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# Ernest Gellner and Contemporary Social Thought

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One of Ernest Gellner's most quoted statements is the definition of nationalism on page 1 of *Nations and Nationalism*, indeed the very first sentence in the book: 'Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner 1983: 1). Adding nuance to the definition later on the same page, Gellner adds that 'ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular ... ethnic boundaries within a given state – a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation – should not separate the power-holders from the rest'. Gellner sees the national idea as one based on ethnic identity. In this, his theory of nationalism contrasts with Benedict Anderson's, whose *Imagined Communities* (1991/1983) explores nationalism as a symbolically integrating force and attaches little importance to its ethnic component or lack of such. Anderson's perspective is also more global than Gellner's rather Eurocentric vision.

One of the most important theoretical debates about nationalism since the almost simultaneous publication of these seminal books in 1983 has concerned its relationship to ethnic identity. While Anderson has occasionally contributed to this discussion (e.g. in his *Long-Distance Nationalism*, 1992), Gellner rarely, if ever, commented on the implications of migration and transnationalism for national identities. Moreover, he did not engage with the difficult questions arising from the rights claims of indigenous groups either, largely limiting his analysis of nationalism to West and East European history up to and including the postwar years.

Gellner was an open supporter of the same mix of cultural nationalism and political cosmopolitanism that he saw in his great hero Malinowski, who had experienced it first in the Krakow of the Habsburg Empire in its twilight years, later in the British colonies of Africa. In his celebrated or, to some, infamous exchange with Edward Said over the latter's *Culture and Imperialism* (Said 1993, cf. Gellner 1994), Gellner initially praised Said's insistence on the individual's right to choose his or her group

allegiance – all said and done, both were liberal universalists, albeit of different persuasions – but dismissed Said's analysis of symbolic power and subordination as misguided and coming dangerously close to a relativisation of truth. Excluding his argument against Foucault-inspired anthropologists in *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (Gellner 1992), Gellner's public argument with Said may have been his closest brush with postcolonial theory and the dilemmas of multiculturalism. When he speaks of Islam, he concentrates on Muslim countries; when he talks of cultural pluralism, he is often content to linger with the Habsburg Empire; and when he speaks of the new millennium (in 'The Coming *fin de Millénaire*', Gellner 1995), he sees it essentially as a turning-point defined through the demise of the Soviet empire.

A couple of years before his death, I asked Gellner how he would analyse, within his own theory of nationalism, the rise of indigenous rights movements in the Amazon and elsewhere, and if he saw any solution to their predicament. He shrugged and said there was no simple answer, and seemed unwilling to discuss the issue further. During the same conversation, Gellner repeatedly described Norway as a culturally homogeneous country which in his view obviously enjoyed a strong degree of cohesion and national solidarity. He might have been forgiven for not thinking about the Saami, who are a smaller and arguably less oppressed minority than many other stateless peoples in Europe, but as we spoke, in a forest retreat in the hills above Oslo, our table was cleared by a brown-skinned waiter of Pakistani origin, dressed in a hybridised kind of Norwegian folk costume. A third of the schoolchildren in Oslo primary schools are defined as having a foreign-language background and, as in other West European countries, questions concerning immigration and the integration of immigrants had by the time of our conversation been at the forefront of public attention for more than a decade.

It would nonetheless be interesting to know what Gellner would have made of, for example, the Parekh Report (Parekh et al. 2000), which famously designates the UK as a 'community of communities', or of the public debate, begun by David Goodhart in the magazine of which he is editor, *Prospect* (Goodhart 2004), on the possible trade-offs between solidarity and diversity. Against this background it seems highly pertinent to explore to what extent the various elements of Gellner's theory of nationalism can shed light on contemporary European minority–majority relations.

Three interrelated questions form the framework of this enquiry.

- First, can the dual processes of incorporation, integration and exclusion of immigrant minorities that can be observed in European

societies today be accounted for through Gellner's theory of nationalism?

- Second, are the conflicts arising from immigration of a kind that can be explained fully or partly through Gellner's theory?
- Third, do the new minorities constitute entropy-resistant groups, are they becoming assimilated, or does the pluralism entailed by their presence as apparently 'unmeltable ethnics' signify the advent of new political entities distinct from Gellner's concept of the nation?

### Gellner's theory

Gellner's theory of nationalism, developed in numerous publications from *Thought and Change* (1964) to the posthumous *Nationalism* (1997), takes as its point of departure a recent watershed in cultural history, namely the industrial revolution. It led to a fundamental refashioning of social relations.

- First, industrialisation entailed an enormous growth in *scale*. Whereas agrarian society had been locally delineated in most respects, industrial society was based on large, anonymous markets where commodities, services and labour could all be bought and sold.
- Second, industrialisation led to *migration*. Millions moved where work was to be found, and were uprooted from custom and tradition, or – in Marx's pithy words – the idiocy of village life.
- Third, industrialisation created a need for *standardisation* of knowledge and skills, making workers and their skills interchangeable.
- Fourth, the *de facto* power residing in family and kinship was reduced, since the family was no longer a functioning unit of production.

In this new situation, the individual person no longer had an unequivocal belonging to a local community. His or her need for food, shelter and existential security could no longer be satisfied locally. In parallel with the economic changes, the state administration also grew, and along with it the state's need to govern its inhabitants. The ideology given the task of healing tendencies of fragmentation and alienation, a functional equivalent to ideologies of locality and kinship, was nationalism, in Gellner's view an ideology based on ethnic identity, that is a kind of identification which is metaphorically related to kinship.

The elites in a fully fledged nation need to consolidate their unity around a 'high culture' symbolically laden with claims to uniqueness, historical memories – real or fictional – and aspirations to aesthetic and moral greatness on behalf of the nation. This high culture, sometimes an upgraded version of peasant culture, sometimes a nationalised version of

a cosmopolitan one, and more often than not a mix of both, is generally recognised, in a functioning nation, as *the* national culture.

The nation, seen as an abstract collectivity or imagined community whose members are loyal to the principle of the nation and its high culture, comes into being largely after the nation-state, whose institutions – including, notably, the educational system and the shared labour market – serve to homogenise the population culturally. Slowly, a majority is being mentally nationalised. However, Gellner adds, there are some groups which are so self-consciously distinctive that they come across as 'entropy-resistant'. The term entropy, taken from thermodynamics, refers to the ironing out of differences. Entropy-resistant groups, Gellner says, may have a different appearance, cultural and economic practices strikingly different from that of the majority, and/or a reflexive self-identity marking them off as different in ways that make them impossible to integrate. In his discussion of entropy-resistance, Gellner (1983: 64ff) points out that in prenational societies, cultural differences were in fact easily naturalised and endorsed; some people were held to be born rulers, while others were born serfs. In industrial societies, by contrast, difference becomes a problem, an obstacle to national cohesion and the egalitarianism presupposed, at least at the ideological level, by national sovereignty.

In the chapter of *Nations and Nationalism* titled 'The Future of Nationalism', Gellner discusses implications of international cultural homogenisation. While he recognises that people 'of a certain class' tend to speak the same language whichever language they speak, he also concedes that nations will, in the foreseeable future, remain culturally discrete, and if they fail to recognise their discreteness from others easily, they will invent national cultural traits in order to highlight their distinctiveness. Today, this is perhaps happening most visibly through the commercialisation of identity in tourism. Gellner also predicts that the intensity of nationalist conflicts, a product of the industrial revolution, will weaken in the future. This may be the case for Western and Central Europe (notwithstanding the rise of the new, populist right), but it is hard to see it happening elsewhere. Moreover, surprisingly and somewhat disturbingly, when Gellner speaks about the assimilation of immigrants and encapsulated diaspora nationalisms, he refers exclusively to historical examples. Here, he mentions language shift and successful participation in the national educational system as necessary conditions of assimilation; and in his discussion of diaspora nationalisms, he deals only with culturally stigmatised but economically successful groups like Parsis and Jews (a theme developed recently in a way consistent with, but ignorant of, Gellner's theory in Amy Chua's *World on Fire*, 2003).

that arise from Gellner's theory of nationalism. A key term in most West European countries is *integration*, and it bears a strong resemblance to Gellner's term *homogenisation*. The aim is to integrate immigrants through the school system and the labour market, to teach them the national language efficiently, preferably effecting a permanent language switch in the second or third generation, to discourage divided loyalties, and, recently, to attempt to depoliticise religion and to discourage transnational marriages (among immigrants, not in the majority).

All this could be predicted from Gellner's theory. However, the dynamics of ongoing social life point in other directions as well, and the direction is just as often away from homogenisation as it is towards it.

### Inclusion and exclusion

The question of entropy-resistance is crucial in any test of Gellner's theory in the contemporary world. Which groups or categories of persons resident in a country are somehow being excluded, voluntarily or involuntarily, from the national unit?

Certain identities are marked, that is labelled *qua* identities, while others are not. Homosexuality is marked while heterosexuality is not. Criminals are marked while law-abiding citizens are not. The very poor and the very rich are marked to a greater extent than everybody else. And, naturally, ethnic, racial and religious minorities are marked. Indeed, the term 'identity' in everyday language increasingly refers to this kind of identity, not to gender, age, class or personal identity. In the football supporter culture of many countries, including Norway, anti-racism has become an institutionalised value. However, anti-sexism or anti-homophobia have not become part of the discourse. Race and ethnicity are visible in ways that other markers of difference are not.

Identities are, in other words, marked in different ways. Who the 'blue people' (Gellner 1983) are, those groups considered to be impossible to homogenise, changes historically. In the context of early twenty-first-century Europe, it seems clear that immigrants, and particularly Muslim immigrants, are considered, to varying degrees, to be entropy-resistant.

As a response to the perceived entropy-resistance, the European states have, to a much greater extent than the USA, resorted to ambitious integration programmes. The aim of these efforts is to help immigrants adapt to majority society through language acquisition and, in some cases, courses in culture and customs. In Amsterdam, there have been attempts to teach Somali women to ride a bicycle, while immigrants in Norway are taken on forest walks. Efforts are also made to facilitate the entry of immigrants into the labour market. All such measures fit with

Gellner's notion of national homogenisation, and seek to disprove claims about permanent entropy-resistance on the part of the immigrant groups, claims which are incidentally always seen as 'pessimistic' in the public and political discourses of European countries.

Regarding 'immigrant culture', concerns have been raised in many countries about marriage practices, though usually less in the political sphere than in general public debate. There have been allegations about incompatibility between arranged marriage and the individualist values on which Western societies are allegedly based, and it has been argued that marriage through family reunification slows integration down because it brings a continuous stream of new migrants into the country.

Interestingly, politicians and other public figures often praise the immigrants for 'enriching' the national culture. At the same time, they may worry about arranged marriages or Islam as impediments to national cohesion. This seeming contradiction indicates that cultural difference is not just one thing. Broadly speaking, we may state that *diversity* is seen as a good thing, while *difference* is not. A non-technical but potentially useful distinction could be made between 'shallow' and 'deep' cultural differences. The latter are the ones that mark a group or category of people as entropy-resistant, seen from the perspective of the state. The former are harmless and often enriching. As the late Robin Cook said in 2001, 'Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish' (quoted from Christensen and Hedetoft 2004: 8).

So far, I have claimed that European nation-states still favour cultural homogeneity, but accept and may even encourage certain forms of difference (diversity, that is) which are not seen as problematic in the context of 'national values'. Since the Rushdie affair (beginning in 1988), Islam has increasingly been perceived as a potential problem for democratic values, and many European Muslims have tried to show how their faith can be reconciled with the hegemonic values in their countries.

Among indigenous peoples, there has been a tendency to choose a certain degree of negentropy, through claims to exclusive land rights, language rights and so on. Among immigrants and their descendants, the right to equality has been more dominant than the right to differ, but all over Europe immigrant organisations also claim the right to be 'equal but different' (the slogan of a European anti-racist campaign in the late 1990s). The ongoing debates concern degrees and kinds of difference.

Negentropy can be chosen or imposed. What marks a group as negentropic also varies. In the early 1970s, substantial numbers of Pakistanis arrived in Norway, and were met by an expanding labour market and many job opportunities. Nobody complained about their language or religion then – if anything, the critics of immigration were left-wingers fearing

unhealthy competition between immigrants and Norwegian workers. In the late 1990s, the right-wing populist party *Fremskrittspartiet* (the Progress Party) claimed that the reason for the high unemployment rates among some immigrant groups was their poor knowledge of Norwegian. However, it goes without saying that most non-white Norwegians today speak much better Norwegian than they or their parents did three decades ago.

Some time ago, an Oslo newspaper ran a story about a Pakistani-Norwegian who owned a flashy BMW car and who had been asked about his credentials by the traffic police ten times in the short period since he bought it. The newspaper had found seven ethnic Norwegians who owned almost identical cars, and only one of them had ever been interrogated by the police, after speeding. The Pakistani-Norwegian BMW owner, by profession a successful shopkeeper, might have been one hundred per cent integrated into Norwegian society at the level of culture – he may not even have been a Muslim believer – but at the level of ascribed identity, he remained as entropy-resistant as a black American under Jefferson.

This example merely says that things are more complicated than Gellner's theory of cultural homogenisation and entropy-resistance would suggest; it does not contradict it. All sorts of causes may lead to a group being disadvantaged in a nation-building context. Presently, race and religion are the most effective markers of exclusion in European countries, and objectively (or functionalistically) speaking, they are irrelevant. Nobody benefits. Unlike Gellner's favoured examples of elite diasporas, neither the minorities nor the majorities can be said to profit from the exclusion of minorities on the basis of criteria which bear no relation to their potential contribution to society. Take, as a final example in this section, the hijab debate, which ran across Western Europe and elsewhere in the first years of the new century. Some claimed that the Muslim headscarf was incompatible with secular values (in France), others claimed that it was oppressive to women (in Scandinavia) or at odds with 'common values' (the Netherlands). Some Muslims who had been indifferent to the headscarf began to take an intense interest in it. Some of their leaders said that it is the duty of a Muslim woman to cover herself, including her hair. To many Muslim girls and women, the result is a catch-22 – a double-bind situation. If they cover themselves up, they retain the respect and recognition of other Muslims, but are denounced as unwilling to integrate (voluntarily entropy-resistant) by the majority. If they choose not to cover their hair, they keep the respect and recognition of the majority, but lose their honour in the Muslim community.

This kind of situation, the intricacies of which were so well depicted in Orhan Pamuk's novel *Snow* (2004), has no relationship to culture in

the Gellnerian sense, as Gellner was very much aware. It was, after all, he who said that being a Bosnian Muslim meant not that one believed that there was only one God and that Muhammad was his Prophet but that one had *lost* that belief. So Gellner was far from ignorant of the fact that cultural identity was created, often out of almost nothing – but he failed to apply that insight to the identity politics going on at the sub-national level.

Gellner's often cavalier treatment of cultural difference is, in this context, a minor point. A more serious objection concerns his tendency to emphasise functional, often economic, motivations for exclusion and inclusion. For as the recent and current politics of identity involving Muslim groups inside and outside of Europe on the one hand, and 'Western values' including American military force on the other, very clearly indicate, neither impediments to functional integration nor an economically competitive situation can account for the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Douglas Holmes (2000) has shown, in his *Integral Europe*, how the rise of the new, anti-immigrant populist right is linked to globalisation and the virtual disappearance of domestic working classes; but as regards the identity politics surrounding Islam, one would be hard pressed indeed to find a similar argument. No objective forces and no functionally relevant cultural differences seem to be at play here. I have argued earlier (Eriksen 2001), and repeat the argument here, that what is at stake in these identity movements is *recognition*. The key factors are, negatively, humiliation and, positively, respect. These are some of the main scarce resources in global identity politics today, and because of his robust, but inadequate concept of culture, Gellner failed to see this.

### Beyond diaspora and territoriality

Entropy-resistant groups may, in a word, remain discrete – voluntarily or through external force – in spite of a high degree of cultural integration. Let us now move quickly to another huge question to be raised in relation to Gellner's theory of nationalism, namely that of territoriality. Gellner assumes, in all his writings about the topic, that cohesive cultural groups are territorial. He writes interestingly about diaspora populations in Central-Eastern Europe, for example. However, the time when the typical minority could be described either as indigenous or diasporic is long gone. The new migrations into Europe and elsewhere are trans-national in character, and to describe them as diasporic would be plainly misleading.

The term diaspora suggests a permanent state of emergency, an unfulfilled need for rootedness, insularity (entropy-resistance) in an alien

context and severed links. Transnationalism, by contrast, suggests an active exploitation of opportunities, a dynamic and shifting identity, a creative and selective integration into the country of residence, and a continuous maintenance of links with the country of origin – or with transnationals of the same origin in other countries.

Now, transnationalism arguably has a greater appeal in contemporary intellectual life than diaspora: it suggests movement, freedom, flexibility, openness and global integration, while diaspora seems to suggest conservatism, cultural insularity and encapsulation. Quite clearly, if we choose to view immigrants as transnational persons instead of members of a diaspora, the normative evaluations of the outcomes of migration may shift from anxiety caused by imperfect integration to celebrations of the extent of social change effected by migration. The migrants will moreover be made to appear as cultural brokers rather than as second-class citizens and, given the acknowledged fluidity of social life, their varying degrees of integration into greater society need not be seen as a problem, but rather as part of the endless variation typical of complex, globally embedded societies.

This depiction of the transnational presupposes that the territorial logic of the nation-state is transcended. Nation-states can relate efficiently, if not always sensibly, to diasporas – minorities with a fixed abode and a clear-cut identity; minorities whose loyalties are perhaps still divided, but who can be won over. The state is much less comfortable when confronted with manifestly transnational groups, who may not be terribly interested in being ‘integrated’, and who care little about domestic politics, but who channel their economic surplus, their social capital and their political interests towards the country of origin – or who form part of a transnational or even global network of people with their origins in the same region, and whose main allegiances are towards that network.

The facts of transnationalism seem to explode the paradigm of nationalism and thereby to historicise Gellner’s theory. Not all migrants are more transnational than they are diasporic; the point is that the territorial state consistently sees migration as the development of diasporas (and lacks a vocabulary for transnationalism), while migrants on the ground often see themselves as suspended in a both-and or neither nor kind of situation regarding their territorial belonging. Like the dual character of light – it is made up of both waves and particles, but the two aspects cannot be seen simultaneously – migration and minority issues appear as radically different phenomena depending on the perspective chosen by the researcher. Now, although the transnationalist stance may be the more fashionable theoretical position, it is quite clear that a lot of

current research on migration takes place within conceptual frameworks where notions of diaspora and integration are used. Partly this can be accounted for by the role of the state in commissioning research, but there are other reasons as well, to do with the traditional concepts used in social science, where ‘society’ and ‘community’ are privileged concepts and where ‘movement’ tends to be seen as an anomaly (cf. Urry 2001).

An evolutionary model popular in an earlier generation of migration researchers assumed that the minority moved from a diasporic situation – cohesive, bounded, longing for the homeland – through integration (‘equal but different’) to full assimilation. This was not to be. Instead, we are witness to a situation where transnationalism is replacing diasporas as the dominant mode of social organisation among migrants. The concerns, mentioned above, over South Asian immigrants who bring brides or grooms from the home village exemplify the continued dominance of a territorial model in European societies.

A telling example of new transnationalism could be the ‘unmeltable ethnics’ of the USA, who are not Scandinavian, Italian or Irish-Americans, but Spanish-speakers. Unlike in the nineteenth century, it is possible today to maintain a Spanish-speaking identity in a sea of Anglophones because the sea separating them from other Spanish speakers has shrunk. Even if they cannot necessarily travel physically, they are no longer cut off from communication with other Spanish-speakers in the USA and Latin America, no matter where in North America they find themselves.

For transnationalism does not, of course, just mean travelling back and forth. My Iranian friends in Oslo know everything about which films are screened in cinemas in Tehran and which ones are only available on the black market, even if they haven’t been in Iran since the early 1980s. Moreover, developments in the country of origin influence the identity formation in the country of residence. In the early 1990s, the well-established and large community of Yugoslav immigrants and descendants in Sweden ceased to be Yugoslav: they began to identify themselves as Serbs, Croats and so on. Their pubs and restaurants were ethnicised, and their organisations split. And as a Norwegian-Pakistani long established in Norway says, back in the early 1980s, whenever he went to Lahore to visit his mother, he asked other Pakistanis in Oslo if they wanted him to bring a message for their relatives. About ten years later, when he asked the same question, they just laughed and held out their cell phones.

Fuglerud (1999) has shown that first-generation Tamils in Norway were strongly oriented towards Sri Lanka and had a modest interest in being integrated into Norwegian society. Tomba (2004), in a study of Chinese immigrants in Italy, quotes an informant who believes that Mandarin is more important for his everyday life than Italian. This is not

because the Chinese community in Italy is very large (like Hispanics in the USA) or very compact (like Chinese in New York), but because of the economic and social importance of transnational connections with Chinese in other countries.

Seen from the territorial perspective of the nation-state, transnationalism is a threat to internal security because it entails divided loyalties. Seen from a more trans- or just international perspective, transnationalism mitigates and may prevent conflict precisely because it creates divided loyalties.

There is, in other words, a tension here – between diaspora and transnationalism. The former builds on ideas of multiculturalism, of bounded groups and cultures. The task of the state thereby becomes to ensure maximum loyalty and participation in the diaspora, perhaps with full assimilation as the ultimate goal. The latter entails a more fluid notion of sociality, with movement in networks and not society as a cohesive unit as the focus of research, where a main task becomes to identify flows through networks rather than gauging problems of integration.

John Urry has argued that '[c]orporeal mobility is ... importantly part of the process by which members of a country believe they share some common identity bound up with the particular territory that the society occupies or lays claim to' (Urry 2001: 149). If this is true, then the increased corporeal mobility (as well as the huge increase in the traffic in signs) characteristic of the present age makes non-territorial forms of identity viable. This view, incidentally, conforms to the widespread view that contemporary information technology contributes to rendering old identities obsolete and new ones feasible.

Let me mention a few more examples of contemporary transnationalism, and its tense and conflictual relationship to the logic of the territorial state.

In Norway, concerns have been voiced over the tendency, not least among some of the most established immigrant communities such as the Pakistanis, to maintain close links, even after two generations, with the home village in the Punjab. They are 'here to commute', not 'here to stay', it has been said. This continuous contact, whereby not only are spouses brought from the home village, but children are sent there for months at a time, is believed to slow down the changes in values, language and family organisation supposedly necessary for a full integration into Norwegian society.

Seen from the perspective of transnationalism, this continuous contact can be seen as a strikingly efficient form of development aid. It enables people to transcend the insular and often unhappy existence of the diaspora and to achieve 'the best of both worlds', and it also contributes

in no small measure to cultural changes in the original homeland. In villages in the Kharian area between Lahore and Islamabad, women can be seen carrying battered plastic bags from H&M as a sign of prestige, indicating a close link with Norway. A reasonable policy measure, if transnationalism were accepted, would entail setting up Norwegian schools in the Kharian area, to give the children a continuity in their education. This has been resisted by politicians so far – however, there are Norwegian schools for expatriate children scattered around the world, recently in southern Spain (which has become a haven not only for middle-class pensioners, but also for their support staff and a few others – thus the need for schools!).

Another obvious example, which shows the independence of transnational connections from the state even more starkly, is the *hawala* system of economic transactions practised by overseas Somalis. As is well known, the money passes from person to person through this system until it finally reaches the recipient. It is efficient enough to be used by Somalis in many countries, and it is entirely based on interpersonal trust. After 9/11, some Somalis in Oslo were brought into custody by the police because it was suspected that they were funding terrorist organisations (foremost al-Qaeda). It was only during these investigations that the official Norway discovered the existence of the *hawala* system.

To the extent that migrants feel anchored in their country of residence, they often feel at home in a city. Vertovec (2005) remarks that as many as 300 languages are spoken in London today, suggesting that migration into the city is far more chaotic and multifarious than in the more orderly postwar decades, when most of the migrants came from the Commonwealth. Actually, in the borough of Holmlia in remote Oslo, more than a hundred languages are spoken. The city, as a focus of identity, has historically accommodated a variety of lifestyle options more easily than the state. Typically, the first sociologist of urbanity, Georg Simmel, emphasised the fleeting, flexible and liberating dimensions of urban life. However, this does not mean that city life precludes community and cultural conformity; only that it offers other options as well. One can live in and feel at home in a city without necessarily being or even wanting to be a citizen.

Add to this the issues of long-distance nationalism, addressed by Anderson (1992) in the aforementioned essay.

A focus on either diaspora or transnationalism leads to two different conceptions of the social, and to different formulations of the issues at hand. The state conceptualises its minorities as diasporas, as does much of the state-sponsored minority research, *as does Gellner*. There has been a great deal of attention to the varying forms of integration *within* states.



Time is now more than ripe to ask about the forms of integration that may take place *independently* of states. It has been argued that illegal migration is economically necessary for several of the most advanced economies, including the USA (Harris 2002); the *normative* question is if citizenship is the only source of salvation for the illegal migrants or if their current situation is better or worse than nothing. Some of the *research* questions to be asked ought to concentrate on coping strategies and ways of forging a sense of security, community and freedom independently of the state and territorial stability (see Malešević and Haugaard 2002 for some possible approaches).

Migration is an open-ended process. It simply never ends, and it represents a powerful counterdiscourse to that of the nation-state. My colleague Christian Krohn-Hansen, who was carrying out anthropological research in the Dominican Republic in the 1990s, realised after a few years that in order to complete his endeavour he would have to do some fieldwork in New York City. Only then could he tie up the loose ends and map out the social networks and cultural connections which were necessary to give a full account of both the Dominican village and the neighbourhoods on the Upper East Side. In this kind of world, the Gellnerian universe of clear-cut boundaries and state-led homogenisation processes is remote.

### Some objections

All is not flow. It is a fact that non-European immigrants in Europe tend to form communities, both literally and metaphorically: they tend to live in the same parts of cities, and to interact more intensively with each other than with the host population. Many of them develop a strong sense of belonging to particular quarters or urban areas. Some would claim that this spatial concentration of immigrants is chiefly a result of exclusion and discrimination; possibly adding emerging identity politics among immigrants as a factor. However, it is also an obvious fact that people who share many of the same experiences and whose world-views overlap to a great extent tend to identify more closely with each other than with others. Norwegian Pakistanis, for example, share a cultural heritage, a mother-tongue, comparable childhood memories, food habits, a complex personal relationship to Islam and secularisation, customs and values. When they interact informally with each other, they do not play a zero-sum game, but confirm their selves in a backstage where they share taken-for-granted that they do not, for the obvious reasons, share with the majority population. In our eagerness to deconstruct stereotypes and dubious generalisations about minorities, many of us have been too quick

to neglect the internal cultural dynamics that contribute to maintaining group identities in complex multiethnic societies. Like language, the structures of relevance shared by individuals with similar experiences are supra-individual and exist not chiefly as the outcome of choice, but as the often unacknowledged conditions for choice. They must be read hermeneutically; they are not merely an aggregate outcome of intentional agency, but the complex institutional, symbolic and incorporated conditions for agency.

As pointed out years ago by Peter Worsley, one cannot simply exchange one's ethnic identity for another; life is not a self-service cafeteria (Worsley 1984). In addition, one cannot easily trade one's childhood experiences and personal network for others; one does not choose one's cultural universe. Culture is to some extent chosen and constructed, but it is also to a great extent implicit; it has an element of fate, or destiny. Similarly, reflexivity, mobility, creolisation at the level of lived culture and the bewildering and massive onslaught of signs do not seem to have dampened people's enthusiasm for anchoring their identities to places. If you only have two places, you belong to the diaspora of fixed abode more than to the world of transnationalism.

As some of the examples earlier in this chapter also suggested, both processes are taking place at the same time: a strengthening of boundaries *and* the evaporation of boundaries; strengthened community feeling and enhanced individualism; diasporic entrenchment, transnational flows and assimilation/conversion. But, and that is the main point here, the lofty dichotomy between homogenisation and entropy-resistance is totally inadequate as a tool for grasping the intricacies of cultural complexity in contemporary Europe.

Immigrants and their descendants in contemporary Europe are faced with four kinds of option. (i) They can opt for a diasporic identification, seeing themselves as living in a foreign country and having a clear idea of what and where their true country is. This creates, by necessity, a divided loyalty. (ii) They can decide to try to become assimilated, leaving the past behind as so many migrants to North America still do today. This option suggests a single loyalty. A Korean-American is American. (iii) The third possibility is transnationalism, where the state becomes less important and loyalty to any state is uncertain and situational. (iv) The final option is that of creole or individualist identification, where the migrant forges his or her own portfolio of cultural identities and mixes thereof, in critical dialogue with both hegemonic culture and ancestral culture. The two final options, I have suggested, are more widespread than the state would like us to believe, and may perfectly well satisfy both individual and collective needs for security and freedom.

### Conclusions

Rereading Anderson and Gellner on nationalism, I tend to get the same feeling as I do when rereading Huxley's and Orwell's respective dystopian novels, *Brave New World* (Huxley 1932) and *1984* (Orwell 1949). While Huxley got almost everything right, Orwell seems stalled in the mid-twentieth century. His prophecy, reeking of coal fumes and the smell of boiled cabbage, has as much in common with the UK of the immediate postwar years as it has with Stalinism; while Huxley, writing a decade and a half earlier, predicted just about anything from package holidays in Spain to infotainment TV and Prozac. Yet, Orwell is the more interesting author to discuss (and disagree) with.

What, then, is left of Gellner's theory of nationalism? One can have mass communication creating a shared cultural identity and a high degree of homogeneity without industrialism – industrialisation is neither necessary nor sufficient as a condition for nationalism. One may have transnational identities, such as that of global Islam, which place strong demands on their adherents and have homogenising effects without being associated with a territory or a clear political project. And one can have reasonably well-functioning societies which are partly made up by communities with a minimal degree of integration into the majority culture, with a tenuous and weak relationship to the state, and which are yet able to offer a great deal of security and continuity to their members. One may even have societies where a large proportion of the population are transnational in their political identities, their social networks, their media consumption and their economic activities. And one can have societies where it is exactly the process of cultural homogenisation that leads to identity-based conflicts by creating tensions and experiences of humiliation. It is often the very fact that the different groups 'speak the same language' that makes conflict possible.

In this chapter, I have argued that Gellner's theory of nationalism draws on a limited and simplistic notion of culture, failing among other things to distinguish properly between culture and identity, and thereby assuming that cultural homogenisation leads to a shared identity. I have also argued that his treatment of entropy-resistance fails to take symbolic dominance into account, focusing too one-sidedly on economic and material factors. Finally, I have noted that in limiting himself to diaspora nationalisms and not considering transnationalism as a viable framework for stable identification, Gellner fails to address some of the most burning issues in today's world.

Yet, at the end of the day there remains a great deal of sociological common sense and original insight in Gellner's theory – in spite of

its limitation to European history – which can be tapped in current research on the politics of culture and identity. His analysis of diasporic elites, where he predicts conflict between diasporas and nations when the latter have got their act together, has recently been confirmed in Amy Chua's influential book *World on Fire* (2003), which shows how elite minorities are being victimised as a result of democratisation. His emphasis on communication as a necessary condition for a shared identity remains as relevant as ever, not least in research on transnational networks and the implications of the new media for identity formation. His analyses of institutional differentiation and cultural entropy are good, Weberian sociology which can still offer a starting framework for detailed empirical research. Finally, the problems of identity currently experienced by the nation-state, some of which have been identified here, confirm Gellner's most controversial claim, namely that the nation-state is a product of particular historical circumstances; it has arisen, flourished, and eventually will go away. The human need for belonging and security may be constant, but it has to be realised under very differing circumstances.

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