

entails wide-ranging exchange relations comprising, among other things, persons, commodities, services, symbols, commitments and insults with respect to the rest of the world, inside and outside of the European Union. The question concerning the boundaries of society and its substance are being raised here, as among the Baruya, but against a very different version of global modernity, characterised by migration, porous boundaries and global networks of information and communication. Whereas the early social theorists saw industrialisation, bureaucratisation and colonialism as the most powerful agents of change in their time, the focus now has to be shifted to other forces, such as transnational processes, instantaneous global communication, complex and contested identities, demographic change and value pluralism. In order to make sense of this new world, a varied analytical toolbox is necessary, utilising both old concepts (tailored to fit the situation around the last turn of the century) and new ones made to measure to suit the present era; some of the classic sociological concepts are still useful, whereas others have become 'zombie concepts' (Beck 2009): undead words. They are still in circulation, but no longer have anything to say. Looking at the debates about citizenship, national identities, ethnic diversity and transnationalism, one may well ask if 'society' may be such a concept.

In his popular textbook in cultural anthropology from 1981, Roger M. Keesing defined (a) society like this:

> ***Society***: *A population marked by relative separation from surrounding populations and a distinctive culture (complex societies may include two or more distinctive cultural groups incorporated within a single social system) (Keesing 1981:518).*

Note the caveat 'relative separation'. Anthony Giddens, in his no less widely read textbook in sociology from 1993, defined the concept of society as follows:

> ***SOCIETY***: *A society is a group of people who live in a particular territory, are subject to a common system of political authority, and are aware of having a distinct identity from other groups around them. Some societies, like those of hunters and gatherers, are very small, numbering no more than a few dozen people. Others are very large, involving many millions...(Giddens 1993:746).*

Like Keesing, Giddens emphasises physical separation from the surroundings. Keesing's formulation 'two or more distinctive cultural groups' is theoretically dated, however, since complex societies contain many borderline cases, frontier areas and overlapping or hybrid cultural worlds. Giddens' phrase 'a distinct identity' is conceptually better, but needs to be checked against diverse empirical realities. Indeed, much current research on complex societies and their internal dynamics of inclusion and exclusion indirectly responds to general phrases of this kind, although the theoretical implications are too rarely spelled out.

Many have proposed new terminologies tailored to help conceptualise the current era, partly replacing the 'zombie concepts' of old in the process. Among the most

radical bids is John Urry's proposal to replace the term 'society' with 'mobility' (Urry 2000). What if, he reasons, we study social life through a lens of mobility rather than stability? The result would doubtlessly be quite different from a conceptualisation (still common in social science) assuming, almost in an axiomatic way, that stable societies are the stuff that social life is made of. At the same time, however, much would be lost if the concept of society was relegated to the dustbin of history, since it is an empirical fact that people all over the world seek stability, continuity, security and predictability (Eriksen, Bal and Salemink 2010), often by defending or creating spatial belonging, border demarcations and collective memories anchored in particular places (Connerton 2009). What has been 'dis-embedded' is, in a multitude of ways, being 're-embedded'.

Less revolutionary, but still fairly radical attempts to renew the conceptual apparatus of the social sciences, can be found in works by, inter alia, Castells (1996–8), Giddens (1991), Beck (2009), Bourdieu (1977) and Bauman (2000), who have suggested terms such as the global network society (Castells), globalised risk society (Beck), multidimensional social spaces (Bourdieu) and the era of reflexive modernity (Giddens), in a series of attempts to conceptualise the social in a time characterised by accelerated change and fuzzy boundaries.

The chapters comprising this book are less revolutionary at the conceptual level, but empirically they are more convincing than the jet set of high-flying theorists tends to be. If anything, this book shows why it remains pertinent to ask analytically and empirically informed questions about the nature of society – its boundaries, its substantial content, its modes of legitimation, its symbolic foundation. Seen as a whole, the contributions indicate the need for a complex methodology. As Gregory Bateson (1979) puts it, two descriptions are better than one. In this context, the diversity of contemporary European states must be studied from a variety of viewpoints in order to be properly understood.

1.2 The need for complex methods

An example illustrating the need for a complex methodology could be the phenomenon of female circumcision among migrants and the controversies surrounding it. Circumcision of girls is widespread in North-Eastern Africa and also exists in some other regions of the world. This kind of practice, painful and potentially physiologically damaging, customarily takes place in girlhood, before puberty. A common Western interpretation of the practice would be that female circumcision (often described as genital mutilation) is an expression of male control over female sexuality, depriving women of the possibility to experience sexual pleasure. However, it remains that women often are responsible for carrying out the surgery, and that many circumcised women hold that they would be less 'complete' and pure if they were not circumcised (Talle 2007).

At least four different perspectives, or gazes, on female circumcision are needed for a full understanding of it, both as practice and as ideology:

(a) From within, in a context where virtually everybody is circumcised, the incision is seen as a natural and necessary part of the transition to womanhood.

(b) From within, in a European context, uncertainty and disagreement about the practice emerge, since one is surrounded by women who have not been circumcised but appear to cope reasonably well with life, notwithstanding.

(c) From outside, in the same European context, the practice is considered barbaric (this is the context in which the term 'genital mutilation' is being used), and the authorities ban it.

(d) In the frontier area between (b) and (c), a fourth perspective develops, where negotiations – often involving NGOs and health personnel – take place aiming to get rid of the practice without violating the self-esteem and agency of those affected by the change.

In politics, the typical, methodologically nationalist interpretation of circumcision is that it represents something 'we' did not have before, but do have now, that is a deterioration from a condition without circumcision to a situation where probably several hundred girls in a country such as Sweden or Norway, possibly more, are being circumcised. A position building on methodological cosmopolitanism would instead focus not on the destiny of the nation, but that of the persons involved, and would note a dramatic decline in the number of cases following migration to the West. Many Somali, Ethiopian and other immigrants in Europe avoid circumcising their daughters, which they would almost certainly have done had they not migrated (Johnsdotter 2002). The nationalist conclusion would be that persons from these areas should be kept outside of the country or be surveilled closely by the authorities, so that Western country X does not get more female circumcision than necessary, while a cosmopolitan conclusion would be that immigration from exactly these areas should be encouraged, so that as many as possible are allowed to evade the knife.

Any social or cultural phenomenon must, in other words, be seen from several perspectives in order to be understood. If there is a common cultural identity in a European country such as Finland or Norway today, it cannot be described as a list of cultural traits or substantial values, but rather as conditions for communication, that is mutual comprehension. A strong form of evidence for cultural commonalities is the possibility of proper disagreement, which indicates a shared fund of common understandings.

This theme is inscribed into the long conversation about who we are, which must immediately be supplemented by the question 'what does *we* mean?' – and, through simple dialectical negation, 'what does *they* mean?'. Many languages distinguish between several words referring to different kinds of communities, and which are all translated with the word 'we' in Western languages, for example 'we who are together in this room now', 'we, that is you and I', 'we, that is my clan', or 'we, the people of Z'.

The inclusion and exclusion denoted by the word 'we' is, obviously, situationally contingent. When politicians speak, possibly unthinkingly, about 'our children and the immigrants' children' in debates about, for example, the minority percentage in schools, they reproduce notions of ethnic nationhood which are being contested by others. What is required to constitute a 'we', be it big or small, depends on the circumstances. Sometimes, it suffices to take the bus together to feel as a 'we', but at other times, it may be necessary to share language, physical appearance, religion and place of origin.

Any complex society offers an almost infinite number of possible criteria for delineating subjective communities for whom the term 'we' can be used meaningfully: Us, the members of the Swedish People's Party in Finland. Us commuters. Us lesbians. Us jazz musicians. Us Christians. Us copywriters. Us women. The underlying question remains, and is made acutely relevant in such differentiated societies as these, whose underlying symbolic basis exists for a shared subjective identity which is overarching and totalising, and which can make it meaningful still to speak of a country as a society, that is something other than a mere administrative entity. Methodological nationalism, which is based on the assumption that the social is limited by the boundaries of a nation-state, has been severely criticised in recent social theory, as an insufficient methodology for identifying and understanding fundamental social processes taking place today, which may just as well be transnational as national. Nationalist ideology has likewise been criticised, often along normative lines, for being unhelpful and immoral if one aims for a universalist humanism. Yet, the nation still has, in many parts of the world, an indisputable and enduring ability to create strong abstract communities, quite the contrary of what many theorists of globalisation predicted towards the end of the last century. The political struggles and debates dividing many European populations these days do not concern the nation as such, but how it should be delineated symbolically and demographically; who should be included, and on what conditions. The nation must now share the field of belonging with various other symbolic communities, many of them transnational, but it remains an important focus for identification. Whether it succeeds or fails in relation to different persons and groups, depends on what it has to offer, instrumentally and symbolically.

The nation, seen as a metaphorical kin group or an abstract community, is nonetheless under pressure, thanks to a large number of both transnational, supranational and subnational processes which do not conform to its logic and indeed appear to threaten it. At the same time, it is doubtlessly correct that a certain degree of national cohesion is necessary for the economy, the public sphere and civil society to function satisfactorily, since such institutions presuppose trust. A society arguably needs a 'social glue', whether or not of the kind intimated by Godelier.

Now, nations never were particularly homogeneous, even before the recent waves of immigration began. As many have shown, it is possible to identify considerable cultural variation within any nation, and this variation does not necessarily follow

ethnic lines. In terms of dialect, way of life, the role of religion and kinship practices, intra-ethnic diversity is considerable even in a smallish country such as Finland. However, this kind of variation does not necessarily imply variation regarding the strength or degree of national identification. As Jan-Petter Blom demonstrated many years ago (Blom 1969), there existed considerable cultural variation between mountain farmers and lowland farmers in central Southern Norway, with no consequences for collective identification or exclusion/inclusion. There were no norms of endogamy or concerted politics of identity taking place in spite of clearly observable cultural differences between the categories.

This example shows that whereas culture is *continuous*, identities are *discontinuous*. Culture – symbolic universes of meaning – flow and mix; one is influenced by one's experiences, surroundings and impulses from near and afar, and many such impulses do in fact flow quite freely, unhampered by state boundaries, cultural border guards or capitalist profitability. Collective identity, on the other hand, is bounded: Either one is a member of the group, or one is not. This is why there always exist criteria for group membership, but for the same reason – the gap between cultural flows and group identities – there tends to be disagreement over the placing of the boundaries. The burning question in many societies in our day and age concerns the criteria. As far as the nation is concerned, Ernest Gellner wrote in his influential book on nationalism (Gellner 1983) that nationalist ideology proposes that cultural boundaries should be coterminous with the political boundaries, which is to say that a state should ideally only contain people of the same kind. This kind of definition begs the question, however, since there is no uncontroversial way of determining who is 'of the same kind'. When the map no longer fits with the territory, there is disagreement over whether the map (ideology of nationhood) ought to be changed, or whether one should rather change the territory (refuse citizenship to minorities, enforce their cultural assimilation, or stop migration, etc.).

In the gap between the relatively free flows of cultural meaning and the theoretically fixed boundaries of identities, it is easy to find both a thorny political terrain and a fertile field for social research. There exists a frontier area, or a grey zone, which expands and contracts from situation to situation, but which as a whole grows, and where the boundaries for inclusion and exclusion are under negotiation.

An analytical approach to these issues must be dialectical in that it accepts that every phenomenon is defined through its opposite, implicitly or explicitly. Openness in one respect entails closedness in another. The French nation, based on Republican values as it is, has historically been open to newcomers, but the guardians of the French language have to the best of their abilities tried to close it off from unwanted impulses from the outside. If one says 'similarity', one also says, implicitly, 'difference': No two individuals are completely identical, and certain differences are always tolerated, even in societies where the hegemonic ideology is founded on the principle of similarity. Integration also entails disintegration:

When politicians and others talk of the need for immigrants to 'be integrated', they simultaneously refer to a society where criteria for integration are by no means settled.

Since the postwar years, North European societies have changed dramatically – urbanisation, migration, changes in the labour market, new family structures, new information technology – and it would be unwise to assume that our present societies are mere updates of their antecedents. For example, it cannot be taken for granted which cohesive and fragmenting – centripetal and centrifugal – forces characterise contemporary Norwegian society. It would be intellectually lazy to assume that a national sense of identity, for example, is a necessary condition for cohesion in this or that society, or that such entities can easily be gauged and measured. As I shall discuss below, a person may well be integrated in one respect and disintegrated in another. The different parts of a cultural universe change at different speeds, a phenomenon which creates dissonance, and a society may be well integrated without its culture being similarly integrated.

1.3   The dual revolution of the 21ˢᵗ century

Nobody presumably disagrees with the view that the world has changed in perceptible ways since the end of the postwar years. Yet, it would be inaccurate simply to claim that social and cultural complexity (according to one definition or another) has become greater. Ethnic diversity and encounters across linguistic and cultural boundaries were more widespread in many traditional communities than in modern nation-states, which have often pursued policies of active homogenisation and exclusion in order to create cultural similarity. And, it is far from certain that contemporary societies are linguistically and culturally more diverse than some of the cultural crossroads – market and trading towns, ports etc. – which existed in premodern or early modern times.

Yet, it does make sense to speak of the present era as a period with some important new characteristics. Back in 1998, Manuel Castells wrote the following, in a lengthy footnote towards the end of his three-volume *The Information Age*:

> *Why is this a new world? ... Chips and computers are new; ubiquitous, mobile telecommunications are new, genetic engineering is new; electronically integrated, global financial markets working in real time are new; an inter-linked capitalist economy embracing the whole planet, and not only some of its segments, is new; a majority of the urban labor force in knowledge and information processing in advanced economies is new; a majority of urban population in the planet is new; the demise of the Soviet Empire, the fading away of communism, and the end of the Cold War are new; the rise of the Asian Pacific as an equal partner in the global economy is new; the widespread challenge to patriarchalism is new; the universal consciousness on ecological preservation is new; and the emergence of a network society, based on a space of flows, and on timeless time, is historically new (Castells 1998:336).*

A few years later, he could have added the advent of deterritorialised warfare and political battles involving the question of humanly induced climate change to the list. He might also have spoken of post-Fordist flexible accumulation (Harvey 1989) and mass migration (Castles and Davidson 2000).

Since around 1990, when the Cold War faded into oblivion to be replaced by a series of new geopolitical conflicts often based on nationality, ethnicity or religion, two related tendencies have contributed to shaping life-worlds worldwide, but not least in Western Europe; the electronic revolution and ethnic/cultural diversification. Since mobile telephones and internet access became widespread in the countries of Northern Europe in the early 1990s, the ties connecting people to cultural identities and place have become ever more unclear. With the emergence of Web 2.0 (based primarily on communication, not information) since the early years of the 21st century, it is increasingly possible to build and maintain almost fully assorted social worlds which are entirely deterritoralised. Flexibility, which may be defined as uncommitted potential for change (Bateson 1972, Eriksen 2005), has been enhanced in nearly every field to do with deterritorialised communication. The nation-state thereby loses one of its main means for creating shared identities, namely territorially based communication. However, research on internet use (Miller and Slater 2000; Eriksen 2001; Uimonen 2001) indicates that ethnic, local, religious and national identities are not necessarily weakened by the new technologies, but that they are re-shaped, often independently of political power structures. One implication for polyethnic societies is nonetheless that long distance nationalism (Anderson 1992; Fuglerud 1999) and diaspora based identity politics have been boosted considerably by the new technologies, making it simple to connect and keep connected people who cannot meet in the flesh.

The growth in ethnic complexity has also been considerable and, in the space of a few decades, has changed the demographic composition of many cities. Now, of course migration is not new, and as noted previously the global proportion of people living outside of their country of birth was higher in 1911 than it is in 2011, but the current situation with people from practically all parts of the world living closely together in large cities, is new. Drawing on research in London, Vertovec (2006) has spoken of *super-diversity*. For many years, most immigrants in London had a background from the colonies, and they lived in particular quarters and suburbs where they had their shops, places of worship and organisations. Since the mid-1990s, the dominant pattern of immigration has shifted, and the largest new groups, such as Iraqis, Poles and Somalis, have no historical connection with the British Empire. In addition, immigrants now increasingly live in a randomly scattered mode and not in particular areas; and finally, it is no longer easy to decide who is an immigrant and who is not. Apart from legitimate labour migrants, chiefly from the EU and Australia, there are seasonal workers (who do not necessarily know when or if they are going home), students employed in the informal sector, refugees with asylum papers and asylum seekers who are either waiting for a decision or have been rejected and live

underground, tourists who have 'forgotten' to return home and an unknown number of persons who have entered the country illegally. Apart from all these categories, there are grey zones and ambiguous cases, and there are many who live in London without knowing whether they are immigrants or not – a statistician's nightmare, perhaps, but a realistic depiction of the uncertainty under which many foreigners live.

Vertovec once mentioned during a seminar that the number of languages now spoken in London is over 300. The figure is impressive, but a web search showed that the number of languages spoken only in the south-eastern borough of Søndre Nordstrand in Oslo, was well over 130! Super-diversity is, in other words, not a phenomenon confined to the UK. The growth in immigrant numbers in nearly all West European countries has been enormous since around 1990, in many cases representing a doubling or trebling of the 1990 figures. In Norway, the proportion of the population with a minority background grew from five to ten per cent between 1995 and 2010 (Statistics Norway 2011).

The growth in immigrant populations has not been as fast as the growth of the World Wide Web, but the two processes should be seen as two sides of the same coin. Both the electronic revolution and the polyethnic one contribute to placing stable, territorially based identities under pressure. The Herderian and nationalist formula 'a people = an ethnic group = a territory = a state = a language' does not function properly in a situation like this. This is why debates about national identity have been so widespread in so many European countries in the last couple of decades.

The new complexity, epitomised in these two processes, has grown out of a period characterised by consolidation, homogenisation and the production of similarity. Gellner has compared pre-modern Europe with a painting by Oskar Kokoschka, the Viennese artist known for his intricate, mosaic-like pictures with thousands of colourful little dots. By contrast, Europe after the great levelling of nationalism had taken place, could be compared with a picture by Amedeo Modigliani, whose most famous pictures are dominated by large, serene, monochromatic areas. In a comment on Gellner, however, Ulf Hannerz (1996) claims that Kokoschka appears to have returned to a time when large cities increasingly become cultural crossroads and transit terminals, when all forms of mobility and movement become faster and smoother, and where identity politics at the micro level ensure that many newcomers resist assimilation to the majority.

There is simultaneously something very new and something much older about the contemporary world. Towards the end of a book about Al-Qaeda and what it means to be modern, John Gray (2003) writes that 'it is the interaction between growing scientific knowledge and unchanging human needs that will determine the future of our species'. Put differently: Changing circumstances must be taken into account in every narrative attempting to make sense of the world in which one lives. The development of new technology and science create new frameworks for human projects, which are still anchored in fundamental human experiences such as community and alienation, security and individuality. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the identity politics of the early 21st century.

1.4 Tensions in the 21st century world

The two 'revolutions' that by and large define the world after the end of the post-war years took off around 1990. It was at roughly this time, too, that the cold war was called off once and for all, resulting in the immediate demise of the global two-bloc system. The ideological conflict between socialism and capitalism appeared to have been replaced by the triumphant sound of one hand clapping. By late 1990, it was also clear that apartheid was about to go; Mandela had been released from prison, and negotiations between the Nationalist Party and the ANC had begun in earnest.

The following year, Yugoslavia began to dismantle itself with surprising violence, fed by a kind of nationalistic sentiment many believed to have been overcome. Around the same time, the Hindu nationalists of the BJP (*Bharatiya Janata Party*, Indian People's Party) went from strength to strength in India. The identity politics of the state, or of state like bodies, was thus not something of the past. In other words, openness and closure were still twin features of politics, but they were operating along new lines.

1991 was also the year in which the Internet began to be marketed to ordinary consumers, so that Mr. and Mrs. Smith could enter the shop and buy their subscription to America Online. This was new, just as new as the small pocket-sized mobile phones that all of a sudden began to spread all over the world, from Mauritius to Iceland, around the same time. Deregulation of markets had taken place in the preceding decade, but many of the effects of a weaker state and a less manageable and predictable market were being felt only now, helped by new information and communication technology.

This post-1991 world is, in addition to everything else, one of intensified tensions and frictions. One needs to only count the present number of transatlantic flights or the number of transpacific telephone connections to realise that the webs of connectedness are hotter, faster and denser than in any previous period, with repercussions virtually everywhere. The growth of urban slums throughout the Third World is an indirect result of economic globalisation (Davis 2006), just as the relative disconnectedness from the Internet in Africa – bracket South Africa, and there are more Austrians than Africans online – is a significant fact alongside the growth in text messages in China, from nil to eighteen billion a month in less than ten years. The networked capitalist world, in a word, is a framework, or scaffolding, for almost any serious inquiry into cultural and social dynamics.

This is an accelerated world, where everything from communication to warfare and industrial production takes place faster and more comprehensively than ever before. Speed, in physics, is just another way of talking about heat. In other words, when one says of someone that he or she is suffering from burnout, the metaphor is apt. The burnout is a direct consequence of too much speed.

This, I believe, is a main reason why the notion of global warming has caught on in such a powerful way in the North Atlantic middle classes. The risk of global warming

may be real, but that is not the point: By focussing on literal heat as an unintentional consequence of modernity, the narratives about global warming fit perfectly with, enrich and supplement, the other narratives about the contemporary age. It functions as a natural-science corollary of stories about terrorism and imperialism. All these narratives, and their relations, depict the contemporary world as one 'out of control', fraught with alienation, powerlessness, global forces and injustices brought about, and reproduced, by the rich and powerful – yet they are, without knowing it, digging their own grave. Above all, the notion of global warming feeds into an even more comprehensive story about acceleration.

Zones of tension are manifold in this world. In addition to the old and perhaps universal lines of conflict – power versus powerlessness, wealth versus poverty, autonomy versus dependence – new conflicts, frictions and tensions appear today:

- Globalisation versus alter-globalisation – the new social movements looking for viable, locally based alternatives to the TINA doctrine ('There Is No Alternative');
- Environmentalism versus development – a very real, if undercommunicated tension in countries like China and India, but also in the rich countries (my native, oil-rich Norway being an excellent example);
- Cosmopolitanism versus identity politics (including xenophobia and religious fundamentalism) – a main dimension of politics almost everywhere in the world now, sometimes supplanting the left/right divide;
- Inclusion versus exclusion – walls, physical and metaphorical, preventing the free movement of people and their full inclusion in society;
- Uniformity versus diversity – shared templates of modernity articulating with local specificity; and finally
- Cultural autonomy versus the quest for recognition – finding the balance, as Lévi-Strauss once put it, between contact and isolation.

The zones of tension briefly mentioned above cannot be reduced to one another, although they are arguably related. The common denominators are increased speed and intensified friction. This situation entails a need for a new set of traffic rules – a global highway code for interaction. Movement is being regulated. Laws regulating immigration and citizenship are obvious examples, but one might also mention the attempts in certain countries to protect the local language(s) from unwanted contamination from the outside (usually English), and puritanist religious currents such as the Deobandi movement in Pakistan, which tries to purge domestic Islam of Hindu and syncretist influence.

Boundary work is always an important element of personal and collective identification processes, and it is now carried out with especial fervour and a sense of urgency: Who is inside and outside the group, what are the criteria for being an insider, and what does it mean to be an individual with proper, socially recognised credentials and personal integrity?

1.5 Dominant relations of inclusion and exclusion

Let us now return to the initial questions concerning what a society is, and what the term 'we' can mean in this era. Collective identities are always defined in relation to that which they are not. They are, in a word, *relational*. Relational positioning is expressed through two main ways: contrasting and matching (Eriksen 2010). Contrasting implies that one defines oneself as the opposite of the other; matching that one defines oneself as structurally equal to the other. As shown by the chapters in this book with a direct focus on minorities such as Sámi or Romani in Finland, minorities tend to combine both strategies in a bid to be recognised as 'equal but different'. Majorities in contemporary European countries tend to be split between a contrasting strategy, seen clearly in the Islamophobic tendencies criss-crossing the continent; and a matching strategy where structural equivalents and compatibilities are sought.

Dominant relationships, seen from a minority perspective, tend to be the connections that link them to the majority. Majorities have more options, since they have several 'others' to choose from. Both religion, race and language may be invoked as contrasting devices. Yet other kinds of relationships framing the logic of inclusion and exclusion in a complex society may also be invoked. In a public lecture given in 2008, Steven Vertovec speaks of a current complexification in the relationships defining the insider/outsider boundary in Europe, making plain exclusion more difficult than before:

> [O]ver the last ten years in the UK, in Germany, across Europe – basically by way of changing global patterns of migration – we've seen a lot of the long-standing patterns of migration diversifying, particularly by way of the relationship between all these sorts of variables (country of origin, gender, legal status, duration of stay, etc. …). So now you have a new configuration, indeed, of all these different variables in relation to each other (Vertovec 2008:6).

Internal variation within every minority, whether it is constituted on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or language, always makes it problematic to generalise about the characteristics of named groups in a society. The current situation, according to Vertovec (and I think he is right), makes such generalisations even more problematic than before, since the diversity of migrant experiences and migrant projects is greater than ever before, and majority encounters and experiences with members of minorities also become more diverse and varied.

In spite of these caveats, it is fair to assume that some ways of producing differences, some types of relationship, will continue to dominate; that identity constructions will tend to gravitate towards what we could call a *semantic core*, that is an ideal-typical symbolic centre which is relatively unchanging, often associated with core symbols such as flags, core state rituals such as national days, or core cultural practices such as Christmas celebrations or food habits.

In the relationship between majority and minorities, religion and race are often mentioned as constitutive. However, one should be wary of exaggerating the importance of new, visible and spectacular differences. Race, language and religion are easy to identify and easy to do research on. This does not, however, mean that other kinds of relationships cannot be more dominant, even if they are less marked in discourse on boundaries and social contrasts in a given society. The fact that the educational attainment and income of parents have a decisive impact on a person's possibilities in the labour market is well documented, and is significant both among majorities and minorities to the extent that it tends to overrule differences resulting from ethnic discrimination. If one were to emphasise these kinds of differences rather than those to do with ethnicity and religion, the map of the new Europe would have looked different. Religions function in a vertically integrative manner – upstairs and downstairs meet in the house of worship – while class functions horizontally integrative. Which zones of tension will predominate in the future, depends on which relations are given precedence in politics and public discourse – religion, race, class or something different altogether. The world is no more ethnic than we choose to make it.

1.6 What is integration?

A recurrent problem in the ongoing public debates about social integration is that one rarely says, or asks, what kind of integration is at stake. For example, politicians and bureaucrats all over Europe talk of the importance of 'integrating immigrants', with no further qualification. When the term 'integration' is being used, however, it is necessary to clarify *who* is supposed to be integrated *to what* and *by whom*. Credible answers to this kind of question bring us several steps closer to an answer to the question of what a society is. In order to ask questions about integration accurately, the term must be narrowed down; in fact, it can refer to very different types of processes.

Firstly, it is necessary to distinguish between *systemic* and *social* integration, a conceptual pair first proposed by Giddens (1979). Systemic integration refers to the macro level, that is the social institutions, their stability and ability to maintain themselves relatively independently of the actors. Social integration, by contrast, refers to people's relational belonging, operative networks and 'social capital' (Coleman 1998). It is perfectly possible to be well integrated socially in a society which is poorly integrated at a systemic level. In many African countries, where the state is weak and the shared formal institutions, from police and judiciary to sewage and electricity supply, are in poor shape, the inhabitants may nonetheless be well integrated socially through kinship, informal networks and other social relationships which create trust and mutual commitments. Conversely, it is possible for a person to live in a society which is well integrated at the systemic level without being well

socially integrated him- or herself. The fact that the buses run on time and the bureaucracy is incorruptible and efficient, says nothing about the scope and quality of the citizens' social networks and subjective sense of belonging.

Secondly, a distinction between *informal* and *formal* relationships is necessary. Such a contrast, which may be highly relevant for the study of multiethnic societies in a situation of rapid change, would take, as its point of departure, the relationship between systemic and social integration, but grafts this contrast onto a distinction of a different kind. The concept of the informal sector in the economy, first introduced by Keith Hart in a study of outdoor markets in Ghana (Hart 1973), calls attention to those economic activities that take place between individuals and groups without being recorded or registered anywhere. Exchange of services without any accounting for the exchange of money (or direct payment without receipts etc.) would be a typical example. Now, regarding social integration more generally, informal networks are very important. The widespread concept 'social capital' refers to the reach, scope and resources flowing through such networks. Granovetter's influential work on 'the strength of weak ties' (Granovetter 1973, 1983) discusses the relationship between strong and weak ties. The strong connections, to relatives and close friends, display a high degree of redundancy; it is likely that your close friends also know each other. Weak ties, of which people have many in a complex society, tend to comprise people who do not know each other very well. Persons who possess many weak ties have greater access to diverse information from the outside world than people who are limited to a few, strong ties, and also more social possibilities.

The analysis of weak versus strong ties reminds us that the informal social life is crucial for the maintenance of the system. Granovetter moreover argues that ideas are disseminated faster in a society with many weak ties than one dominated by strong ties. The tendency in the kind of society scrutinised in this book – the complexifying modern nation-state – would normally be a growth in the number and reach of weak ties, but another possibility could be segregation in bounded groups, in which each maintains its integrity and collective identity through the cultivation of strong ties internally. This would be the case with strongly incorporated minorities which are also endogamous. The concept of 'parallel societies', sometimes used disparagingly about ethnically complex societies, refers to such a situation, which was also documented in mid-20th century studies of 'plural societies' such as British Burma and Jamaica (Furnivall 1948; Smith 1965).

Thirdly, *social* integration is not the same as *cultural* integration. Possibly thanks to influence from American cultural anthropology, there is a tendency in much of the Scandinavian literature on pluralism to write about 'societies' and 'cultures' as though they were synonymous. This conflation of two very distinctive phenomena can only deepen the already significant confusion typical of the public debate. Although cultural meaning and social interaction coexist empirically, they must be disentangled analytically. Many years ago, Clifford Geertz followed the lead of Talcott

Parsons in distinguishing between culture, integrated in a 'logico-meaningful way' and society, integrated in a 'causal-functional way' (Geertz 1973). This meant that social and cultural dynamics could be studied relatively independently of each other. Shared meaning, i.e. that one understands the world in roughly the same way and also largely understands each other, can emerge without interaction; and certain forms of interaction (such as trade or war) can take place without much by way of shared understandings.

Such a perspective, however, draws the boundary between the social and the cultural in too absolute a way (Eriksen 1992). The Greek concept *habitus*, used to great effect by Marcel Mauss and Norbert Elias in 20th century social science (and stolen much later by Pierre Bourdieu), refers to the merging of cultural interpretations and social behaviour that takes place when the body develops enduring dispositions for action. The abhorrence of pork among Jews and Muslims is a cultural value with social consequences – it is both symbolic and enacted.

Still, it can be meaningful to distinguish between the social and the cultural. Let me give an example: Two persons live in the same block of flats in eastern Oslo. One of them is a Somali woman with four children. The husband no longer lives with them, and she has filed for divorce. She barely understands Norwegian, and uses the children as interpreters in her meetings with representatives of the authorities. When the tax return form arrives, she throws it in the bin, believing it to be an ad brochure. She covers her body before leaving the flat and gets her daily dose of verbal harassment on the street. She has never worked and is functionally illiterate. This woman is, briefly, a classic example of a poorly integrated immigrant following the commonsensical and political views dominating local perceptions.

Her neighbour, on the next floor, is a single Norwegian in his thirties. He has no problems making himself understood and demanding his rights in the welfare office; he knows where everything is in the supermarket and submits his betting coupon without a problem every week. He is in full command of his remote control, knows what is showing on the cinemas downtown, and laughs at every joke made by a TV comedian. Nobody sneers at him when he leaves the flat; he is phenotypically unmarked.

Which of them is more integrated? Before proceeding to answer, we may add that the woman has a long list of persons she can ring up if she has a problem, that she sends a hundred euros a month to her sister in Somalia and knows that her children are likely to get a better life in Oslo than they would in Somalia. Her upstairs neighbour, by contrast, knows nobody. He is on greeting terms with a couple of dozen people in the suburb, but he has nobody to call if anything comes up in his life. The short answer is that the man is culturally, but not socially integrated; while the woman is socially integrated (in her Gemeinschaft) but not culturally integrated (in her local community and country of residence).

These examples may represent extremes. The point is, nevertheless, that cultural integration (the production of shared meaning) is not necessarily accompanied by

social integration (that is committing, stable networks made up by interaction). In many multiethnic societies, there is a clear tendency of cultural convergence following a certain period of close coexistence – language shift, for example, tends to take place after two or three generations – without being accompanied by the disappearance of ethnic networks. Culture varies along a continuum, while social communities are – at least in theory – sharply delineated. Culture is continuous; identities are discontinuous.

Fourthly, integration takes place at several *levels of scale*. Scale is not the same as macro and micro (which is dealt with in the contrast between social and systemic integration), but refers to the reach and scope of the networks within which one is acting. When acting on a small scale, one is integrated with a few people – family gatherings, school classes and private dinner parties are small-scale events. When acting on a large scale, by contrast, one is integrated with a potentially unlimited number of others, but there is often an inversely proportional relationship between the size of the network and its cohesive power. You are loosely integrated with many when you pull out your VISA card in a remote city, but closely integrated with a few when lounging on the beach with your nuclear family. A football training session is in itself an event on a small scale, but as soon as the team joins a tournament, the scale grows, and it continues to do so when the team plays in a European cup.

Scale is a measure of complexity and the potential reach of individuals through their networks. In order to study and gauge the degree of cohesion in contemporary societies, integration through various levels of scale is a key factor. It is, for example, a common assumption that minority persons often miss job opportunities because they lack informal networks ('someone to ring up') and the informal cultural competence needed to create intimacy and weak ties. In certain situations, as when they send remittances to family members in Sri Lanka or go on *hajj* to Mecca, many immigrants participate in networks on a large scale; but the social capital they accumulate in this way can rarely be converted to a currency which can be spent in competition over scarce resources in Europe.

Both methodologically ('what are we studying') and empirically ('what kinds of social glue and solvents exist out there'), there are sound reasons to specify levels of scale when one speaks of integration, whether one has cultural or social aspects in mind. The concern over 'loss of national identities' which is being expressed almost everywhere, is frequently a result of the experience that cultural integration takes place at too high a level of scale, that is transnationally or globally: People watch American television rather than listening to local musicians, and so on – or it could be that the level of scale is deemed too low and local, thus incapable of mobilising inhabitants countrywide for an abstract community.

The debates about the future of the nation-state and its presumed reduced power can, in this way, be understood as debates about which level of social scale is appropriate. There exists a widespread perception that important political

decisions are taken elsewhere, and that important economic processes take place transnationally in ways difficult to govern.

There is no easy way out, either politically or intellectually, when confronted with the dual question raised in this essay – 'what is a society?' and 'who are we?'. There are no quick fixes or simple answers, but the contribution from social theory and empirical research may at the very least make it possible to raise the questions in an accurate and constructive way, as we continue on our journey through the world of the twenty-first century, divided by a shared destiny as we are, eternally busy rebuilding the ship at sea.

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