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NATION

Alice Ludvig

INTRODUCTION: CONTROVERSIES OVER DEFINING THE NATION

Searching for criteria to define ‘a nation’, one will most likely first refer to a group of people living within a territory and, secondly, will try to link them to shared traits such as a common language, religion, historical traditions and common norms and values. This is a form of objective definition; it ascribes cultural factors to the concept of a nation. For instance, Joseph Stalin, the Soviet communist leader, defined the nation thus: ‘A nation is an historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture’ (1954: 307). According to Stalin’s definition, the former Soviet Union itself must have been perceived by most communist elites in Moscow as something like a ‘multinational’ empire, including many such nations under the umbrella of the USSR. However, from the perspective of many of those nations, it must have been seen as an imperial state, oppressing their ‘national’ aspirations.

This leads us to the second way of defining a nation: a concept oriented to the subjective experience of its members. Ernest Renan made a classic statement in Paris in his famous lecture ‘What is a Nation?’ in 1882: ‘A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is a present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an

individual form' (1996: 52). Thus there are at least two possible views on the nation: one from outside and one from the inside, with the latter having, as Renan suggests, two focuses: one towards the past and the other in the present.

Other scholars have pointed to discrepancies in these concepts. The German sociologist Max Weber held that purely objective criteria, such as language, religion, territory or genealogy, will on one hand always fail to include some nations, but on the other hand subjective criteria may take in too large a number of cases (1964: 675f.). Later, Ernest Gellner stated in *Nations and Nationalism*: 'To put it in the simplest terms: there is a large number of potential nations on earth. Our planet only contains room for a certain number of independent or autonomous political units' (1983: 2). Gellner's work leads us to the political factor in the concept of a nation, not explicitly addressed in either Stalin's definition above or Renan's work. The nation becomes political in the sense that it occupies a common territory, or demands to do so, and, in some cases, it aims to possess sovereign authority over this territory. However, a community characterised by a common language, a shared belief or religion, or common territory, as well as a genealogy, thereby marked off from other communities by some distinctions, can also be described as an 'ethnic community'. Still, without a common public culture and a sovereign political authority it is not a nation (see also Miller 1995: 25); it is a different way of thinking about collective identity from ethnicity and it is misleading to use the language of kinship and descent to characterise nations (Calhoun 1997: 36ff.). Consequently, and in short, a nation is characterised by a common belief in political self-determination on a sovereign territory for a homogeneously imagined group of people, sharing certain features which intend to distinguish them from others.

It is worth stressing that one must be careful not to confuse the term 'nation' with the terms 'country' or 'state'. For instance, World War I gave birth to the League of Nations, World War II to the United Nations. Yet both are conglomerates not of nations but rather of states. Likewise, the term 'nationality' does not refer to membership of a nation, but of a state, also called citizenship. Around the world there are many nations without states, such as the Kurdish people in Central Asia, the Jewish Zionists before 1948, when the state of Israel was founded, or the Palestinian people in the same country. This means that not every nation has its own state, and, importantly, the reverse may also be the case: not many states have, in fact, a singular and homogeneous nation within their territorial boundaries.

One can define with certainty the following: firstly, a nation is *not* a state, and, secondly, a nation is *not* an ethnic community. It is less than a state, because it lacks its institutional preconditions such as a polity, sovereignty and a government. Yet it is more than an ethnic community because an ethnic community is characterised by a collective cultural identity and not

a 'political' identity. Still, the borders are blurred and there is by no means a consensus in scholarly debates about defining a nation.

NATIONALISM

Nationalism is the conscious identification and solidarity with a national community. Above we have split up the concept of the nation into a view from inside and a view from outside; in the same manner we can distinguish here between two forms of nationalism: an inclusive and an exclusive notion. Inclusive nationalism aims to include certain groups and wants to evoke integrating and legitimising effects (for example for support of a certain political system). Exclusive nationalism is characterised by strong self-centring attitudes and intends to distinguish itself from other nations. Sometimes this can result in demands for correspondence of ethnic and political borders or, more precisely, the congruency of territory and people. Furthermore, it can be that corresponding national characteristics take on an exaggerated significance. While exclusive nationalism flows to differentiation and demarcation from other ethnic groups and, depending on the case, to radical disapproval of foreign rule, inclusive nationalism primarily aims to arouse feelings of community within a nation.

In reference to nationalism Gellner states that 'nationalism holds that they [nations and states] were destined for each other; that either without the other is incomplete, and constitutes a tragedy' (1983: 6). In short, as a political concept, nationalism is in some way or other always longing for the result that the boundaries of the nation and those of a state should, in so far as possible, coincide. There is at least one serious objection to this normative nationalist principle, formulated here by Gellner:

On any reasonable calculation, the former number of (potential nations) is probably much, much larger than that of possible viable states. If this argument or calculation is correct, not all nationalisms can be satisfied, at any rate not at the same time. The satisfaction of some spells the frustration of others. This argument is furthered and immeasurably strengthened by the fact that very many of the potential nations of this world live, or until recently have lived, not in compact territorial units but intermixed with each other in complex patterns. It follows that a territorial political unit can only become ethnically homogenous, in such cases if it either kills, or expels, or assimilates all non-nationals (1983: 2).

The emerging question is what takes place first: the demands of a collective community, considering itself 'a nation', for a congruent common territory? Or is it nationalism that arouses these feelings of belonging and taking part in 'a nation' in individual people, succeeding in the claims to

sovereignty, secession or simply just patriotism in times of war or crisis? What came first, the nation or the collective sentiment towards it (nationalism)?

Scholars largely approach this from two different viewpoints. On the one hand, the *perennialists* (also called *primordialists*) argue that nations have been around for a very long time, except that they have had different shapes at different moments in history. They assume that there is a continuity in history between pre-modern ethnic communities and the nations of modernity. On the other hand, the *modernists* (or *constructionists*) argue that nations are an entirely modern phenomenon and that they are constructed. The latter are the more recent and are currently prevalent. Of course, there is no sharp line between both approaches. For example, although Anthony Smith emphasises, in *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (1986), the importance of ethnic cores in nations as an historic congruency and, therefore, argues in a perennialistic way, he also holds that they are a modern phenomenon as well. Thus, in his view the nation is modern; however, it has developed on the basis of ethnic cores or 'ethnic navels' (Smith 1991). Smith stands between both views, which have merged in recent years, as he himself says:

In the past, one could be sure that modernists were also instrumentalists (and vice-versa), while perennialists were always primordialists of one kind or another (and vice-versa). But this simple dualism has given way to more variegated and complex formulations. Not all modernists embrace a robust instrumentalism; and not all perennialists turn out primordialists. We can even find an instrumentalist who is a perennialist of sorts; though the converse, a thorough-going primordialist who could propound a modernist account of nations and nationalism, is rare. What we can find instead are theorists who embrace a perennialist view of ethnicity (with some primordialist overtones), only to adopt a modernist approach to nations and nationalism (1998: 159).

If, like the perennialists, one regards nations as a natural and historically timeless phenomenon, just like humanity itself, then there will be no reason to explain how and when they have emerged. There is no need to delve too deeply into the primordialist and perennialist view. Today few scholars continue to consider the nation as an unchanging and eternal entity. Yet, if one agrees with the modernists that the nation is constructed, it becomes important to explain how and why nations have developed. Though most of the constructivists locate the origin of nations historically in different times and places, they all locate the emergence of nationalism and the building of the nation-states in some social change leading from the pre-modern world to the modern one. Gellner himself postulates three stages in human history (the hunter-gatherer, the agro-literate and the industrial) and locates it in

the turning point from agro-literate to industrial society. Specifically, the connection between power and culture has changed: in the industrial society there is a need for a 'shared culture' to hold power, therefore nationalism is 'invented'. In the reading he proposes four 'false theories of nationalism' as the basis for his chain of reasoning: the false theory of nationalism as naturalism, the theory of nationalism being artificial, the 'wrong address' theory and the theory of the 'Dark Gods' (1983: 129–30). None of these theories are tenable; furthermore, Gellner argues as a constructionist: 'In fact, nations, like states, are a contingency, and not a universal necessity. Neither nations nor states exist at all times in all circumstances; moreover, nations and states are not the same contingency' (1983: 6).

When we declare nations as solemnly existing in the real world within the borders of modern nation-states, they are, historically, a very young phenomenon. They emerged with modernity at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The historian Eric Hobsbawm comes, like Gellner, to the conclusion that nationalism existed *before* nations and that it is nationalism itself that creates the nation:

Like most serious students, I do not regard the 'nation' as a primary nor as an unchanging social entity. It belongs exclusively to a particular, and historically recent, period. It is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the 'nation-state', and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except insofar as both relate to it. Moreover, with Gellner I would stress the element of artefact, invention and social engineering which enters into the making of nations. 'Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent . . . political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes preexisting cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates preexisting cultures: that is a reality'. In short, for the purposes of analysis nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round (1990: 9f.).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATION

If we agree with some of the constructivists' view that the nation as a natural fact is a social construct and a myth used by nationalism for its specific aims, then we still have no explanation for the very real fact that many of the most enduring conflicts in this world turn around the question of whether a particular group is, or should become 'a nation'. At the same time it will appear rather shocking that millions of individuals throughout history have been ready to lose their lives in the name of something that scholars call a 'myth'. Therefore we need to reveal more on how the nation is constructed and how it is effective in the heads of people.

One of the most interesting advocates of a constructionist view is Benedict Anderson. In his work he searches for reasons why people in modern times have so emotionally identified with 'their' nation. In particular, he has emphasised the fact that the nation is an 'imagined' community:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...] In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined (1991: 6f.).

It is, however, certain that any society that goes beyond 'face-to-face' contacts is 'imagined' in this way. Therefore the criterion of 'imagination' cannot be the only one for the nation in particular. Anderson states that, historically, the nation as an imagined community emerges against the background of the dissolution of hegemonic religious regimes in society (secularisation). Nations grew out of and replaced the religious communities and dynastic realms of the Middle Ages. In concrete terms, this change is driven mostly via changes in the arrangements of *language*, *state*, *time* and *space*. Owing to the invention of the printing press, firstly it became possible to reach a broader readership and secondly a unified *language* took hold, reducing the importance of regional dialects. Furthermore, the emergence of the *state* and its institutions superseded the pre-modern dynastic empires whose frontiers were blurred and, usually, detached from a common 'national language'. Anderson also links a historic shift in time perception, like the one in language, to the development of the technology of book print in the eighteenth century: novels and newspapers count as the first capitalist mass products. Any general identification with a greater anonymous national collective is only possible via widespread circulation of novels and newspapers. The feeling of community is especially created by the latter, as people read them *at the same time*, and this experience of simultaneousness is Anderson's key to national community. Finally the concept of *space* changed with modernity. Concerning the nation there are three main aspects of space: a geographical (the map), a demographical (the population census) and a representational level (the museum). One necessary precondition for imagining the nation is the idea of a clearly demarcated country, a limited territory:

'The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will

join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet' (Anderson 1991: 7).

The concept of the nation differentiates itself in particular from the imagination of an ethnic community through the specific idea of a 'perfectly tailored' home territory with sharp edges like a puzzle. By way of the census, it is demonstrated that there is a limit as well to the population that lives within these boundaries. Ultimately, the museum functions as the ideal place where all images of national space, national population and national time perception come together. In the museum certain national symbols are represented, most often linked to a fateful date in history; the national space-time incidents are represented and reproduced.

It is very hard to give enough space here to Anderson's very original work. Since its first publication in 1983, his book has probably been the most cited theoretical work on nationalism. He differs from Smith in that he does not read the emergence of nations as the result of a process of unification of pre-existing ethnic cores. He also rejects Gellner and Hobsbawm for their 'macro-perspective' from above, where the concept of a specific elite invents traditions and creates the sentiment of nationalism predating the historical appearance of nation(-states). Anderson's imagined community contrasts to Gellner's notion of the nation; as a fabricated entity. There are historic pre-conditions for the emergence of the nation; in this idea of the nation as a political community, people and events are emotionally linked, even if they do not stand in connection with each other. At least one question emerges here, namely Anderson's emphasis on the emergence of print capitalism; for at least the first hundred years only a few elite people actually had access to, or were able to read, such material. Anderson gives particular prominence to the ways in which nations are constructed through cultural representation and symbols. Consequently, some scholars accuse him of 'cultural reductionism', disregarding the political dimension (Breuilly 1993). In that sense, for instance, the German and the Italian nation-states were political creations, and the 'cultural' unification took place afterwards.

Certainly, his theory doesn't hold for all nation-building processes. Another counter-argument to his approach is that religion and nationalism are not opposing principles. Religion played a very important part in the rise of national consciousness in many cases, even in the later stages, when the nation had replaced religion as the governing passion. For instance, Liah Greenfeld locates the emergence of the nation in sixteenth-century England, and she argues that '[t]he already growing national consciousness was strengthened manifold when it became confluent with the Protestant Reformation' (1992: 87). According to Greenfeld, it was in times when

religious identity grew more and faith became more significant that nationalism emerged; it developed with the support of religion and not, as Anderson suggests, with secularisation. We know religious nationalism today for example in the Islamic world, in India, in Europe and in parts of the former Soviet Union.

The study of nations and nationalism amounts to the study of myths and manipulations which intermingle with objective and subjective factors which all further intermingle and intersect. The recent debate that centred around the question of whether nations are *only* fictional – constructed by pure will – or if they are *also* based upon real differences and communalities shared between individuals remains open, unless we change our perspective. Then we may regard it rather as a kind of structuring discourse, an all-encompassing ideology that shapes the way in which we perceive and constitute the world. This way we are produced and reproduced as ‘nationals’, as ‘citizens’ through symbols, passports, TV, bureaucracy and day-to-day actions. It determines our collective identity in a form of seeing and interpreting which conditions our daily speech, behaviours, interactions and attitudes. At this point one may suggest that this is a very broad perspective, yet it has the advantage that additional sub-categories can always be added.

NATIONAL IDENTITY

Has anyone ever *seen* a nation? For social research on the concept of the nation and, related to it, nationalism, it is worth stressing again that we can better deal with it not as a real ‘thing’, but treat it as one category that describes a specific historical and socio-cultural configuration. When reviewing the mass of scholarly literature on the issue, one can also regard it from a greater distance. There are those who use the notion of nation more affirmatively and others who use it critically. No doubt, one portion of the literature has to be seen in itself as a substantial element for nation-building processes. It is a question of distance from the object:

For nationalists themselves, the role of the past is clear and unproblematic. The nation was always there, indeed it is part of the natural order, even when it was submerged in the hearts of its members. The task of the nationalist is simply to remind his or her compatriots of their glorious past, so that they can recreate and relive those glories (Smith 1994, 18).

All this does certainly not mean that the object of identification has to be something real. Neither nations nor ethnic communities are objectively conceivable groups. However, there are other constructivist scholars who argue that the nation exists in social reality not because people ‘invent’ it, as Gellner theorises, or because they ‘think’ or ‘imagine’ it, as Anderson holds.

Instead they emphasise the idea that it is rather something that *happens*. It is because people 'act' and 'behave' it. In this view, the human behaviour of 'practising the nation' has no primordial and universal historically determined character because it happens not only in the social superstructures, but also in the heads and bodies of real people on the micro level. Rogers Brubaker (1996, 1998, 2002) and Craig Calhoun (1997) are amongst the supporters of this line of argumentation. Brubaker, for instance, differentiates between nation, nationhood and nationness:

We should focus on nation as a category of practice, nationhood as an institutionalised cultural and political form, and nationness as contingent event or happening, and refrain from using the analytically dubious notion of 'nations' as substantial, enduring collectivities. A recent book by Julia Kristeva bears the title 'Nations without Nationalism'; but the analytical task at hand, I submit, is to think about nationalism without nations (1996: 21).

Brubaker warns us against the danger of reifying nations and treats nationalism first and foremost as a structuring discourse. Likewise, national identity is not something static that a person possesses, it is something that happens and has to be produced and reproduced in everyday actions and interactions. Therefore it might be more precise to talk of 'national identification' in order to get hold of identity as a process. Brubaker convincingly argues that nationalist discourse can only be effective if it is reproduced on a daily basis. It is a heterogeneous set of 'nation-oriented' practices, idioms and possibilities that are continuously available or 'endemic' in modern cultural and political life (Brubaker 1996: 10).

What differentiates Brubaker's theory of the concept of the nation from the modernist and constructivist approaches? The latter have made it plausible that the nation is a modern social construction. While their focus of analysis lay on the macroperspective of social reality, Brubaker introduces with his analytical tools 'nationhood' and 'nationness' the meso level: everyday practices and interactions between people. The remaining micro level takes place at the location where nation actually 'happens': in a cognitive process within the individual.

IDENTIFICATION WITH THE NATION IN A GLOBALISING WORLD

In *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Hobsbawm foresees the end of the peak in the study of nationalism:

As I have suggested, 'nation' and 'nationalism' are no longer adequate terms to describe, let alone to analyse, the political entities described as such, or even sentiments once described by these words. It is not

impossible that nationalism will decline with the decline of the nation-state, without which being English or Irish or Jewish, or a combination of all these, is only one way in which people describe their identity among the many others which they use for this purpose, as occasion demands. It would be absurd to claim that this day is already near. However, I hope it can at least be envisaged. After all, the very fact that historians are at least beginning to make some progress in the study and analysis of nations and nationalism suggests that, as so often, the phenomenon is past its peak. The owl of Minerva which brings wisdom, says Hegel, flies out at dusk. It is a good sign that it is now circling around nations and nationalism (1990: 192).

Indeed, the 1980s marked a turning point in the study of nationalism: with Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Hobsbawm and Terence Roger's *The Invention of Traditions* (1983) and Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) among many others, the theories on nationalism have grown increasingly sophisticated. Still, though many scholars have deconstructed the 'myth of nationalism', the national in its social reality is still prevalent. It has come as a surprise to many that, since the end of the East–West conflict, an increasing upsurge of nationalisms and nationalist conflicts around the world has been taking place. A truly vast array of articles and books over the last fifteen years begin by referring to how nationalism has recently become important. They quote similar examples: Bosnia, Rwanda, Albania, Somalia, Eritrea, Indonesia and so on. This has been called the 'return of the repressed' perspective (Brubaker 1998), which emphasises that there is a new wave of emerging nationalisms following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.

Brubaker refers to the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union when he declares that these obviously *did* repress nationalism, but the 'return of the repressed' view mistakes the manner in which they did so because it suggests that these regimes repressed not only nationalism, but nationhood. For Brubaker, nationalism flourishes today in the post-Soviet national struggles *because* of the regimes' policies, as these former policies were not anti-national, they were only anti-nationalist; the USSR's more than fifty national territories were each defined as the homelands of particular ethnonational groups, and constituted an elementary form of political identity (Brubaker 1998: 286–90).

Ultimately, there is a pervading view on nationalism that manifests itself only under extreme conditions, such as a natural disaster or epidemic which arrives unforeseen and unpredictably. To me it seems as if this view draws an underlying distinction between a 'good' and a 'bad' nationalism within these parameters. In such a distinction lies the danger of a disguised paternalistic Eurocentric view combined with an evolutionary linear notion of history: accordingly, in Europe we find a 'good' harmless form of

nationalism (for example enacted in football stadiums). The horrible forms of nationalism are a problem for those marginalised on the periphery. Only when they have completed their nation-building processes and their ethnic and territorial struggles will they have reached the stage of what a 'proper nation' is supposed to look like, including a nation-state's politico-institutional preconditions. However, nationalism has many different forms and continues to be an issue in the Western world as well, as we see, for example, in Quebec, Northern Ireland, the Basque country and Corsica.

Nonetheless, since the end of the 1990s new global tendencies in economic, political and sociocultural relationships have put the future of the nation-state as the primary actor in the international arena increasingly into question. Global tendencies are crystallising in a shift towards the development of 'macroregions' and supranational political units, such as the EU, with increasing independence from the rule of nation-state regimes. For many scholars of nationalism, it has acted as an engine or a vehicle, catapulting mankind from pre-modernity to modernity. This implies that the further the process of change is advanced, the less the need will be for it. Let me modestly suggest the following: the specific form of nationalism which has driven the twentieth century's two world wars, fuelled by the competition (economic and military) between these nation(-states) no longer prevails. It seems as if the world is once again on the threshold of momentous change. Of course, regional identification with nation(-states) is still alive and will continue to play a significant role, but what will happen in the long run to the nation is unclear at this stage.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Is the nation a useful unit for contemporary political analysis?
- Which came first: nations or nationalism?
- Is Anderson correct to claim that the nation is an imagined community?
- What is the difference between a state and a nation?

BENEDICT ANDERSON

EXTRACTS FROM *IMAGINED COMMUNITIES: REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF NATIONALISM*

CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

It seems advisable to consider briefly the concept of 'nation' and offer a workable definition. Theorists of nationalism have often been perplexed, not to say irritated, by these three paradoxes: (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists. (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept – in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender – vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, 'Greek' nationality is *sui generis*. (3) The 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. In other words, unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes, or Webers. This 'emptiness' easily gives rise, among cosmopolitan and polylingual intellectuals, to a certain condescension. Like Gertrude Stein in the face of Oakland, one can rather quickly conclude that there is 'no there there'. It is characteristic that even so sympathetic a student of nationalism as Tom Nairn can nonetheless write that: "Nationalism", is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as "neurosis" in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies) and largely incurable'.¹

Benedict Anderson (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed., London: Verso.

Part of the difficulty is that one tends unconsciously to hypostasize the existence of Nationalism-with-a-big-N (rather as one might Age-with-a-capital-A) and then to classify 'it' as *an* ideology. (Note that if everyone has an age, Age is merely an analytical expression.) It would, I think, make things easier if one treated it as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion', rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism'.

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.² Renan referred to this imagining in his suavely back-handed way when he wrote that 'Or l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses'.³ With a certain ferocity Gellner makes a comparable point when he rules that 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist'.⁴ The drawback to this formulation, however, is that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity', rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation'. In this way he implies that 'true' communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. Javanese villagers have always known that they are connected to people they have never seen, but these ties were once imagined particularistically – as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship. Until quite recently, the Javanese language had no word meaning the abstraction 'society'. We may today think of the French aristocracy of the *ancien régime* as a class; but surely it was imagined this way only very late.⁵ To the question 'Who is the Comte de X?' the normal answer would have been, not 'a member of the aristocracy', but 'the lord of X', 'the uncle of the Baronne de Y', or 'a client of the Duc de Z'.

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet.

It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Coming to maturity

at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living *pluralism* of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith's ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.

Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism.

NOTES

1. *The Break-up of Britain*, p. 359.
2. Cf. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, p. 5: 'All that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one'. We may translate 'consider themselves' as 'imagine themselves'.
3. Ernest Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?' in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1, p. 892. He adds: 'tout citoyen français doit avoir oublié la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XIII^e siècle. Il n'y a pas en France dix familles qui puissent fournir la preuve d'une origine franque...'
4. Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 169. Emphasis added.
5. Hobsbawm, for example, 'fixes' it by saying that in 1789 it numbered about 400,000 in a population of 23,000,000. (See his *The Age of Revolution*, p. 78). But would this statistical picture of the noblesse have been imaginable under the *ancien régime*?

ROGERS BRUBAKER AND FREDERICK COOPER EXTRACTS FROM ‘BEYOND “IDENTITY”’

‘The worst thing one can do with words’, wrote George Orwell a half a century ago, ‘is to surrender to them’. If language is to be ‘an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought’, he continued, one must ‘let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about’.¹ The argument of this article is that the social sciences and humanities have surrendered to the word ‘identity’; that this has both intellectual and political costs; and that we can do better. ‘Identity’, we argue, tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity). We take stock of the conceptual and theoretical work ‘identity’ is supposed to do and suggest that this work might be done better by other terms, less ambiguous, and unencumbered by the reifying connotations of ‘identity’.

We argue that the prevailing constructivist stance on identity – the attempt to ‘soften’ the term, to acquit it of the charge of ‘essentialism’ by stipulating that identities are constructed, fluid, and multiple – leaves us without a rationale for talking about ‘identities’ at all and ill-equipped to examine the ‘hard’ dynamics and essentialist claims of contemporary identity politics. ‘Soft’ constructivism allows putative ‘identities’ to proliferate. But as they proliferate, the term loses its analytical purchase. If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere. If it is fluid, how can we understand the ways in which self-understandings may harden, congeal, and crystallize? If it is constructed, how can we understand the sometimes coercive force of external identifications? If it is multiple, how do we understand the terrible

Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000), ‘Beyond “Identity”’, *Theory and Society*, 29(1).

singularity that is often striven for – and sometimes realized – by politicians seeking to transform mere categories into unitary and exclusive groups? How can we understand the power and pathos of identity politics?

‘Identity’ is a key term in the vernacular idiom of contemporary politics, and social analysis must take account of this fact. But this does not require us to use ‘identity’ as a category of analysis or to conceptualize ‘identities’ as something that all people have, seek, construct, and negotiate. Conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-identifications in the idiom of ‘identity’ saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary.

We do not aim here to contribute to the ongoing debate on identity politics.² We focus instead on identity as an analytical category. This is not a ‘merely semantic’ or terminological issue. The use and abuse of ‘identity’, we suggest, affects not only the language of social analysis but also – inseparably – its substance. Social analysis – including the analysis of identity politics – requires relatively unambiguous analytical categories. Whatever its suggestiveness, whatever its indispensability in certain practical contexts, ‘identity’ is too ambiguous, too torn between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ meanings, essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers, to serve well the demands of social analysis.

[...]

‘STRONG’ AND ‘WEAK’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF ‘IDENTITY’

We suggested at the outset that ‘identity’ tends to mean either too much or too little. This point can now be elaborated. Our inventory of the uses of ‘identity’ has revealed not only great heterogeneity but a strong antithesis between positions that highlight fundamental or abiding sameness and stances that expressly reject notions of basic sameness. The former can be called strong or hard conceptions of identity, the latter weak or soft conceptions.

Strong conceptions of ‘identity’ preserve the common-sense meaning of the term – the emphasis on sameness over time or across persons. And they accord well with the way the term is used in most forms of identity politics. But precisely because they adopt for analytical purposes a category of everyday experience and political practice, they entail a series of deeply problematic assumptions:

1. Identity is something all people have, or ought to have, or are searching for.
2. Identity is something all groups (at least groups of a certain kind – e.g., ethnic, racial, or national) have, or ought to have.

3. Identity is something people (and groups) can have without being aware of it. In this perspective, identity is something to be *discovered*, and something about which one can be *mistaken*. The strong conception of identity thus replicates the Marxian epistemology of class.
4. Strong notions of collective identity imply strong notions of group boundedness and homogeneity. They imply high degrees of groupness, an 'identity' or sameness among group members, a sharp distinctiveness from nonmembers, a clear boundary between inside and outside.³

Given the powerful challenges from many quarters to substantialist understandings of groups and essentialist understandings of identity, one might think we have sketched a 'straw man' here. Yet in fact strong conceptions of 'identity' continue to inform important strands of the literature on gender, race, ethnicity, and nationalism.⁴

Weak understandings of 'identity', by contrast, break consciously with the everyday meaning of the term. It is such weak or 'soft' conceptions that have been heavily favored in theoretical discussions of 'identity' in recent years, as theorists have become increasingly aware of and uncomfortable with the strong or 'hard' implications of everyday meanings of 'identity'. Yet this new theoretical 'common sense' has problems of its own. We sketch three of these.

The first is what we call 'clichéd constructivism'. Weak or soft conceptions of identity are routinely packaged with standard qualifiers indicating that identity is multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated, and so on. These qualifiers have become so familiar – indeed obligatory – in recent years that one reads (and writes) them virtually automatically. They risk becoming mere place-holders, gestures signaling a stance rather than words conveying a meaning.

Second, it is not clear why weak conceptions of 'identity' are conceptions *of identity*. The everyday sense of 'identity' strongly suggests at least some self-sameness over time, some persistence, something that remains identical, the same, while other things are changing. What is the point in using the term 'identity' if this core meaning is expressly repudiated?

Third, and most important, weak conceptions of identity may be *too* weak to do useful theoretical work. In their concern to cleanse the term of its theoretically disreputable 'hard' connotations, in their insistence that identities are multiple, malleable, fluid, and so on, soft identitarians leave us with a term so infinitely elastic as to be incapable of performing serious analytical work.

We are not claiming that the strong and weak versions sketched here jointly exhaust the possible meanings and uses of 'identity'. Nor are we

claiming that sophisticated constructivist theorists have not done interesting and important work using ‘soft’ understandings of identity. We argue, however, that what is interesting and important in this work often does not depend on the use of ‘identity’ as an analytical category. Consider three examples.

Margaret Somers, criticizing scholarly discussions of identity for focusing on categorical commonality rather than on historically variable relational embeddedness, proposes to ‘reconfigur[e] the study of identity formation through the concept of narrative’, to ‘incorporate into the core conception of identity the categorically destabilizing dimensions of *time*, *space*, and *relationality*’. Somers makes a compelling case for the importance of narrative to social life and social analysis, and argues persuasively for situating social narratives in historically specific relational settings. She focuses on the ontological dimension of narratives, on the way in which narratives not only represent but, in an important sense, constitute social actors and the social world in which they act. What remains unclear from her account is why – and in what sense – it is *identities* that are constituted through narratives and formed in particular relational settings. Social life is indeed pervasively ‘storied’; but it is not clear why this ‘storiedness’ should be axiomatically linked to identity. People everywhere and always tell stories about themselves and others, and locate themselves within culturally available repertoires of stories. But in what sense does it follow that such ‘narrative *location* endows social actors with identities – however multiple, ambiguous, ephemeral, or conflicting they may be?’ What does this soft, flexible notion of identity add to the argument about narrativity? The major analytical work in Somers’s article is done by the concept of narrativity, supplemented by that of relational setting; the work done by the concept of identity is much less clear.⁵

Introducing a collection on *Citizenship, Identity, and Social History*, Charles Tilly characterizes identity as a ‘blurred but indispensable’ concept and defines it as ‘an actor’s experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience; the public representation often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative’. But what is the relationship between this encompassing, open-ended definition and the work Tilly wants the concept to do? What is gained, analytically, by labeling *any* experience and public representation of *any* tie, role, network, etc. as an *identity*? When it comes to examples, Tilly rounds up the usual suspects: race, gender, class, job, religious affiliation, national origin. But it is not clear what analytical leverage on these phenomena can be provided by the exceptionally capacious, flexible concept of identity he proposes. Highlighting ‘identity’ in the title of the volume signals an openness to the cultural turn in the social history and historical sociology of citizenship; beyond this, it is not clear what work the concept does. Justly well-known for fashioning sharply focused, ‘hard-working’ concepts, Tilly

here faces the difficulty that confronts most social scientists writing about identity today: that of devising a concept 'soft' and flexible enough to satisfy the requirements of relational, constructivist social theory, yet robust enough to have purchase on the phenomena that cry out for explanation, some of which are quite 'hard'.⁶

Craig Calhoun uses the Chinese student movement of 1989 as a vehicle for a subtle and illuminating discussion of the concepts of identity, interest, and collective action. Calhoun explains students' readiness to 'knowingly risk death' in Tiananmen Square on the night of June 3, 1989 in terms of an honor-bound identity or sense of self, forged in the course of the movement itself, to which students became increasingly and, in the end, irrevocably committed. His account of the shifts in the students' lived sense of self during the weeks of their protest – as they were drawn, in and through the dynamics of their struggle, from an originally 'positional', class-based self-understanding as students and intellectuals to a broader, emotionally charged identification with national and even universal ideals – is a compelling one. Here too, however, the crucial analytical work appears to be done by a concept other than identity – in this case, that of honor. Honor, Calhoun observes, is 'imperative in a way interests are not'. But it is also imperative in a way *identity*, in the weak sense, is not. Calhoun subsumes honor under the rubric of identity, and presents his argument as a general one about the 'constitution and transformation of identity'. Yet his fundamental argument in this article, it would seem, is not about identity in general, but about the way in which a compelling sense of honor can, in extraordinary circumstances, lead people to undertake extraordinary actions, lest their core sense of self be radically undermined.⁷

Identity in this exceptionally strong sense – as a sense of self that can imperatively require interest-threatening or even life-threatening action has little to do with identity in the weak or soft sense. Calhoun himself underscores the incommensurability between 'ordinary identity self-conceptions, the way people reconcile interests in everyday life' and the imperative, honor-driven sense of self that can enable or even require people to be 'brave to the point of apparent foolishness'.⁸ Calhoun provides a powerful characterization of the latter; but it is not clear what analytical work is done by the former, more general conception of identity.

In his edited volume on *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Calhoun works with this more general understanding of identity. 'Concerns with individual and collective identity', he observes, 'are ubiquitous'. It is certainly true that '[we] know of no people without names, no languages or cultures in which some manner of distinctions between self and other, we and they are not made'.⁹ But it is not clear why this implies the ubiquity of identity, unless we dilute 'identity' to the point of designating *all* practices involving naming and self-other distinctions. Calhoun – like Somers and Tilly – goes on to make illuminating arguments on a range of issues concerning claims

of commonality and difference in contemporary social movements. Yet while such claims are indeed often framed today in an idiom of 'identity', it is not clear that adopting that idiom for *analytical* purposes is necessary or even helpful.

IN OTHER WORDS

What alternative terms might stand in for 'identity', doing the theoretical work 'identity' is supposed to do without its confusing, contradictory connotations? Given the great range and heterogeneity of the work done by 'identity', it would be fruitless to look for a *single* substitute, for such a term would be as overburdened as 'identity' itself. Our strategy has been rather to unbundle the thick tangle of meanings that have accumulated around the term 'identity', and to parcel out the work to a number of less congested terms. We sketch three clusters of terms here.

Identification and categorization

As a processual, active term, derived from a verb, 'identification' lacks the reifying connotations of 'identity'.¹⁰ It invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying. And it does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve. Identification – of oneself and of others – is intrinsic to social life; 'identity' in the strong sense is not.

One may be called upon to identify oneself – to characterize oneself, to locate oneself vis-à-vis known others, to situate oneself in a narrative, to place oneself in a category – in any number of different contexts. In modern settings, which multiply interactions with others not personally known, such occasions for identification are particularly abundant. They include innumerable situations of everyday life as well as more formal and official contexts. How one identifies oneself – and how one is identified by others – may vary greatly from context to context; self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual.

One key distinction is between *relational* and *categorical* modes of identification. One may identify oneself (or another person) by position in a relational web (a web of kinship, for example, or of friendship, patron-client ties, or teacher-student relations). On the other hand, one may identify oneself (or another person) by membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute (such as race, ethnicity, language, nationality, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). Craig Calhoun has argued that, while relational modes of identification remain important in many contexts even today, categorical identification has assumed ever greater importance in modern settings.¹¹

Another basic distinction is between self-identification and the identification and categorization of oneself by others.¹² Self-identification takes place

in dialectical interplay with external identification, and the two need not converge.¹³ External identification is itself a varied process. In the ordinary ebb and flow of social life, people identify and categorize others, just as they identify and categorize themselves. But there is another key type of external identification that has no counterpart in the domain of self-identification: the formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorization developed by powerful, authoritative institutions.

The modern state has been one of the most important agents of identification and categorization in this latter sense. In culturalist extensions of the Weberian sociology of the state, notably those influenced by Bourdieu and Foucault, the state monopolizes, or seeks to monopolize, not only legitimate physical force but also legitimate symbolic force, as Bourdieu puts it. This includes the power to name, to identify, to categorize, to state what is what and who is who. There is a burgeoning sociological and historical literature on such subjects. Some scholars have looked at 'identification' quite literally: as the attachment of definitive markers to an individual via passport, fingerprint, photograph, and signature, and the amassing of such identifying documents in state repositories. When, why, and with what limitations such systems have been developed turns out to be no simple problem.¹⁴ Other scholars emphasize the modern state's efforts to inscribe its subjects onto a classificatory grid: to identify and categorize people in relation to gender, religion, property-ownership, ethnicity, literacy, criminality, or sanity. Censuses apportion people across these categories, and institutions – from schools to prisons – sort out individuals in relation to them. To Foucauldians in particular, these individualizing and aggregating modes of identification and classification are at the core of what defines 'governmentality' in a modern state.¹⁵

The state is thus a powerful 'identifier', not because it can create 'identities' in the strong sense – in general, it cannot – but because it has the material and symbolic resources to impose the categories, classificatory schemes, and modes of social counting and accounting with which bureaucrats, judges, teachers, and doctors must work and to which non-state actors must refer.¹⁶ But the state is not the only 'identifier' that matters. As Charles Tilly has shown, categorization does crucial 'organizational work' in all kinds of social settings, including families, firms, schools, social movements, and bureaucracies of all kinds.¹⁷ Even the most powerful state does not monopolize the production and diffusion of identifications and categories; and those that it does produce may be contested. The literature on social movements – 'old' as well as 'new' – is rich in evidence on how movement leaders challenge official identifications and propose alternative ones.¹⁸ It highlights leaders' efforts to get members of putative constituencies to identify themselves in a certain way, to see themselves – for a certain range of purposes – as 'identical' with one another, to identify emotionally as well as cognitively with one another.¹⁹

The social movement literature has valuably emphasized the interactive, discursively mediated processes through which collective solidarities and self-understandings develop. Our reservations concern the move from discussing the work of identification – the efforts to build a collective self-understanding – to positing ‘identity’ as their necessary result. By considering authoritative, institutionalized modes of identification together with alternative modes involved in the practices of everyday life and the projects of social movements, one can emphasize the hard work and long struggles over identification as well as the uncertain outcomes of such struggles. However, if the outcome is always presumed to be an ‘identity’ – however provisional, fragmented, multiple, contested, and fluid – one loses the capacity to make key distinctions.

‘Identification’, we noted above, invites specification of the agents that do the identifying. Yet identification does not *require* a specifiable ‘identifier’; it can be pervasive and influential without being accomplished by discrete, specified persons or institutions. Identification can be carried more or less anonymously by discourses or public narratives.²⁰ Although close analysis of such discourses or narratives might well focus on their instantiations in particular discursive or narrative utterances, their force may depend not on any particular instantiation but on their anonymous, unnoticed permeation of our ways of thinking and talking and making sense of the social world.

There is one further meaning of ‘identification’, briefly alluded to above, that is largely independent of the cognitive, characterizing, classificatory meanings discussed so far. This is the psychodynamic meaning, derived originally from Freud.²¹ While the classificatory meanings involve identifying oneself (or someone else) *as* someone who fits a certain description or belongs to a certain category, the psychodynamic meaning involves identifying oneself emotionally *with* another person, category, or collectivity. Here again, ‘identification’ calls attention to complex (and often ambivalent) *processes*, while the term ‘identity’, designating a *condition* rather than a *process*, implies too easy a fit between the individual and the social.

Self-understanding and social location

‘Identification’ and ‘categorization’ are active, processual terms, derived from verbs, and calling to mind particular acts of identification and categorization performed by particular identifiers and categorizers. But we need other kinds of terms as well to do the varied work done by ‘identity’. Recall that one key use of ‘identity’ is to conceptualize and explain action in a non-instrumental, non-mechanical manner. In this sense, the term suggests ways in which individual and collective action can be governed by particularistic understandings of self and social location rather than by putatively universal, structurally determined interests. ‘Self-understanding’ is therefore the second term we would propose as an alternative to ‘identity’. It is a dispositional term that designates what might be called ‘situated subjectivity’:

one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act. As a dispositional term, it belongs to the realm of what Pierre Bourdieu has called *sens pratique*, the practical sense – at once cognitive and emotional – that persons have of themselves and their social world.²²

The term 'self-understanding', it is important to emphasize, does not imply a distinctively modern or Western understanding of the 'self' as a homogeneous, bounded, unitary entity. A sense of who one is can take many forms. The social processes through which persons understand and locate themselves may in some instances involve the psychoanalyst's couch and in others participation in spirit-possession cults.²³ In some settings, people may understand and experience themselves in terms of a grid of intersecting categories; in others, in terms of a web of connections of differential proximity and intensity. Hence the importance of seeing self-understanding and social locatedness in relation to each other, and of emphasizing that both the bounded self and the bounded group are culturally specific rather than universal forms.

Like the term 'identification', 'self-understanding' lacks the reifying connotations of 'identity'. Yet it is not restricted to situations of flux and instability. Self-understandings may be variable across time and across persons, but they may be stable. Semantically, 'identity' implies sameness across time or persons; hence the awkwardness of continuing to speak of 'identity' while repudiating the implication of sameness. 'Self-understanding', by contrast, has no privileged semantic connection with sameness *or* difference.

Two closely related terms are 'self-representation' and 'self-identification'. Having discussed 'identification' above, we simply observe here that, while the distinction is not sharp, 'self-understandings' may be tacit; even when they are formed, as they ordinarily are, in and through prevailing discourses, they may exist, and inform action, without themselves being discursively articulated. 'Self-representation' and 'self-identification', on the other hand, suggest at least some degree of explicit discursive articulation.

'Self-understanding' cannot, of course, do *all* the work done by 'identity'. We note here three limitations of the term. First, it is a subjective, auto-referential term. As such, it designates *one's own* understanding of who one is. It cannot capture *others'* understandings, even though external categorizations, identifications, and representations may be decisive in determining how one is regarded and treated by others, indeed in shaping one's own understanding of oneself. At the limit, self-understandings may be overridden by overwhelmingly coercive external categorizations.²⁴

Second, 'self-understanding' would seem to privilege cognitive awareness. As a result, it would seem not to capture – or at least not to highlight – the affective or cathectic processes suggested by some uses of 'identity'. Yet self-understanding is never purely cognitive; it is always affectively tinged or charged, and the term can certainly accommodate this affective dimension.

However, it is true that the emotional *dynamics* are better captured by the term 'identification' (in its psychodynamic meaning).

Finally, as a term that emphasizes situated subjectivity, 'self-understanding' does not capture the objectivity claimed by strong understandings of identity. Strong, objectivist conceptions of identity permit one to distinguish 'true' identity (characterized as deep, abiding, and objective) from 'mere' self-understanding (superficial, fluctuating, and subjective). If identity is something to be discovered, and something about which one can be mistaken, then one's momentary self-understanding may not correspond to one's abiding, underlying identity. However analytically problematic these notions of depth, constancy, and objectivity may be, they do at least provide a reason for using the language of identity rather than that of self-understanding.

Weak conceptions of identity provide no such reason. It is clear from the constructivist literature why weak understandings of identity are *weak*; but it is not clear why they are conceptions of *identity*. In this literature, it is the various *soft predicates* of identity – constructedness, contingency, instability, multiplicity, fluidity – that are emphasized and elaborated, while what they are predicated of – identity itself – is taken for granted and seldom explicated. When identity itself is elucidated, it is often represented as something – a sense of who one is,²⁵ a self-conception,²⁶ – that can be captured in a straightforward way by 'self-understanding'. This term lacks the allure, the buzz, the theoretical pretensions of 'identity', but this should count as an asset, not a liability.

Commonality, connectedness, groupness

One particular form of affectively charged self-understanding that is often designated by 'identity' – especially in discussions of race, religion, ethnicity, nationalism, gender, sexuality, social movements, and other phenomena conceptualized as involving *collective* identities – deserves separate mention here. This is the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders.

The problem is that 'identity' is used to designate *both* such strongly groupist, exclusive, affectively charged self-understandings *and* much looser, more open self-understandings, involving some sense of affinity or affiliation, commonality or connectedness to particular others, but lacking a sense of overriding oneness vis-à-vis some constitutive 'other'.²⁷ Both the tightly groupist and the more loosely affiliative forms of self-understanding – as well as the transitional forms between these polar types – are important, but they shape personal experience and condition social and political action in sharply differing ways.

Rather than stirring all self-understandings based on race, religion, ethnicity, and so on into the great conceptual melting pot of 'identity', we would do better to use a more differentiated analytical language. Terms such as commonality, connectedness, and groupness could be usefully employed here in place of the all-purpose 'identity'. This is the third cluster of terms we propose. 'Commonality' denotes the sharing of some common attribute, 'connectedness' the relational ties that link people. Neither commonality nor connectedness alone engenders 'groupness' – the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group. But commonality and connectedness together may indeed do so. This was the argument Charles Tilly put forward some time ago, building on Harrison White's idea of the 'catnet', a set of persons comprising both a *category*, sharing some common attribute, and a *network*.²⁸ Tilly's suggestion that groupness is a joint product of the 'catness' and 'netness' – categorical commonality and relational connectedness – is suggestive. But we would propose two emendations.

First, categorical commonality and relational connectedness need to be supplemented by a third element, what Max Weber called a *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*, a feeling of belonging together. Such a feeling may indeed depend in part on the degrees and forms of commonality and connectedness, but it will also depend on other factors such as particular events, their encoding in compelling public narratives, prevailing discursive frames, and so on. Second, relational connectedness, or what Tilly calls 'netness', while crucial in facilitating the sort of collective action Tilly was interested in, is not always necessary for 'groupness'. A strongly bounded sense of groupness may rest on categorical commonality and an associated feeling of belonging together with minimal or no relational connectedness. This is typically the case for large-scale collectivities such as 'nations': when a diffuse self-understanding as a member of a particular nation crystallizes into a strongly bounded sense of groupness, this is likely to depend not on relational connectedness, but rather on a powerfully imagined and strongly felt commonality.²⁹

The point is not, as some partisans of network theory have suggested, to turn from commonality to connectedness, from categories to networks, from shared attributes to social relations.³⁰ Nor is it to celebrate fluidity and hybridity over belonging and solidarity. The point in suggesting this last set of terms is rather to develop an analytical idiom sensitive to the multiple forms and degrees of commonality and connectedness, and to the widely varying ways in which actors (and the cultural idioms, public narratives, and prevailing discourses on which they draw) attribute meaning and significance to them. This will enable us to distinguish instances of strongly binding, vehemently felt groupness from more loosely structured, weakly constraining forms of affinity and affiliation.

NOTES

1. From 'Politics and the English Language,' in George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1953), 169–170.
2. For a tempered critique of identity politics, see Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), and for a sophisticated defense, Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon, 1997). For a suggestion that the high noon of identity politics may have passed, see Ross Posnock, 'Before and After Identity Politics,' *Raritan* 15 (Summer 1995): 95–115; and David A. Hollinger, 'Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the United States,' in Noah Pickus, editor, *Immigration and Citizenship in the Twenty-first Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield, 1998).
3. Avrum Stroll, 'Identity,' *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan, 1967), Vol. IV, p. 121–124. For a contemporary philosophical treatment, see Bartholomaeus Boehm, *Identitaet und Identifikation: Zur Persistenz physikalischer Gegenstaende* (Frankfurth/Main: Peter Lang, 1989). On the history and vicissitudes of 'identity' and cognate terms, see W. J. M. Mackenzie, *Political Identity* (New York: St. Martin's 1978), 19–27, and John D. Ely, 'Community and the Politics of Identity: Toward the Genealogy of a Nation-State Concept,' *Stanford Humanities Review* 5/2 (1997), 76ff.
4. See Philip Gleason, 'Identifying Identity: A Semantic History,' *Journal of American History* 69/4 (March 1983): 910–931. The 1930s *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan: 1930–1935) contains no entry on identity, but it does have one on 'identification' – largely focused on fingerprinting and other modes of judicial marking of individuals (Thorstein Sellin, Vol. 7, pp. 573–575). The 1968 *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan), contains an article on 'identification, political' by William Buchanan (Vol. 7, pp. 57–61), which focuses on a 'person's identification with a group' – including class, party, religion – and another on 'identity, psychosocial,' by Erik Erikson (ibid., 61–65), which focuses on the individual's 'role integration in his group.'
5. Gleason, 'Identifying Identity,' 914ff; for the appropriation of Erikson's work in political science, see Mackenzie, *Political Identity*.
6. Gleason, 'Identifying Identity,' 915–918.
7. Anselm Strauss, *Mirrors and Masks: The Search for an Identity* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959).
8. Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963); Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973); Peter Berger, 'Modern Identity: Crisis and Continuity,' in *The Cultural Drama: Modern Identities and Social Ferment*, ed. Wilton S. Dillon (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974).
9. As Philip Gleason has pointed out, the popularization of the term began well before the turbulence of the mid- and late 1960s. Gleason attributes this initial popularization to the mid-century prestige and cognitive authority of the social sciences, the wartime and postwar vogue of national character studies, and the postwar critique of mass society, which newly problematized the 'relationship of the individual to society' ('Identifying Identity,' 922ff).
10. On the merits of 'identification,' see Stuart Hall, 'Who Needs "Identity?"', in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, editors, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996). Although Hall's is a Foucauldian/post-Freudian understanding of 'identification,' drawing on the 'discursive and psychoanalytic repertoire,' and quite different from that proposed here, he does usefully warn that identification is 'almost as tricky as, though preferable to, 'identity' itself; and certainly no guarantee against the

- conceptual difficulties which have beset the latter' (p. 2). See also Andreas Glaeser, 'Divided in Unity: The Hermeneutics of Self and Other in the Postunification Berlin Police' (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1997), esp. chapter 1.
11. Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 36ff.
 12. For an anthropological perspective, usefully extending the Barthian model, see Richard Jenkins, 'Rethinking Ethnicity: Identity, Categorization and Power', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17/2 (April 1994): 197–223, and Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).
 13. Peter Berger, 'Modern Identity', 163–164, makes a similar point, though he phrases it in terms of a dialectic – and possible conflict – between subjective and objective identity.
 14. Gerard Noiriel, *La tyrannie du national* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991), 155–180; idem, 'L'identification des citoyens: Naissance de l'état civil republicain', *Genèses* 13 (1993): 3–28; idem, 'Surveiller des déplacements ou identifier les personnes? Contribution à l'histoire du passeport en France de la I^{er} à la III^e République', *Genèses* 30 (1998): 77–100; Béatrice Fraenkel, *La signature: genèse d'un signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). A number of scholars, including Jane Caplan, historian at Bryn Mawr College, and John Torpey, sociologist at University of California, Irvine, are currently engaged in projects on passports and other identification documents.
 15. Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in Graham Burchell et al., editors, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104. Similar conceptions have been applied to colonial societies, especially in regard to the way colonizers' schemes for classification and enumeration shape and indeed constitute the social phenomena (such as 'tribe' and 'caste' in India) being classified. See, in particular, Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
 16. On the dilemmas, difficulties, and ironies involved in 'administering identity', in authoritatively determining who belongs to what category in the implementation of race-conscious law, see Christopher A. Ford, 'Administering Identity: The Determination of 'Race' in Race-Conscious Law', *California Law Review* 82 (1994): 1231–1285.
 17. Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
 18. Melissa Nobles, '“Responding with Good Sense”: The Politics of Race and Censuses in Contemporary Brazil', Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1995.
 19. See, for example, A. Melucci, 'The Process of Collective Identity', in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, editors, *Social Movements and Culture* (London: UCL Press, 1995); Denis-Constant Martin, 'The Choices of Identity', *Social Identities* 1/1 (1995): 5–20.
 20. Stuart Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs "Identity?"', Margaret Somers, 'The Narrative Constitution of Identity', *Theory and Society* 23 (1994), 605–649.
 21. See Hall, 'Introduction', 2ff; and Alan Finlayson, 'Psychology, psychoanalysis and theories of nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism* 4/2 (1998): 157ff.
 22. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).
 23. An extensive anthropological literature on African and other societies, for example, describes healing cults, spirit possession cults, witchcraft eradication movements, and other collective phenomena that help to constitute particular forms of self-understanding, particular ways in which individuals situate themselves socially. See studies ranging from classics by Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957) and I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1971) to more recent work by Paul Stoller, *Fusion of the Worlds: An Ethnography of Possession*

- among the Songhay of Niger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men and The Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
24. For a poignant example, see Slavenka Drakulic's account of being 'overcome by nationhood' as a result of the war in the former Yugoslavia, in *Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of the War*, trans. Maja Soljan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 50–52.
 25. See, for example, Peter Berger, 'Modern Identity: Crisis and Continuity', 162.
 26. See, for example, Craig Calhoun, 'The Problem of Identity in Collective Action', in Joan Huber, editor, *Macro-Micro Linkages in Sociology* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1991), 68, characterizing 'ordinary identity'.
 27. For a good example of the latter, see Mary Waters's analysis of the optional, exceptionally unconstraining ethnic 'identities' – or what Herbert Gans has called the 'symbolic ethnicity' – of third- and fourth-generation descendants of European Catholic immigrants to the United States in *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
 28. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 62ff.
 29. On the centrality of categorical commonality to modern nationalism, see Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), and Calhoun, *Nationalism*, chapter 2.
 30. See, for example, the discussion of the 'anti-categorical imperative' in Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin, 'Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency', *American Journal of Sociology* 99/6 (May 1994): 1414.