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SITUATIONS OF
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The Formation and Mobilization of Collective Identities in Situations of Conflict and Integration¹

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Abstract

The authors propose a framework for the comparative analysis of collective identities and corresponding processes of identification. “Collective identities” are defined as representations containing normative appeals to potential respondents and providing them with the means of understanding themselves, or being understood, as members of a larger category or assemblage of persons. The term “processes of identification” refers to the ways in which actors respond to or engage with the appeals inherent in collective identities and to the combined effects of such responses or engagement. After a critical review of the secondary literature and brief comments on the social, cultural, and historical contexts of collective identities and processes of identification, the authors explicate the two central concepts and their interrelationship. Discussion of the concept of collective identity covers dimensions and markers of collective identity, the semantic relations among different collective identities within larger systems of classification, and the variable significance that collective identities may have for actors in diverse social situations and under changing circumstances. Processes of identification are examined in terms of three (sets of) concepts corresponding to major approaches in social and anthropological analysis: “structure and function, culture, and meaning”; “practice and power”; and “choice.” Rather than being mutually exclusive, the approaches based on these concepts throw identity variables into relief in different ways and to different degrees, and they highlight different processes of identification.

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I. Collective Identities and Processes of Identification: definitions and clarifications

Our goal in this paper is to provide a framework for the comparative analysis of collective identities and corresponding processes of identification. We understand a “collective identity” to be a representation containing – or seeming to contain – a normative appeal to potential respondents and providing them with the means of understanding themselves, or being understood, as members of a larger category of persons or as participants in a larger assemblage.³

The normative appeals that are inherent in collective identities may be explicit or implicit. At one extreme, they may be formulated as doctrines or programs; and, at the other extreme, they may consist merely in discernable resemblances that seem to invite unconscious assumptions or conscious inferences about likeness and difference, conjunction and disjunction, solidarity and alienation. In any case, the resemblances upon which explicit doctrines or implicit assumptions are based include, typically, shared traits, material and symbolic resources, situations, interests, attitudes, and practices. These may, in turn, be taken as signs of affiliation with others, based on ties of nationality, ethnicity, “race,”⁴ kinship, language, religion, local or regional origins, historical experience, social class, generation, gender, or participation in a social movement.

Identities, understood as representations containing normative appeals to potentially interconnected actors, invite active responses – that is, some form of engagement – from those who are confronted with such appeals. But who makes such appeals, and who responds to them in one way or another? What are the precise contents of appeals and of subsequent responses? How are appeals and responses formulated and articulated? Where, when, under what circumstances, and why? Such questions cannot be answered in general terms; rather, answering them requires analysis of particular processes of identification in carefully reconstructed social, cultural, and historical contexts. Once this has been accomplished, however, it should be possible to organize the presentation of data drawn from various case studies in a way that renders them comparable, perhaps even allowing for the testing of hypotheses and the formulation of generalizations. The framework that we present in this paper is intended to contribute toward achieving these goals.

For our purposes, “identification” refers most generally to the ways in which actors respond to or engage with collective identities, while the term “processes of identification” also refers to the often very complex results of such responses or engagement. It is safe to assume, we suggest, that actors respond in one way or another to appeals that may seem to be always already inherent in the situations with which they are confronted in the course of their lives; but just as appeals may be explicit or implicit, so it is with responses. With reference to Max Weber’s (1978 [1922]: 24–26)

³ Our use of the term “representation” is based loosely on Émile Durkheim’s (1965 [1912]) concept of *représentations collectives*, i.e., signs or symbols to which human beings refer in orienting themselves to each other, to the world around them, and to themselves. By saying that representations contain or seem to contain normative appeals – we might just as well have said rhetorical force – we mean to suggest they serve simultaneously as “models of” and “models for” life in society, as Clifford Geertz (1966: 7–8) has said of symbolism generally in another context. That is, identities tell people not only how they are related to one another but also how they should be related and, often, how they should behave if they are to achieve this particular form of interrelation. Since there is never any single “correct” way to represent social relations, which are fundamentally ambiguous, all representations of them may be understood to be skewed in one direction or another. Indeed, as Kenneth Burke (e.g., 1950) never tired of reminding us, representations must be skewed with respect to that which they represent, if they are to say something, as opposed to saying everything at once and, hence, nothing. When particular identities stand in a systematic relationship to other representations of a similar type, as is often – perhaps always – the case, they may also be regarded as categories. We explore the implications of the status of identities as categories in parts III and IV of this paper.

⁴ We employ the term “race” not in a biological sense but as a category common in modern identity politics, especially, though not exclusively, in British and American discourse. For discussions of race in these terms, see, for example, Balibar and Wallerstein 1988, Harrison 1995, Mukhopadhyay and Moses 1997, Fenton 2003, and Glick Schiller 2005.

types of social action, however, it is possible to replace the simple opposition between explicit and implicit responses with yet finer distinctions: responses to the appeals inherent in identities may be habitual, affective, or rational – whereby the term “rational” includes both value-based rationality and instrumental rationality, i.e., rationality oriented towards consistency with professed values and rationality oriented towards achieving desired ends through the calculated utilization of available means. Of course, even when making these finer distinctions, we are still dealing with ideal types; but such ideal types have the salutary effect of allowing us to conceptualize the parameters within which actual behavior occurs.⁵

In a narrow sense, the term identification might be taken to denote affirmation of the appeals that are inherent in the kinds of representations we call identities. We suggest, however, that it makes more sense to conceive of identification quite broadly, using it to refer to all varieties of behavior for which collective identities provide a greater or lesser degree of orientation. These varieties are too multifarious to allow for a definitive list of processes of identification; therefore, we employ purely descriptive terms that are appropriate in the context of particular case studies. In any given investigation, the relevant processes of identification may include, among many others, the following: the assignation of collective identities to individuals or groups, whether from inside or outside of any conceivable group; the evaluation of collective identities from various perspectives and according to variable standards; the reproduction of any given collective identity, e.g., through repeated reference to shared symbols in the context of ritual performances; the habituation of both the practices upon which collective identities are based and the perceptions that link practices and identities; the assertion of particular collective identities within wider fields of social or political relations; acceptance of or resistance to assignations or evaluations imposed by those who are perceived to be external authorities; the alteration of the markers or contents of collective identities; the generation of new collective identities (often best understood as a special case of alteration); the instrumentalization of such identities for political or economic purposes; the mobilization of multiple actors with reference to supposedly shared collective identities – and so on. Of course, these and other processes of identification are governed by a whole series of variables, which we outline below, at least for those processes that are most relevant for our research and for comparative purposes.

Having defined the terms “collective identity” and “processes of identification,” we provide a few further qualifications before proceeding. Neither the significance of collective identities nor the course taken in processes of identification are strictly determined by the discernable resemblances among people upon which representations are based; rather, such resemblances, which in and of themselves are ambiguous, allow for greater or lesser degrees of selectivity and hence flexibility in the formulation of variable identities. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize at the outset that this flexibility in the formation of collective identities is not unlimited, as representations must also satisfy principles of plausibility, i.e., must seem to be based, at least to those involved, on actual conditions. Still, the plausibility of the appeals inherent in collective identities is not enough to ensure that particular forms or degrees of identification actually come about. Clearly, however, the perception of resemblance and of likeness, but also of difference and complementarity, may serve – under conditions that one should be able to specify – as the basis for the development of feelings of

⁵ In this paper, we refer most generally to “behavior,” replacing this term with “action” or “practice” – which correspond to Weber’s typology of social action in complex ways – where appropriate.

belonging and solidarity, for the establishment of cooperative relations, for the emergence of proclivities for coordinated action, and so on.

Our discussion is restricted to collective identities and corresponding processes of identification as they are defined above. We use the term “collective identity,” rather than “social identity,” because the later is often used to refer to characteristics of the individual resulting from social processes and affecting the significance of his or her position in relation to others (e.g., Goffman 1963; Goodenough 1965; cf. Hardin 2001; Jenkins 2008). In this sense, the difference between collective identities and social identities is largely one of perspective: When investigating collective identities, one takes categories that include multiple individuals as one’s point of departure; but, when investigating social identity, one starts with the individual in order to discover his or her multiple affiliations, which, taken together, contribute to processes of individuation.⁶ Clearly, the social aspects of individual identity are often relevant for our general topic and for our various case studies; but they are not our focus in this paper. Excluded from our conceptualization of either collective or social identities are strictly psychological aspects of individual identity, which seem, in our view, to constitute a separate topic that must be investigated using different methods. This means that we reject the attempts of some authors to trace the concept of collective identity back to psychological approaches that were subsequently applied to social phenomena (e.g., Gleason 1983; Fearon 1999; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Niethammer 2000). We suggest, in fact, that many of the misconceptions concerning the concept of collective identity stem from the mistaken assumption that all phenomena to which the word “identity” can be or has been applied form a single topic. Our position can be clarified by situating our research with respect to various traditions of scholarship: Our sources of inspiration include not psychological theories of individual identity, such as those of Erik Erikson (e.g., 1968), but major theoretical approaches in the fields of anthropology and sociology, which, however, we supplement with reference to pragmatism, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, the sociology of language, ordinary language philosophy, and institutional analysis. These debts will be made explicit as we proceed.

We are aware, of course, that the concept of identity has been subject to criticism and that some critics have suggested abandoning it entirely (e.g., Handler 1994; Rouse 1995; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Niethammer 2000). In order to articulate our own critical perspective and also to explain why we still insist that the concept of identity is useful, we address the arguments made against it by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper in their widely cited article, *Beyond ‘Identity’* (2000), referring occasionally to other critiques as we proceed.

The critique of the concept of identity, as formulated by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), can be summarized in three points: (1) Particular identities are reifications, which are properly understood as rhetorical means linked to particular, often questionable political ends. Given the rise of ethnic and indigenous movements in the wake of recent trends towards globalization, the same point can be made with regard to the concept of identity in general. Social scientists who adopt such “categories of practice” as if they were adequate “categories of analysis” (Brubaker and Cooper

⁶ For example, being disabled may be one aspect of the social identity of some individuals without necessarily constituting a collective identity in our sense (Engel and Munger 2003) – unless of course, people with disabilities begin to conceive of themselves as members of a larger collectivity and to act accordingly. Fruitful ground for the exploration of the relationship between collective identities and the social aspects of individual identities may be found in the literature on the social construction of the person, as, for example, in Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985, Strathern 1988, Rapport 2001, and Carsten 2004: 83–108.

2000: 4–5) unwittingly reproduce and reinforce underlying reifications, thus endorsing related practices uncritically. (2) The term identity is used to refer to heterogeneous, only loosely related phenomena. For the sake of clarity, these heterogeneous referents should be distinguished clearly and investigated separately. (3) While the concept of identity should be rejected, the etymologically related concept of identification is admissible, even indispensable, insofar as it refers to actual social processes, rather than to reified states or conditions.

While we reject each of these criticisms, we take some more seriously than others. The first criticism, especially, is not only methodologically unsound but illogical and – for reasons about which we can only speculate – rhetorically manipulative. We agree, of course, that identities are reifications, but we reject the suggestions, first, that this means that they are not proper object of analysis and, second, that analyzing them is tantamount to endorsing them.

Our views of reification, its significance in the analysis of human identities, and its status in social scientific investigation are similar to those of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967). Although Berger and Luckmann restrict the term “identity” to the social aspects of individual identity, calling it “a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society” (1967: 174), their notions of “identity types” or “typifications,” which result, they say, from reification, are very close to our understanding of collective identities. “Identity (...) may be reified,” they suggest, as in the “total identification of the individual with his socially assigned typifications,” that is, when the individual “is apprehended as *nothing but* that type” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 91). In this context, Berger and Luckmann comment pointedly on the place of such reifications in scientific investigations:

“Clearly the status of such typifications is not comparable to that of the constructs of the social sciences, nor does the verification and refutation follow the canons of scientific method (...) The point of interest in the present context is that identity types are ‘observable’ and ‘verifiable’ in pretheoretical, and thus prescientific experiences (...) It should be stressed again that we are here referring to theories about identity as a social phenomenon; that is, without prejudice as to their acceptability to modern science.” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 174–175)

Almost half a century after Berger and Luckmann wrote this passage, the situation may have become more complicated because of the increasing permeability of the boundaries between scientific, popular, and political discourses; but their position is still superior to that of Brubaker and Cooper for a number of reasons. First, Berger and Luckmann (1967: 89–90) view reification not “as a perversion of an originally non-reified apprehension of the social world, a sort of cognitive fall from grace,” but as “a modality of consciousness.” Second, they recognize that all actors are engaged in theoretical or at least speculative thought, though they also insist that efforts be made to establish standards ensuring the adequacy of theory for the purposes of the social sciences. Third, they present a balanced argument for understanding social science analysis as a consciously directed, though necessarily selective, exercise in “dereification” with respect to the categories of thought that are employed both by the people whom social scientists study and by social scientists themselves: “The analysis of reification is important because it serves as a standing corrective to the reifying propensities of theoretical thought in general and sociological thought in particular” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 91).

While there is much more to be said about these topics, the foregoing is perhaps sufficient to expose the errors of Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 4–5), who simply assert that analyzing the concepts of nation, race, or identity is the same as naively endorsing essentialist understandings of nations, races, and identities (cf. Handler 1994: 27–30). Possibly, Brubaker and Cooper argue in this fashion in order to emphasize their rejection of all forms of essentialism and to distance themselves from politically driven studies of race and nation (cf. Niethammer 2000); but, such considerations, however understandable they may be, should not be allowed to interfere with our primary tasks, namely, documenting, analyzing, and accounting for social and cultural phenomena (cf. Jensen 2000).⁷ Clearly, it is impossible to study nationalism without taking the concept of nation into account, just as it is impossible to study racism without referring to the concept of race; and, clearly, such studies in no way imply “buying into” nationalist understandings of the nation or racist notions of race. Admittedly, the concepts of nation and race, on one hand, and identity, on the other, are not perfectly comparable, because the latter is a general category, while the former refer to particular dimensions of identity. Still, the same general point applies, namely, that employing the concept of identity is not the same as assuming that identities have a reality beyond their significance for various actors. Ignoring people’s representations of nation, race, or, more generally, collective identity will not make them go away, nor will it lessen their effects.

Brubaker and Cooper’s second criticism – that the concept of identity refers to heterogeneous phenomena, which should be distinguished and analyzed separately – is one which we take more seriously but with which we still disagree, this time strictly on methodological grounds. Their declared goal is “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 (...) attribute meaning and significance to them” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 21). In fact, we share this goal, but we follow a different path in achieving it.

After rejecting the concept of identity, Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 14) argue that, “given the great range and heterogeneity of the work done by ‘identity,’ it would be fruitless to look for a *single* substitute.” Instead they favor breaking down the concept into its supposedly separate components. In their analysis, the various components that are confused within the concept of identity include the following: “identification and categorization”; “self-understanding and social location”; and “commonality, connectedness, and groupness” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 14):

⁷ We use the terms “essentialism” and “essentialist” to refer to assumptions concerning unchanging essences or substances – both terms are based on Latin translations of a single Greek word (MacIntyre 1967; Schneider 1972) – that are thought to underlie and determine the character of social phenomena. In this sense, essentialism often involves assuming that the categories employed by social scientists or by the people whom they study correspond unproblematically to an underlying reality. Examples of studies that have been criticized for essentialist tendencies include Herrnstein and Murray (1994) on race and Banfield (1958), Patai (1973), Huntington (1996), and Kaplan (1996) on culture. For critiques of these works, see Marks 2005 (on Herrnstein and Murray), Greenwood 1980 (on Banfield), Said 1978 (on Patai and many others), Brown 2005 and Gusterson 2005 (on Huntington), and Bringa 2005 and Besteman 2005 (on Kaplan). It seems inevitable that essentialist portrayals of social phenomena wittingly or unwittingly serve particular interests or political purposes; but it may be important to identify these purposes more precisely. It has often been observed that discourses about race may allow members of dominant groups to “divide and conquer” suppressed groups (e.g., Barot and Bird 2001); however, as Nina Glick Schiller (2005: 291) notes, the same or very similar discourses “may serve to unite people desperately struggling to obtain social justice against those with much greater power and to legitimate and popularize their claims to land, resources, and life itself.” Therefore, it is not enough for scholars simply to reject essentialism; the point should be, rather, to understand its various forms and their underlying motives (cf. Handler 1994: 38; Briggs 1996; Sturgeon 1999; Eidson 2004, 2005).

“The problem with subsuming these forms of relational connectedness under ‘the social construction of identity’ is that linking and separating get called by the same name, making it harder to grasp the processes, causes, and consequences of differing patterns of crystallizing difference and forging connections.” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 23)

We follow Brubaker and Cooper halfway in their analysis, but we draw exactly the opposite conclusions. They want to separate variables and call them by different terms, e.g., “to distinguish instances of strongly binding, vehemently felt groupness from more loosely structured, weakly constraining forms of affinity and affiliation” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 21); but we want to talk about them together, because human relations are fluid and subject to transformation under changing conditions. What Brubaker and Cooper call “groupness” may vary in the estimation of various individuals or for a single individual in different social situations and under changing circumstances over time. For this reason, we *do* want to call “linking and separating ... by the same name,” precisely because, rather than making processes harder to grasp, it is indispensable for grasping them. Only in this way can one discover what causes linking in some cases and separating in others; or what, for a single case over time, causes things that are initially linked to be separated or things that are initially separated to become linked.

Our alternative is to articulate what Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 24) themselves call “principles of a sliding scale of connection” by specifying identity variables with multiple values and reflecting on the conditions under which variants become manifest and are subject to further transformation. Presenting collective identities and processes of identification in terms of variables, rather than analytically distinct terms, allows us to examine variation and co-variation, which is the empirical prerequisite for theorizing.

Finally, in their third critical observation, Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 14–17) combine the logical errors and methodological missteps of the first two criticisms. After rejecting identity as a viable concept and breaking it down into its supposed components, they take up one of these components, “identification,” which, despite its etymological relation to “identity,” is admissible because it refers to processes, rather than reified states. Admittedly, Brubaker and Cooper are not alone in making this kind of argument. The idea that the concept of identification is somehow superior to the concept of identity is quite widespread, having emerged in the context of the critique of structuralism and structural functionalism and their alleged one-sided emphasis on structures over processes (Ortner 1984; Vincent 1986). While we are sympathetic to a degree with the critique of structuralism and related approaches, and while we draw inspiration from the innovative work of recent decades on practices and processes, we also think that the compensation for the one-sidedness of structuralism has often verged on overcompensation. By focusing simultaneously on structures and processes, we want to restore the balance between these two aspects, drawing on recent developments in social theory without abandoning the fundamental achievements of the early and mid-twentieth century. While we agree that it is inadequate to focus on identities alone, neglecting processes of identification, we must also insist that the latter cannot

be understood without the former. Just as there can be no identities without identification, so can there be no identification without identities.⁸

The preceding comments on Brubaker and Cooper (2000) may serve as our point of departure in clarifying our position on debates about the concepts of constructivism, primordialism, and instrumentalism, as they are used in analyzing collective identities and processes of identification. As in the case of the article that we have just discussed at some length, many of the positions taken in recent debates are characterized by logical confusion and by a failure to grasp properly the relationship between normative and descriptive approaches in research on collective identities. Often, constructivism and primordialism are portrayed as contrasting approaches to collective identities, between which analysts must choose and which they must subsequently advocate or criticize (e.g., Cerulo 1997; Yeros 1999). Sometimes, one of these terms is replaced by the term instrumentalism; or the simple dichotomy between constructivism and primordialism is rendered more complex by introducing instrumentalism as a third term (Varshney 2002; Young 2002). There is, thereby, no consensus on the logical status of these terms in relation to one another. For example, in a recent edited volume including contributions by anthropologists and political scientists, the author of the introduction distinguishes “two main approaches,” primordialism and instrumentalism (Thornton 2007: 2), while the author of the first chapter opposes instrumentalist and constructivist approaches, defining constructivism in a way that is hardly distinguishable from the definition of primordialism in the introduction (Brown 2007: 16). In other publications, however, instrumentalism is seen as a variety of constructivism and opposed to primordialism (Comaroff 1996; cf. Yeros 1999). Such examples could be multiplied.

Our solution to this terminological and logical confusion is as follows. Our position is fundamentally constructivist, though this does not mean that we agree with all of those who see themselves as spokespersons for a constructivist position. Rather, we understand constructivism broadly to mean that, within the species *Homo sapiens*, all identities are social, cultural, and historical products, regardless of whether or not they seem to be natural in the eyes of various actors. We note that some actors may perceive the identities that they espouse for themselves or

⁸ Even Brubaker and Cooper (2000) concede this point, if only indirectly and without admitting it, in the way in which they use the terms “category” and “categorization.” After defining identification and categorization in more or less equivalent terms, they reject the term “identity,” while employing “category” freely. Logically, the relationship of identity to identification is parallel to the relationship of category to categorization. Once one admits the concept of “category,” logical consistency requires admission of the concept of “identity” as well. In subsequent publications, Brubaker (2002), along with his coauthors (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004), has corrected some of the errors or exaggerations that we have criticized. For example, he admits that, although “we should avoid unintentionally *doubling* or *reinforcing* the reification of ethnic groups in ethnopolitical practice with a reification of such groups in social analysis, (...) we should certainly try to *account* for the ways in which – and conditions under which – this practice of reification, this powerful crystallization of group feeling can work” (Brubaker 2002: 167). Nevertheless, our critique of his earlier publication (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) is still necessary for the following reasons. (1) It is a widely cited text that makes explicit a whole series of assumptions and conclusions, which, though mistaken, enjoy broad popularity. (2) In subsequent publications, Brubaker never retracts his criticism of the concept of identity; rather, he attempts to restrict the applicability of his corrections of earlier errors to the concept of ethnicity – while, we might add, regretting the absence of a general term for a larger domain including “race,” “ethnicity,” and “nation” (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004: 47–49). And, even in these subsequent publications, (3) Brubaker still employs straw-man arguments and reinvents the wheel. For example, he articulates his critique of “groupism” – his neologism for the reification of groups – without citing a single instance of an author who is guilty of this sin (Brubaker 2002; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004: 45); and he heralds his cognitive approach to ethnicity, which he now understands in terms of the concept of category, as if it were something new. While we welcome recent contributions to the cognitive sciences and suspect that they will lead to important new insights into collective identities and processes of identification (see, for example, the discussion of the literature on schemata and prototypes in Finke 2005), we also note that it was not necessary to wait for them in order to formulate our approach: Durkheim’s concept of collective representations, which provides the point of departure for our understanding of collective identities, was introduced nearly 100 years ago. For critiques of Brubaker’s writings on identity and identification with which we generally agree but which, in our view, do not go far enough, see Calhoun 2003 and Jenkins 2008: 8–15.

attribute to others not as social, cultural, or historical contingencies but as natural “givens”; but this means only that we acknowledge the currency of primordialist perspectives without being primordialists ourselves. More importantly, however, we do not assume that all actors at all times and places have primordialist understandings of collective identities; rather, we view this as one possible understanding among others.⁹

Curiously, no single term exists in the secondary literature for those cases in which people understand “their own” collective identities not as natural givens but as the results of social, cultural, or historical processes. Rather, depending on a whole series of variables, such cases are described in terms of “civic codes of collective identity” (Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995: 81), “civic nationalism” (Calhoun 1997: 86–92), “assimilation” (Rumbaut 2001), “performative” understandings of ethnicity (Hutchinson 2000; Hutchinson and Jok 2002), or even “emic constructivism” (Feyissa forthcoming).¹⁰ When actors view their chosen collective identities as products of social processes, however, this does not necessarily involve instrumentalization. Actors may instrumentalize collective identities – for example, in seeking advantages or avoiding disadvantages by disregarding them, misrepresenting them, or emphasizing some aspects of them and not others – regardless of whether they understand them to be natural “givens” or social products (Scott 1990; Fenton 2003: 84; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004: 51).

In sum, our preference – as outlined in the third and fourth sections of this paper – is not to apply sweeping categorizations such as “primordialist” or “instrumentalist,” but to speak in terms of variable identities or identity components and variable forms of engagement with them, depending on the orientations of actors in different situations and under different circumstances as they change over time. Whether the corresponding representations, perceptions, interpretations, arguments, and actions may be understood to be primordialist, civic, performative, instrumentalist, or some combination thereof is an empirical question.

As noted at the outset, our aim is to sketch an analytical framework that allows for comparative analyses of diverse case studies. We set this goal as anthropologists sharing a focus on integration and conflict in widely varying settings in East and West Africa, Europe, Central Asia, and Siberia in order to be able to specify the peculiarities of our various case studies, to render our ethnographic and historical data comparable, and to draw general conclusions (see Schlee 2001a, 2003a, 2005). The concepts of collective identity and identification lend themselves to comparative analysis precisely because they allow for reflection on variable data within a common framework that is still flexible enough to accommodate different approaches, depending on the proclivities of the individual researcher or on the questions that he or she is trying to answer.

We close this introductory section with a few words about the relationship between collective identities, processes of identification, and conflict. Whether or not the reverse is also the case – and we suspect that it is – we are certain that a theory of collective identities and corresponding processes of identification is indispensable in the study of conflict. We agree with John Bowen

⁹ For a clear-headed sorting out of the confusion plaguing the term primordialism, see Fenton (2003: 73–90), who points out that, all too often, two separate questions are confused: first, “Are groups real?” and, second, “Are group attachments affective or instrumental?” Failure to distinguish these two questions results in absurdities, which, in the meantime, have become commonplaces – such as the suggestion that Geertz was a primordialist (e.g., Eller and Coughlan 1993). Commenting on the significance of primordialist forms of self-understanding or political rhetoric does not make one a primordialist. For further comments on Geertz’s use of the term “primordial,” see the section entitled “Structure and Function, Culture and Meaning” below. On the transformation of the meaning of the term “primordial” from Edward Shils’ (1957) usage to Geertz’s (1973 [1963]), see Fenton 2003: 77–83.

¹⁰ For critical reflection on the distinction between “civic” and “ethnic” varieties of nationalism, see Glick Schiller 2005: 303–306 and Zenker forthcoming.

(1996) that identities do not cause conflicts in simple ways; nevertheless, we also insist that analyses of collective identities and identification are necessary components of attempts to arrive at adequate explanations of conflict situations. When, for example, one asks what a conflict is about, the answer is often resources such as water, oil, jobs, or political power; but a full analysis of any given conflict requires that other questions be answered as well: In conflicts, who sides with whom against whom and why? Such questions can only be answered with recourse to data on collective identities and corresponding processes of identification. What is more, in conflict situations, processes of identification are often accelerated, intensified, dramatized, and contested in a way that makes them more accessible to researchers than they are under other circumstances (Schlee 1997, 2003b, 2003c, 2004, 2006, 2008; Feyissa 2002, 2005, 2008; Hoehne 2006, 2009; Zenker 2006, forthcoming; Fuest n.d.).

In the following, we present our framework in three steps: first, we comment briefly on those aspects of the social, cultural, and historical context that must be taken into account when analyzing collective identities and processes of identification; second, we outline the aspects of collective identities that may come into play in any given situation; and third, we identify various processes of identification and suggest how they may be analyzed from different perspectives.

II. Collective Identities and Processes of Identification in Context

Understanding processes of identification requires familiarity with the contexts in which they occur. Such contexts include, minimally, particular geographical and infrastructural conditions, the actors who live under such conditions, a wide variety of institutions, different kinds of social relations, material resources, and also the kinds of symbolic and discursive resources that we call collective identities.

Under particular geographical and infrastructural conditions – which, though never strictly determinant, often set important limits on communication, travel, and transport (Greenwood 1980; cf. Boal 2001; Graham 2001) – actors participate in social worlds that are structured by diverse, often overlapping institutions. An institution exists when actors interact regularly in ways that are oriented toward achieving implicit or explicit goals, for which purpose at least some actors are able to draw on designated resources and to encourage or enforce compliance with behavioral norms. Examples of institutions include families, descent groups, status groups (including those involving involuntary statuses, as in cases of bondage), alliances, religious organizations, polities of various sizes, parties, but also markets, interest groups, trading partnerships, etc. Institutions are not the same as collective identities, but they may and often do provide the basis for identity formation and other identification processes. Such institutions vary in their degree of organizational centralization, their characteristic structures of authority, and their ways of providing for the needs of their members. Thus, they also differ in the degree to which they or their agents are able to compel compliance from those who are subject to their authority.

The state and state-regulated systems of production, distribution, and consumption represent extreme forms of political and economic centralization, and, in analyses of collective identities and processes of identification, their effects must always be taken into account, even in cases where these effects appear to be highly mediated. Typical processes of social change occur when local or regional populations are integrated into larger administrative and economic systems. This may entail, for example, changes in the mode of production (e.g., the – often only partial – transition

from peasant production to commercial agriculture or industrial labor), in the mode of administration (e.g., becoming subjects or citizens of a centrally administered political system), or even in opportunity structures related to employment and brokerage in the expanding sector of the development business, as in parts of contemporary Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Larger contextual changes such as these may be so gradual as hardly to affect the enduring conditions of everyday life in the short run; or they may be very dramatic, taking the form of extraordinary events that alter previous conditions rapidly and sometimes quite radically. While collective identity and identification are always relevant aspects of analysis, they are often especially evident in situations of rapid change (Hann 1994). In such situations, actors are often forced to make choices, including choices among variable aspects of collective identities, which affect alliances and enmities in struggles over access to resources, life-chances, power, and authority (Schlee 2003c).

When considering the effects of states and markets, however, it is important to avoid the common mistake of accepting the categories supplied by their authoritative representatives as adequate representations of social reality. Representatives of dominant political and economic institutions typically have a vested interest in promoting a particular view of units, their boundaries, and their contents; and, in this spirit, they typically provide those who are subject to their authority – and also external auditors – with representations containing the kinds of normative appeals that we referred to in our definition of collective identity. Furthermore, they may also have the wherewithal to enforce the norms contained in such representations, as, for example, in the state's "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force" (Weber 1946 [1919]: 78). For the social sciences, however, units of analysis must be fundamentally problematic. Categories that are provided selectively by representatives of dominant institutions must be subjected to critical scrutiny and often relativized in their significance, i.e., recognized as data in and of themselves with their own contexts, causes, and consequences.

Counteracting the unwarranted influence of dominant political or economic institutions on our perceptions of processes of identification requires a double focus on the social relations in which actors are involved and the collective identities to which they refer in perceiving those relations and pursuing their various projects through them or against them. Social relations may be understood to involve the different kinds of exchanges through which social life is constituted – exchanges of messages, goods and services, and, as we have learned from alliance theory, spouses. Such exchanges may occur within the boundaries of established institutions or they may crosscut such boundaries, as, for example, in the case of networks and social fields. Networks are egocentrically defined sets of often quite pragmatic relations, which typically crosscut established social and institutional boundaries, thereby providing further opportunities for individual and cooperative action (Barnes 1954; Mitchell 1969; Boissevain and Mitchell 1973; Leinhardt 1977; Wasserman and Faust 1994; Schweizer and White 1998; White and Johansen 2005). The term "social field" has been used to refer to "an unbounded terrain of multiple interlocking egocentric networks" (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999: 344), i.e., to interstitial but nevertheless very important contexts that are often overlooked when one focuses too myopically on dominant institutions. Rather than corresponding to the kinds of bounded units that are more to the taste of administrative authorities, networks and fields are dialectical and shifting in character. Nevertheless, taking them into account may be an indispensable step in grasping existing states of affairs and transformations induced by changing circumstances.

Finally, the empirically ascertainable facts of social relations must be supplemented with attention to the variable aspects of collective identities and processes of identification that are the subject of this paper. Collective identities, as we have defined them – representations containing or seeming to contain normative appeals to potential members of a larger category or assemblage of persons and potentially evoking more or less engaged responses – are symbolic and discursive resources that allow people to orient themselves to others, to the world around them, and to themselves in the course of fulfilling their needs and pursuing their life-projects. Thus, in the analysis of any given situation, the full range of such resources must be taken into account, for only in this way is it possible to infer which resources are relevant in understanding actors' engagement.

III. Aspects of Collective Identities: dimensions, markers, and variables

Beginning with birth, human beings are subject to processes of socialization and enculturation, which provide them with variable means for orienting themselves to one another, to the world around them, and to themselves. As these processes unfold, human beings – let us call them “actors” – are positioned within webs of socio-cultural, political, and socio-economic relations, which, without being rigidly deterministic, provide them, in various ways and to greater or lesser degrees, with opportunities for adaptation, habituation, strategic action, and so on.

Largely on the basis of social origins, one is German, not French; one is a native speaker of one language (or two or more languages) and not another; one is Protestant, not Roman Catholic, Muslim, atheistic, or agnostic; a Saxon, not a Bavarian or a Kreuzberger of Anatolian heritage; and Nowak, not Maier or Yılmaz – along with the whole range of variables determined by sex and gender, familial affiliation, heritage, and historical experience.¹¹ Even these simple examples are enough to show that identities and processes of identification are not only variable but also multiple. In various situations and under changing circumstances, actors may experience their own engagement with particular collective identities or the engagement of others differently; they may understand the relations among relevant identities differently; and they may seek actively to fill them with new contents, to merge them with others, or even to discard them for others. For these reasons, multiplicity and variability must be central to the study of collective identities. In the following, we provide a framework for thinking of multiplicity and variability in a systematic way.

Dimensions of Collective Identity

Collective identities are articulated with reference to various dimensions, including especially those most commonly understood in terms of nationality, ethnicity, race, kinship, language, religion, local or regional origins or orientations, historical experience, social class, gender, generation, and participation in social movements. These dimensions of collective identity, which are themselves complexly structured, may be combined in various ways.

It might seem, at first glance, that nationality, ethnicity, race, and kinship should be classified together as presumed descent-based identities, but a number of qualifications are necessary. While each of these categories is commonly understood in terms of the particular origins and the correspondingly distinctive character of a certain group of people, they may – with the apparent

¹¹ Not all names of people in Germany sound German. According to Wikipedia.org, Nowak and Yılmaz are, respectively, the most common family names of Polish and Turkish origin in Germany. Nowak is said to be the 157th most common name in Germany, and Yılmaz the 587th.

exception of race – also be conceived in terms of processes of becoming. Examples include assimilationist ideologies, as, for example, in the United States (Greenfeld 1992: 397–484) or among the Nuer (Hutchinson 2000; Hutchinson and Jok 2002; Feyissa forthcoming). Similarly, kinship ideologies may be based on perceptions not only of common descent but also of relatedness through interaction and exchange in everyday life (Overing 2001; Carsten 2004; Guichard and Schlee 2007). Even interactionist and assimilationist ideologies, however, may be essentialist, as is evident in ideas of the “melting pot” or the “crucible” of national experience (Cornell and Hartmann 1998: 4–7) or of shared substance acquired through shared experience (Strathern 1988; Fuest n.d.).

The choice between the terms “nationality” and “ethnicity” in describing particular collective identities is often based on political criteria and may itself be politically contentious. “Nationality” is often reserved for whole peoples organized within a state or with aspirations to statehood, while “ethnicity” is commonly used for culturally distinct and subordinated “subnational” minorities (Williams 1989: 429; Eriksen 2002: 4–13; cf. A. Cohen 1974; Greenwood 1977, 1985; R. Cohen 1978; Verdery 1993; Banks 1996; Gingrich and Banks 2001; Fenton 2003).

Like nationality, ethnicity, and kinship, race is a social construction, but it is exceptional in its strict association with biologicistic models that were formulated in Europe and then popularized globally from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century (Balibar and Wallerstein 1988; Harrison 1995; Mukhopadhyay and Moses 1997; Cornell and Hartmann 1998: 21–34; Schnapper 2001; Glick Schiller 2005). This is not to say, of course, that biologicistic conceptions of race have no analogs in ideologies of descent and relatedness in many other parts of the world (Beer 2002).

Common language is often the basis for feelings of relatedness among speakers sharing oral conventions and often also literary traditions, the contents of which may be thought to differ significantly from those of other language communities. Especially in multilingual situations – which are, after all, the norm in human life, given the multiplicity of languages and the varieties within any single language community – language and speech are often salient ways of grasping and expressing distinctions between self and other, private and public spheres, intimate and alien experiences, and parochial and cosmopolitan orientations (Fishman 1968; Giglioli 1972; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Brenneis and Macaulay 1996; Hanks 1996; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Kroskrity 2000; Holmes 2001; Bauman and Briggs 2003). Nevertheless, shared language is neither necessary nor – in and of itself – sufficient for the development of feelings of relatedness. Processes of identification may occur with reference to other dimensions of collective identity, largely independently of language and speech, so that the Herderian or Whorfian view of language as the basis for shared substance and worldview is only one possibility among others (Schlee 2001b).

Despite the origins of the term in the Western (specifically, Latin) tradition, religion is an indispensable category in comparative analysis, referring to variable conceptions of a fundamental reality beyond appearances and, equally importantly, to corresponding representations, attitudes, practices, organizational forms, and relations of authority (Lessa and Vogt 1965; Banton 1966; Lambek 2002). For the purposes of research on collective identities and processes of identification, the category of religion includes the so-called world religions, along with their many variants and subdivisions, and also the full spectrum of representations and practices that have been described as animistic, indigenous, folk, or syncretistic.

Especially in the form of “historical landscapes” that have gained a particular profile and character through their geographical peculiarities, their history of culture contact, or their integration into particular administrative systems and markets, localities and regions often serve as points of orientation in the formation of collective identities (Gollwitzer 1964; cf. Greenwood 1985; Middell 2001; Hann and Magocsi 2005). Such identities are especially relevant when larger political unions consist of heterogeneous regions or when regional communities straddle political boundaries. Locales and regions, as objects of collective identification, may, of course, correspond to ethnic, linguistic, and religious distinctions in complex ways, thus representing one aspect of compound or complex collective identities.

Collective identities based on common historical experience are often linked to other dimensions of collective identity as well, but we list them separately, because this dimension may, in some cases, be decisive. Nationalist ideologies are often framed in terms of shared history (Smith 1986), but other communities may be united by historically determined fates that do not necessarily include common origins or political union, as in the case of victims of oppression, enslavement, or genocide (Torpey 2003; Alexander et al. 2004; Fuest forthcoming). A shared history of victimization is also a possible basis for the formulation of movements aspiring to social emancipation or political union and sovereignty, in which case this dimension may blend with that of ethnicity or nationality (e.g., Genovese 1976).

When people share a position within the larger economy that imposes greater or lesser restrictions on their access to resources and opportunities, this does not necessarily result in a common orientation toward a particular collective identity, unless it is accompanied by the development of a common style of life, shared standards for the social estimation of honor, and corresponding restrictions on social intercourse (Weber 1978 [1922]: 932–938). When this is the case, however, shared self-understanding based on social class may indeed become the basis for the formation of collective identities, as, for example, in the case of the bourgeoisie and labor in Europe since the nineteenth century (e.g., Lidtke 1985; Kocka and Frevert 1988; Siegrist 2001) or even of the academic disciplines today (Becher 1989; Fuest 2006). In the most extreme cases, restrictions on social intercourse may take the form of endogamy, in which case a status group corresponding largely to a particular class situation may come to resemble a large descent group, as in case of South Asian caste (Kolenda 1978). Comparison between South Asian caste and North American racial segregation indicates that class, ethnicity or race, and also religion are often related in complicated ways (e.g., Berreman 1960; cf. Balibar and Wallerstein 1988).

Given its cultural definition and its correspondence to the division of labor and to differences in status, authority, and power, gender provides one of the most important dimensions of collective identity in everyday life (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Moore 1988; Hauser-Schäublin and Röttger-Rössler 1998). Gender is, however, also often the basis for the negotiation of collective identities in variable processes of identification spanning social or political boundaries, though its effects are often complicated through its interaction with nationality, ethnicity, class, or historical experience (Aretxaga 2001; Fuest n.d.). Either within or across gender categories, generation is also a frequently activated dimension of identification, based either on common positions within kinship systems or on common experiences during particular periods of history (Lamb 2001; Eisenstadt 2001). The significance of membership in generational cohorts is especially evident in age-grading systems in East Africa (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1940; Schlee 1989; Hutchinson 1996) but is no less important in other widely differing settings (e.g., Wierling 2002). Common experiences

during life-crisis events, which may or may not have the formal character of rites of passage, often create strong bonds or compelling obligations among members of generational cohorts.

Throughout recorded history, at least, people have often found themselves together in social movements that are oriented toward social emancipation, political reform, or cultural or religious renewal (Linton 1943; Wallace 1956; Turner 1969: 131–167; Tarrow 1994; Snow and McAdam 2000; Edelman 2001; Fuest forthcoming). Especially under conditions of crisis and rapid change, participation in such movements may be of overriding importance in the formation and mobilization of collective identities. Nevertheless, emerging organizational structures and corresponding relations of authority within social movements may result in significant degrees of internal differentiation. Participation in social movements often co-varies with dimensions of collective identity such as ethnicity, religion, historical experience, social class, gender, and generation; but it is still useful to consider social movements separately, as their aims to change the status of particular groups or to reform society as a whole often go against the grain of established institutions and social relations.

Markers of Collective Identity – Emblems and Indices

In the secondary literature, the term “marker” is often used to refer to sensory data that may serve, either intentionally or unintentionally, as signs of collective identity and affiliation (Schlee 1994; Fuest n.d.). Markers may take the form of emblems or indices. Through emblems, actors “say something” of themselves to others, whom they may perceive to be similar to or different from themselves in fundamental ways; and with reference to indices, actors draw inferences about others and their affiliations, evaluating them on the basis of observations, regardless of the conscious intentions of those whom they observe. That is, the distinction between emblems and indices of collective identity is based, ideally, on the degree of intentionality behind the marker – though, admittedly, it is not always possible to draw this distinction neatly. Common emblems, in this sense, include names, symbols, selected practices, performances or products, and various discourses and expressive genres; whereas common indices include phenotype, speech, everyday social practices, style of life, etc. Once again, the boundary between emblems and indices is fluid, as self-consciously displayed emblems may become habitual and be taken for granted, while indices may become objects of reflection and be elevated to the status of emblems.

Identity Variables

Most fundamentally, collective identities may vary in two ways: first, in their semantic relationship to other identities within a system of classification; and, second, in their significance for actors in different social situations or under changing circumstances.

When we view identities as representations in the sense defined above, it becomes evident that they rarely, perhaps never, stand alone but are usually, perhaps always, embedded in larger systems of classification. In this sense, identities are the kinds of representations that are known as classes or categories and, therefore, are subject to the forms of semantic analysis that have been developed in the cognitive and linguistic sciences.

The semantic relations among various collective identities may be inclusive or exclusive, contrasting or complementary. A relation between two identities is inclusive or exclusive when, for example, one is more general and the other more particular. Identities that refer to the same level of inclusion and exclusion in a logical structure are contrasting when the selection of one rules out the

selection of the other. Finally, two or more identities are complementary when they are not mutually exclusive, i.e., when they may occur together in various combinations.

It is possible to conceive of such relationships among identities with reference to concepts from formal semantic analysis, such as taxonomies, on one hand, and paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, on the other (Sturtevant 1964; Tyler 1969; Schlee 2008: 44–45). Taxonomies are semantic structures that illustrate the logical relations among more general (or inclusive) and more particular (or exclusive) categories. Categories such as collective identities may be situated within a taxonomic organization, built on “vertical” relations of inclusion and “horizontal” relations of contrast. Thus – to cite a very simple example for the purpose of illustration – German and French are contrasting values within the more inclusive category, European; while Saxon and Swabian are contrasting values within the more inclusive category German.

The distinction between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations becomes relevant when actors may select categories among the logical possibilities and combine them in order to realize any one of a number of practical alternatives. Thus, mutually exclusive nationalities – French, German, Polish, etc. – may be said to form a paradigm, from which (usually) only one item can be selected and, subsequently combined with an item chosen from a complementary paradigm, such as religion. Continuing with this example, one might say that national and religious categories may stand in a complementary or syntagmatic relation to one another, as in case of French Huguenots, German Muslims, or Polish Pentecostals, to cite some possible, if not necessarily stereotypical, examples.

The point of employing concepts from formal semantic analysis is not to achieve definitive classifications of relations among various terms used to designate collective identities but to reveal possible relations that may become important, depending on point of view and variable situations or circumstances. For example, the relation among the terms of hyphenated designations, such as British-Somali or Hmong-American – which proliferate under particular but quite common historical conditions (e.g., colonialism or immigration) – may be taxonomic or paradigmatic, depending on one’s point of view: “British-Somali” may be understood to be a subset of “British”; or “British” and “Somali” may be seen as equivalent values serving as two parallel points of orientation simultaneously.

In a second kind of variability, collective identities may vary in their significance for particular actors in different social situations or under variable circumstances. Identities may vary in their salience in any given social situation, in their pervasiveness across different situations, and, finally, in their stability over time, depending on changing circumstances.

An identity is salient when, in a particular situation, it provides the framework for ordering social relations and guiding behavior; and an identity is pervasive if it is salient in a wide variety of situations, perhaps even serving as a framework for social life generally (cf. Snow 2001: 2215). Often, the salience and pervasiveness of a collective identity may be assessed with reference to two related indices: the relative density of markers and the degree of practical commitment that actors display toward them. If names, symbols, practices, products, discourses, and expressive genres, but also phenotype, speech, style of life, etc., may serve as markers of collective identity, then it will sometimes be possible, at least roughly, to quantify the distinctive markers that are bundled together and so to assess their density. Of course, this bundling of markers may also be a feature of compound identities, e.g., when particular values along different dimensions of identity are combined as oft-related aspects of a larger whole. Being a Polish Catholic bureaucrat from

Warsaw, for example, may involve a whole series of markers pertaining to nationality, speech, religious practices, social class, attitudes, habits of everyday life, and so on. Depending upon other contextual information, the density of markers may be interpreted as an index of a relatively high degree of identification; or, to formulate this point more carefully, it may be interpreted as an indication of the degree of resistance that would have to be overcome by those intent upon weakening or ending their identification with particular representations.

Another index of salience and pervasiveness is the degree of commitment that actors display toward identity markers or underlying collective identities, whether in particular situations or in a variety of situations. For example, it may sometimes be possible to gauge the frequency and the regularity with which actors express association with particular markers and perhaps also their felt degree of commitment in processes of identification, e.g., through the self-conscious display of emblems, through participation in rituals or ceremonies, or through expressions of devotion and loyalty. Of course, it is probably not uncommon that expressions of commitment are made largely independently of corresponding feelings of commitment, since “expressing commitment” may be limited to providing “lip service” or “going through the motions.” Often, however, regular and frequent expressions of commitment will be coupled with corresponding subjective attitudes, which are positive and affirmative. At any rate, the degree of commitment is an important factor in assessing whether or not an identity can, under changing circumstances, be significantly altered or discarded for opportunistic reasons. A high degree of habitual commitment may present serious obstacles to alteration, while a low degree of commitment may allow for easier transition from one identity to another.

Taken together, salience and pervasiveness – along with indices such as the relative density of markers and the expressed degree of commitment to markers – may provide a measure for the “stickiness” of collective identities (Banton 1965; Stone 1966), for the degree to which they are “experience-near” or “experience-distant” (Geertz 1974: 28), or for their “thickness” or “thinness” (Cornell and Hartmann 1998: 73–85). With reference to these and similar dichotomies, it is possible to imagine two poles within a larger field of variants, namely, collective identities that are characterized either by very high or by very low degrees of salience and pervasiveness. Of course, under changing circumstances over time, the position of collective identities between these two poles may shift.

Assuming that the existence of identities is dependent upon processes of reproduction, and considering that reproduction, even in the absence of the intention to introduce change, always introduces change to some degree (as, for example, in the inevitable changes that are always introduced into languages diachronically), it is often still possible to differentiate among identities that are more or less stable over time. Stability depends, first, on the combined effects of the variables just discussed and, second, on a whole series of contextual factors. Gradual or rapid change in the social, cultural, and historical parameters – caused, for example, by processes of state-building and bureaucratization, colonization, the emergence of or integration into a market economy, industrialization, economic recession or depression, warfare, forced expulsion, migration, etc. – inevitably introduce varying degrees of instability, which subsequently may have direct or indirect effects on collective identities and processes of identification.

The interdependence of the two kinds of identity variables – the semantic relations among different identities and the varying significance of identities for actors in different situations or under changing circumstances – may be illustrated very briefly with reference to possible relations

between national and ethnic identities, as they may be understood by actors or analysts under particular political conditions. We give here only a very few among the many possible examples, but they should serve to illustrate the point that the variables that we have distinguished for analytical purposes are actually co-variants, which must be considered in their interdependence.

Nationality and ethnicity may stand in a taxonomic relation of inclusion, for example, when the category British is understood to encompass the categories English, Scottish, Welsh, British-South Asian, British-Caribbean, British-Somali, etc. If, however, people who identify with the subordinate categories reject such taxonomic inclusion, as in the case of some Scottish nationalists, the taxonomy disintegrates into a paradigmatic set of mutually exclusive terms, at least from some points of view. Of course, such attitudes towards classifications may vary not only from one actor to another but for any one actor, depending on the definition of the situation and the particular circumstances.

For members of the first generation of immigrants to a multiethnic society such as the United States, their previous nationality or region of origin may become, when viewed in the American context, the ethnic identity of a minority, but one with high degrees of salience and pervasiveness. Under such conditions, the new national identity may be salient only in situations that are defined by the state (e.g., taxation, education, military service, voting rights, etc.), that is, limited in its pervasiveness to the legal status of citizenship. In the unstable situation of immigration, however, stability may be largely restricted to the experience of members of particular generations, since by the second or third generation the relevant relationships often will have changed. But the outcomes of this alteration may vary widely. In cases of assimilation, members of later generations retain only a few markers of ethnic identity, which largely lack pervasiveness and are salient only under particular circumstances, for example during family events involving multiple generations or in the context of religious practices – though, as Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1963) showed in their pioneering study, distinct ethnic identities may still persist, largely in the absence of the set of markers previously associated with them. Often, however, descendants of immigrants resist assimilation, at least to a degree, achieving simultaneous incorporation in the context of complex transnational interconnections between their place of origin and their place of immigration (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Glick Schiller 2005; Nieswand 2007, 2008). The semantic relations among the identity variables that are current in such situations are never rigidly determined but vary with changing situations, circumstances, and points of view. Nevertheless, in the analysis of any given case study, it is important to be aware of possible semantic relations in order to be able to recognize those instances in which they are activated.

IV. Perspectives on Processes of Identification

Following our preliminary statement on the contexts of human behavior and our outline of the variable aspects of collective identities, we now move to the final step in this presentation of our framework, namely, an overview of various processes of identification. We apply the term “processes of identification” very generally to the combined effects of the behavior of multiple actors for whom particular collective identities have provided a greater or lesser degree of orientation. It is possible to distinguish many different kinds of processes but impractical to attempt to list them systematically. Such processes may be discovered at various levels of social organization and, depending on the questions that researchers are attempting to answer, may be

discussed very generally or broken down into more specific aspects or components. Therefore, we introduce a series of purely descriptive terms, which are only vaguely evocative before being explicated in the context of particular analyses. To aid the reader in recognizing these processes of identification in the course of our discussion, we italicize each term when it is introduced.

To bring the significance of various processes of identification into focus, we consider them under the heading of key concepts corresponding to distinct approaches in twentieth and early twenty-first century anthropology and social science. These concepts or sets of concepts include (1) structure and function, culture and meaning, (2) practice and power, and (3) choice. The first set of concepts corresponds to approaches concerned with social or cultural systems considered more or less as integrated wholes; the third concept involves a focus on the self-interested action of individuals who calculate the costs and benefits of alternative ways of using resources in achieving goals; and the second set of concepts is associated with various attempts to mediate the opposition between approaches taking either integrated systems or self-interested individuals as their point of departure. As shall be seen, the three approaches have different implications for the analysis of the variable aspects of collective identities that were outlined in the previous section: in the first approach, identities generally are assumed to be relatively stable within designated units of analysis – for example, within particular societies or cultures – but to vary from one such unit to another; in the second approach, there is a greater emphasis on the ambivalence of identity variables in everyday life, on their malleability depending on variable circumstances, and on their susceptibility to inequalities in the distribution of power; and in the third approach, the determination of variable aspects of collective identities is problematized to the most extreme degree, as actors are assumed – at least sometimes and under some conditions – to have some leeway in selecting and combining identity variables according to their needs or wants.

Structure and Function, Culture and Meaning

The concepts listed in the subtitle of this section are meant to evoke the approaches and contributions of the social and cultural anthropologists of the early and mid-twentieth century. Although functionalism, structuralism, and various strains of cultural anthropology – especially symbolic anthropology and its precursors – are now supposed to have been largely superseded, it is clear that even their harshest critics still accept many aspects of them, though often only implicitly. Therefore, we still need to rehearse the contributions that earlier social and cultural anthropologists made to the study of collective identities and processes of identification – whether or not they employed these terms – before considering the implications of more recent developments in the social sciences. The point is not to engage in disciplinary history for its own sake but to avoid the unwarranted narrowing of our perspective on collective identities and processes of identification that characterizes much of the current literature (e.g., Handler 1994; Cerulo 1997; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Niethammer 2000).

In the version of disciplinary history that has become a commonplace over the course of the last quarter century, earlier social and cultural anthropologists are faulted for a whole series of errors: reifying “societies” and “cultures,” taking the fixity of social and cultural boundaries for granted, assuming that societies and cultures are internally consistent and social life largely consensual, viewing social action as the enactment of clear-cut cultural rules, and emphasizing the reproduction of social and cultural systems over processes of social and cultural change (e.g., Marcus and Cushman 1982; Wolf 1982: 3–19; Ortner 1984; Vincent 1986, 1991; Moore 1999). Two points

must be made in response to this critique. First, it is a caricature, which exaggerates some aspects of earlier anthropological research, while ignoring others. Second, it is possible to learn valuable lessons on the basis of assumptions that are untenable as general principles but useful heuristically for the investigation of some questions. We address these points briefly in reverse order.

Some of the tendencies that are criticized in the currently dominant version of disciplinary history may indeed be found in the works of Émile Durkheim, who was most concerned to explain how human beings, who might otherwise amount to nothing more than a disorganized mass, gain a conception of themselves as members of a larger collectivity. In his treatise on religion, Durkheim (1965 [1912]) concluded that this is accomplished through the periodic *representation* and *affirmation* of shared emblems, shared ideals, shared goals, and complementary roles and practices. This basic model was adopted by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and, in his early works, by Bronislaw Malinowski as they attempted in different ways to establish social anthropology as a science of society understood as a synchronic system (Kuper 1996: 62–63; Barth 2005). Through analyses of exchange relations (Malinowski 1922) or of kinship structures (Radcliffe-Brown 1952), to cite two representative research foci, these founding figures placed their emphasis squarely on the *establishment* and *maintenance* of social relations and, hence, of society in a particular form – although Malinowski also emphasized individual maneuvering within the established framework. In extending this style of analysis to the constituent elements of “primitive” societies, such as the avunculate, descent groups, or kingship, their students often displayed a keen awareness of oppositions, contradictions, and conflicts at the base of social life – e.g., in processes they referred to as *schismogenesis* (Bateson 1936), *group-fission* and *fusion* under conditions of segmentary opposition (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Fortes 1949), or *rituals of rebellion* (Gluckman 1954) – while still coming up with ingenious interpretations of how such oppositions, contradictions, and conflicts contributed to the maintenance or reestablishment of social equilibrium.

Edmund Leach pushed functionalism to its limit and beyond in his analysis of the ways in which members of Kachin communities of highland Burma oscillated “between two polar types” (Leach 1965 [1954]: 9) of social system, one decentralized and democratic and the other centralized and autocratic, thus engaging in a process that Georg Elwert (2002) would later call *identity switching* (see Kuper 1996: 149–152). Indeed, the students of Edmund Leach and Max Gluckman, including J.A. Barnes (1954), F.G. Bailey (1969), and Fredrik Barth (1969a, 1969b), followed their teachers so far in emphasizing individual strategies in struggles for power or resources that they departed from functionalism and structural functionalism, developing approaches that fit better in the section of this paper on rational choice (Kuper 1996: 135–158).

On the other side of the Atlantic, also in the early twentieth century, Franz Boas and his students, despite the many influences and emphases separating them from their British colleagues, were also concerned with identifying the institutions, practices, and ceremonies that contributed to the reproduction of the way of life that was typical of a particular culture. Thus, Franz Boas (1966: 77–104) and Ruth Benedict (1959 [1934]: 173–222) depicted the potlatch among the Kwakiutl as a performance involving the *dramatization* of central values, such as wealth, magnanimity, and status; while Robert Lowie (1935) showed that counting coup among the Crow served as a *demonstrative reiteration*, even a *stylized exaggeration* of values such as charisma and bravado, which were consistent with the life-situation, organizational forms, and practices of Plains Indian culture. In neither of these cases – in contrast to the Pueblos of the North American Southwest, Benedict (1959 [1934]: 57–129) argued – did consensus regarding central values and defining

practices imply an atmosphere of social harmony; on the contrary, in the Plains and on the Northwest Coast rivals strove to gain advantages by embodying shared ideals to the highest possible degree. The corresponding process of identification might be referred to as the *agonistic heightening* of the characteristic features of collective identity (cf. Mauss 1997 [1923-1924]: 153).

Ethnographic accounts and ethnohistorical reconstructions of the social and cultural anthropologists of the first half of the twentieth century were not always historically situated in a way or to the degree that would satisfy today's standards. Nevertheless, they displayed an awareness of – even a focus on – the relativity of social and cultural boundaries, as, for example, in Malinowski's (1922) analysis of the functions of *kula* in the context of intertribal relations, in the Boasian concern with the diffusion of traits among neighboring communities within a larger region and with resulting processes of *contact metamorphosis* (Lowie 1937: 188), in Benedict's (1959 [1934]), Kroeber's (1939), and Steward's (1955) demonstrations of the *reinterpretation* of previously shared cultural traits in processes of adaptation to different natural environments and levels of socio-cultural integration, and in Evans-Pritchard's (1940) apperception of the situational and circumstantial nature of group definitions and affiliations in segmentary societies.

In American cultural anthropology, the tendency to reify the unit of analysis seems to have been intensified with the near abandonment of the initially historicist orientation of most Boasians in favor of an emphasis on the relationship between culture and personality, as in the work of Margaret Mead (e.g., 1935). She was perhaps the foremost representative of the view that humanity is divided into different cultures, each of which is sustained in a particular form through processes of *enculturation* working with the essentially plastic stuff of humanity in making one kind of human as opposed to another.

Durkheim was one of those seminal figures whose published works displayed complexities that allowed subsequent scholars to develop his ideas in different directions (R. Murphy 1980: 170; Boon 1982: 54–88). Thus, while British functionalists and structural functionalists, in their focus on units such as societies, lineages, and corporate groups, emphasized one aspect of Durkheim's larger program, French structuralists chose instead to follow the countervailing, though equally Durkheimian inclination to view isolable units as precipitates within broader systems of differences.¹² Following this cue, and also echoing Lowie's notion of contact metamorphosis, Claude Lévi-Strauss (e.g., 1962: 100–143) suggested that distributions of similar but distinguishable cultural traits among populations within larger regions reflect processes of *delimitation*, whereby actors select, modify, and recombine variables in order to define themselves in contradistinction to others – though possibly only with the intent or the result of allowing themselves to reestablish relations with those same others on the basis of complementary differences.

We close this section with reference to two anthropologists whose contributions to the study of collective identities and processes of identification span the gap between the mid- and late twentieth century: Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz. Exploring themes that he shared with Gluckman and other members of the Manchester School, Turner (1957) applied the three-stage model of processual analysis (separation, margin, aggregation) that Arnold van Gennep (1909) had introduced in his study of rites of passage to the analysis of kin relations, political competition, and

¹² The primary example of Durkheim's treatment of isolable units as precipitates within a broader system of differences is his analysis of the crosscutting affiliations of aboriginal Australians with local groups and regionally dispersed clans (Durkheim 1965 [1912]: 126–128, 245–251; cf. Boon 1982: 59–62).

village fissioning among the Ndembu of Central Africa. Subsequently, he turned to a general exploration of phenomena corresponding to the marginal or liminal phase in van Gennep's model (Turner 1967, 1969, 1975, 1982). With the term "liminality," Turner referred to constitutive but often latent aspects of social life which both contradict and complement the values informing dominant institutions and which come to the fore only under special conditions: e.g., during rites of passage, in conventions pertaining to agnatic ties in societies based largely on matrilineal principles or to uterine ties in societies based largely on patrilineal principles, in dramatic performances, during pilgrimages, or in religious or political movements. In essays on these various topics, Turner suggested that sensitivity to the *suspension* or *inversion* of established norms and values under conditions of liminality allows for a broader view of societies than is possible in studies focused exclusively on corporate groups or political institutions – and that this broader view reveals the bases of an often overlooked endogenous potential for social change.¹³

Clifford Geertz (e.g., 1960, 1973) returned to themes championed by Benedict but stripped them of the psychoanalytic trappings that they had acquired during the heyday of "culture and personality" studies and reformulated them in terms of the Parsonian synthesis of Durkheim and Weber, emphasizing the ways in which cultural systems provide orientation for social action. Moreover, his research was situated not in the "primitive" world but in the postcolonial societies of the newly independent states of Asia and Africa. Here he examined the politicization of processes of collective identification, especially in terms of dilemmas arising from the need to determine "the content, relative weight, and the proper relationship of two rather towering abstractions: 'The Indigenous Way of Life' and 'The Spirit of the Age'" (Geertz 1973 [1971]: 240). In this context, he introduced the oppositions between "primordial sentiments" and "civil politics" (Geertz 1973 [1963]: 255–310) and between "essentialism" and "epochalism" (Geertz 1973 [1971]: 243–249). In new forms of self-understanding and in new formulas for political rhetoric in the postcolonial states, "primordial sentiments" or "essentialism" were expressions of a process that Geertz (1973 [1964]: 219, footnote 42)¹⁴ called *ideological retraditionalization* – two decades before the publication of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Rangers' *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). Thus, he provided a precedent for more recent studies of the politics of meaning (e.g., Eidson 1993), recognition (e.g., Taylor 1994; Eidson 2006), and difference (Wilmsen and McAllister 1996; Horstmann and Schlee 2001).

In sum, through analyses of processes of identification such as the representation, affirmation, dramatization, enculturation, delimitation, inversion, and "ideological retraditionalization" of collective identities, the social and cultural anthropologists of the early and mid-twentieth century contributed to our understanding of how collectivities are established and maintained – but also of how they are contested and transformed. With regard to the general problem of social or cultural difference, they often placed greatest emphasis on variability *between* their favored units of analyses, e.g., societies or cultures; not infrequently, however, they also pointed to the variability of

¹³ Turner's variety of processual analysis has been applied to political or juridical conflicts (Turner 1957; Moore and Myerhoff 1975; Moore 1987), ritual and drama (Turner 1967, 1969, 1982; Schechner 1985), social movements and pilgrimages (Turner 1969, 1975), and environmental crises (Vayda and McCay 1975; Lees 1983; Vayda 1983; Lees and Bates 1990; Vayda, McCay, and Eghenter 1991).

¹⁴ The cited articles by Clifford Geertz were republished in 1973, as part of a collection of selected essays entitled *The Interpretation of Cultures*. They were first published in the following volumes: *The Integrative Revolution: primordial sentiments and civil politics in the New States* (1963) in: Clifford Geertz (ed.). *Old Societies and New States*. New York: The Free Press, pp. 105–157; *Ideology as a Cultural System* (1964) in: David Apter (ed.). *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: The Free Press, pp. 47–56; *After the Revolution: the fate of nationalism in the New States* (1971) in: Bernard Barber and Alex Inkeles (eds.). *Stability and Social Change*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, pp. 357–376.

institutions, beliefs, and practices *within* such units and explored the significance of such variability for our understanding of social dynamics. Both in the ways in which they seem to have conformed to the stereotypical critique of them and in the ways in which they do not, they laid the groundwork for the developments discussed in the next section.

From Practice to Power

The major shift that has occurred in social and anthropological theory “since the sixties” (Ortner 1984) is based on the critique of functionalist, structuralist, and cultural anthropological approaches from two sometimes interrelated points of view: first, from the perspective of writers such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Anthony Giddens, drawing in different ways on phenomenology, existentialism, and some varieties of *Lebensphilosophie*; and, second, from the perspective of more self-consciously Marxian scholars, including the structural Marxists (especially, Louis Althusser, Maurice Godelier, and Emmanuel Terray) and those intent upon examining connections between culture and political economy (e.g., Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, and others).

The new emphasis in social and anthropological theory fell, first, on practice – or on roughly equivalent concepts such as agency – and, second, on power. The concept of practice served as a gloss for a shift away from essentializing uses of the concepts of society, structure, and culture toward an approach emphasizing the tacit, habitual, circumstantial, and indeterminate character of human activities, social relations, and corresponding meanings (Kemper 2001). Viewed as practice, human life now appeared to be fundamentally ambivalent and, therefore, refractory in the face of attempts to impose facile classifications on it; it was seen to consist in often overlooked possibilities for often unexpected transformations. The concept of power, on the other hand, signaled a shift in emphasis from the apparent self-evidence of classifications favored by scholars, among others, to the essentially contested nature of social relations and corresponding classifications among the people under investigation – especially with reference to the implications of alternative classifications for the distribution of resources, life-chances, and power itself. In the words of Eric Wolf (1990: 593), “Power is implicated in meaning through its role in upholding one version of significance as true, fruitful, or beautiful, against other possibilities.” He is saying, of course, that the versions upheld by the powerful serve the purpose of maintaining their dominant position *vis-à-vis* the less powerful or the powerless – and this is the functionalist remnant in the critique of functionalism, a remnant which tilts simultaneously in the direction of utilitarian models of maximization (Sahlins 1976). Power, as conceived by the theorists in question, may be exercised directly or indirectly, though always more or less systematically. Concepts such as ideology (Marx), cultural hegemony (Gramsci), and discourse (Foucault), while by no means equivalent, are similar insofar as they direct our attention to ways in which power is exerted indirectly, e.g., through the classificatory, emotive-exhortative, or disciplinary practices of actors in various institutional contexts, including those which are not overtly political (cf. Burke 1950; Geertz 1973 [1964]; Lears 1985; Walzer 1988: 191–209).

In the literature on practice and power since the 1960s, there is often a marked tendency to contrast these two concepts in a way that becomes evident when considering their relation to representations, including collective identities. Practice is often conceived rightly to be largely unreflective but wrongly – in our view at least – to be somehow pre-representational, i.e., logically or actually anterior to, distinct from, and more authentic than representations; while power is usually thought to entail not only the threat of physical violence but also the manipulation of

representations in ways that benefit the powerful.¹⁵ From this perspective, representations seem to be the result of a kind of “fall from grace,” while the supposedly pre-representational realm of practice becomes a screen onto which nearly utopian assumptions can be projected. Such assumptions, whether implicit or explicit, are at the base of the widespread idea that categorization necessarily does violence to the fluid nature of human practice, and they also seem to have inspired the objections that some scholars have to the concept of identity. We suggest, however, that it is precisely this aspect of the literature on practice and power that requires critical reexamination. One does not have to subscribe to Whorfian notions – and we do not – to see that representations, minimally in the form of the unconscious categories of language, are always already present among the preconditions of practice. Thus, all practice necessarily occurs with direct or indirect reference to variable representations – including identities – which provide members of the species *Homo sapiens* with indispensable, if ambivalent, resources for coming to terms with others, their environment, and themselves. The lasting value of the concept of practice, we suggest, lies not in misconceptions of the role of representations in human life but in helping us to guard against essentialized views of society, social structure, or culture by reintroducing sensitivity to heterogeneity and ambivalence and thus allowing for the rediscovery of the very real, though not unlimited, potential for transformation in most social constellations.

Nevertheless, it is still necessary to conceive of relations between practice and power as being both continuous and discontinuous. This relation is continuous, insofar as practice necessarily involves the exercise of power, if usually on a very modest scale. Giddens has articulated this link in his reflections on agency, which, in this context at least, may be treated as a synonym of practice (I. Cohen 2006). Agency, in Giddens’ (1986: 9) definition, “refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capacity of doing those things in the first place.” It is because of this “capacity of doing things” that “agency implies power” – an interpretation that is consistent with the definition of an “agent” as “one who exerts power or produces an effect” (Giddens 1986: 9, quoting from the Oxford English Dictionary). Thus, “agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could (...) have acted differently. What happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened” (Giddens 1986: 9).

If, however, agency – or, by extension, practice – necessarily implies the exercise of power, then it must also be said to be especially sensitive to differences in degrees and forms of power as these are distributed over various actors and institutions. That is to say, the relation between everyday practice and established political or economic power is discontinuous, insofar as different quantities of power often correspond to different qualities of power, e.g., personal forms of power, on one hand, and structural forms of power, on the other (Giddens 1986: 15; cf. Wolf 1990). This is why, in the approaches under discussion, key terms often come in pairs, which are often described as having a dialectical relationship to one another, e.g., agency and structure or practice and power; or they are replaced with terms that are meant to mediate this gap, as in Bourdieu’s use of habitus to designate “the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations” (Bourdieu 1977: 78).

¹⁵ While it is difficult to give a precise citation to demonstrate the first point, both Foucault (e.g., 1980) and Bourdieu (e.g., 1990) seem to go further than we do in footnote 3 – where we say that representation is necessarily selective and therefore skewed in its relation to its fundamentally ambiguous referent – in suggesting that representation is always also distorting misrepresentation. The second point is also consistent with much of what these two authors, and others who have been inspired by them, have published – though Foucault himself refrains from identifying any specific group of beneficiaries – and it is made explicit in Bourdieu’s (1990: 127) notions of “symbolic” or “gentle” violence. For a critique of this aspect of the poststructuralist literature that is formulated in terms that are similar to ours, see Ortner 1995.

What are the implications of these approaches for the analysis of collective identities in processes of identification? Concepts such as practice, agency, habitus, and power lead us to emphasize the heterogeneity and ambivalence of collective identities, which, in turn, allow contrasting values to come into focus, depending on variable circumstances and behaviors. These variables stretch between largely tacit practices of *reproduction* in everyday life and overtly strategic practices of *domination*.

Here we cite only a few examples of corresponding processes of identification with reference especially to language and ethnicity. For actors, everyday practices are largely unreflective but may also become objects of reflection, serving as indices or emblems of collective identities; and they may be subject to unofficial norms or official policies, which help to establish authoritative frameworks within which practices are reproduced. Thus, such practices may be analyzed from various perspectives, e.g., by focusing on actors and their unconscious or semi-conscious habits and maneuvers or on policies, their underlying intentions, their implementation, and their unintended consequences.

Studies of speech behavior in everyday life show that practice always leads to alteration, if at differing rates and to differing degrees, depending on contextual factors contributing to greater or lesser stability. Even in the limiting case when speakers simply reproduce their language, the result is alteration, as a comparison of literary documents written in a “single” language over several centuries attests – an effect which Edward Sapir (1949 [1921]: 147–170) called “drift.” Thus, speech fulfills the criteria in the definitions of practice and agency given above, insofar as its observable effect, though unintentional, would not have been achieved if individuals following their own agendas had acted differently. As has been demonstrated in much sociolinguistic research, however, what seems from a macrosociological perspective to be *alteration through reproduction* may often be shown, from a microsociological perspective, to be *alteration through distinction* – related to what we called delimitation in the previous section. One classic example is William Labov’s (1972) research on language change on the island of Martha’s Vineyard, where, in the course of his investigation, the “Yankee” dialect of Anglo-Saxon fishing families could be shown, through a process that he calls *hypercorrection*, to be becoming more distinct from the English of descendants of Portuguese immigrants, of affluent summer vacationers, and even of those children of “Yankee” families who saw their own future on the mainland (cf. our comments on stylized exaggeration with reference to Lowie above).

The significance of power relations for collective identities may be illustrated with reference to processes of assignation and evaluation. With *assignation*, we mean the ways in which individuals or groups become linked – either in their own view or in the views of others – with particular collective identities, e.g., as perceived members of language communities, ethnic groups, or social classes; and with *evaluation*, we mean the ways in which particular identities are assigned relative values, for example, as prestigious or stigmatized identities. Language varieties that are understood to be characteristic of particular regions may be positively evaluated by people who identify with the regions in question but negatively evaluated by outsiders – for example, by those who understand themselves to be speakers and advocates of a standard language from which regional varieties are said to deviate. Through official language policies or through the combined effect of legislation pertaining to citizenship, education, voting rights, etc., agents of the state may contribute to the valorization of some language varieties and the stigmatization others (e.g., Conklin and Lourie 1983: 225–260). But such official evaluations often correspond to language attitudes or

ideologies that have emerged over time in situations characterized by both inequality and regional, ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences (Fishman 1968; Fishman, Ferguson, and Das Gupta 1968; Giglioli 1972; Labov 1972; Ferguson and Heath 1981; Conklin and Lourie 1983; Silverstein 1996; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Bauman and Briggs 2003).

In recent decades, much attention has been given to *official categorization*, i.e., the imposition on subject populations of collective identities that have specifically defined values within a larger system of classification. Examples include the imposition of ethnic identities by governmental agencies, e.g., through census categories, which serve subsequently as criteria for inclusion and exclusion or for the delimitation of rights and entitlements (Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Cohn 1987; Kertzer and Arel 2002; Donahoe et al. 2008; Donahoe 2009). In other well known examples, whole traditions of scholarship have been subject to critical reevaluation for having engaged systematically in comparable forms of categorization (see Berkhofer 1978; Said 1978; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Wolff 1994). As the authors just cited suggest, responses to such impositions may take the form of *accommodation*, *resistance*, or some combination thereof – when, for example, people sharing feelings of belonging together either overtly or covertly accept external impositions, reject them, or produce new syntheses combining aspects of them with endogenous or other elements.

The discussion in the preceding paragraphs is based largely on the assumption that it is possible to distinguish clearly between assignation or categorization by oneself or by others and evaluation according to endogenous or exogenous criteria. Once this distinction is made, however, it must be qualified immediately; for – as we have argued all along – the relativity of social boundaries, the plurality of available identities, and the variability of relations of power and authority render simple distinctions between “us” and “them” or an “in-group” and “out-group” problematic.

Our methodological point of departure, outlined in part II of this paper, suggests that ambiguous cases occupying an intermediary position between the acceptance of exogenous categories and the assertion of endogenous ones represent the norm in actual processes of identification. Thus, the insights that anthropologists have gained into synthetic collective identities through research in colonial or postcolonial settings – conceived, over the course of the twentieth century, in terms of syncretism (Herskovits 1937), nativism (Linton 1943), revitalization (Wallace 1956), great and little traditions (Redfield and Singer 1954), the politics of meaning, difference, or recognition (e.g., Geertz 1973; Taylor 1994; Wilmsen and McAllister 1996; Horstmann and Schlee 2001), marginality (Tsing 1993), and, most recently, cultural citizenship (Ong 1996; Rosaldo 2003) – acquire a more general significance. Situations involving an apparent combination of domination, accommodation, and resistance are perhaps best described in terms of *appropriation*, i.e., the simultaneous adoption and alteration of identity variables by those experiencing repression – either in fact or in their own self-understanding – for the purpose both of satisfying their own requirements and inducing or forcing acceptance by others, especially by authorities or power-holders.¹⁶

¹⁶ An example cited by Linton (1943: 231–232) – namely, Gaelic, the stigmatized language of a conquered people, which was transformed into a symbol of national revival – has lost nothing of its relevance. See Zenker (2006, 2008, forthcoming) on the Gaelic revival in West Belfast.

Choice

Finally, we turn to processes of identification that can be analyzed in terms of choice, a concept derived from microeconomics and corresponding to what Weber (1978 [1922]: 24–26) called the instrumental rationality of actors who calculate costs and benefits in allocating available means among alternative ends with the goal of maximizing benefits (see also Elster 1986; Hechter 1986; Cook and Levi 1990; Banton 1994; Friedman 1996; Boudon 2003). Actors who behave in this way are typically assumed to be motivated by self-interest, but it is important to specify what is meant by this term. We conceive of “self-interest” as a gloss for motivations underlying actions carried out for a restricted circle of beneficiaries, minimally the single individual but probably more often a family, faction, or interest group. If the circle of beneficiaries is extended to include the community as a whole, however this might be defined, the distinction between self-interest and altruism – or between instrumental and value-based rationality – vanishes. Nevertheless, the distinction retains its validity, insofar as, for any action, the definition of the circle of beneficiaries will usually seem to be restricted and, hence, exclusive from some points of view. The key to identifying behavior that is “self-interested” is, in other words, the position of the observer with respect to the distinction between the beneficiaries of the observed actor’s choices and those others who are treated as mere instruments in producing benefits which they do not themselves enjoy – in short, between people who may be understood as the “ends” and “means” of choices based on instrumental rationality.¹⁷

An approach based on choice lends itself to the analysis of strategic action in settings characterized by multiple collective identities that provide alternative objects of identification, because in such settings actors sometimes may achieve desired ends by manipulating the identity variables outlined above. The research objective is, then, to understand how and why actors choose some identities and not others (see Leach 1965 [1954]; Barth 1969a, 1969b; A. Cohen 1969, 1974). In analyzing empirical data, it is often necessary to distinguish between choices that affect processes of identification indirectly and choices that involve the intentional manipulation of identity variables for the purpose of achieving particular ends. Due to limitations of space, we will focus on the latter, although this involves considerable oversimplification.

In all attempts to understand behavior in terms of calculations of costs and benefits with reference to means/ends ratios, the question of the validity of the assumption of rationality on the part of actors must be raised. It would seem to be indisputable that some people behave rationally in some situations some of the time. The question is, under what conditions and to what degree are we justified in extending this model from situations in which it definitely applies to those in which it might apply? Our answer to this question is threefold. First, in research on collective identities and processes of identification, the assumption of rationality is often demonstrably valid for those actors who might be referred to as identity entrepreneurs, about whom we say more below; second, it is evidently valid for many actors beyond this narrowly defined group under special

¹⁷ Rick Wilk (1996: 146–153) has relativized the distinction between self-interest and altruism in a way that is consistent with our approach. Reflecting critically on these concepts, he concludes that they are not diametrical opposites but extreme values in a “social-temporal grid” defined by two axes: time and the social scale. “On the time scale,” he notes, “immediate self-interest, the satisfaction of a need or desire felt at the moment of decision, is at one end of a range of possible self-interests. A person can also be interested in maximizing long-term self-interest, thinking about needs and desires for next week, next year, or a distant retirement. The time scale extends beyond the individual life span into the infinite future because people often take what will happen to them after death into account (...) Behavior that is motivated by this infinite time scale is often considered ‘altruistic’ or ‘moral’” (Wilk 1996: 147–148). Wilk continues by observing that “the social scale is roughly a measure of the size of the group that a person includes when maximizing, beginning with the self and leading to the infinite, to all humans on the planet. In between are social dyads like friendship, the household, the family network, then on to larger groups like church, community, and nation” (Wilk 1996: 149).

circumstances; and, third, the assumption of rationality may sometimes be useful as a heuristic device. In terms of the framework outlined in this paper, the advantage of a “choice” approach is that it allows for the most explicit analysis of operations with regard to the variables of collective identities, as sketched in section III.

Especially in contexts characterized by social and cultural pluralism, where political decisions are conditioned by and have effects on collective identities, leading political actors, whatever else their roles entail, are often also identity entrepreneurs.¹⁸ This term refers to those actors who, with greater or lesser degrees of virtuosity, are able to manipulate identity variables in order to influence both the behavior of others and the distribution of benefits among them (Schlee 2008: 29, 54). As employed by identity entrepreneurs, the rhetoric of naturalization, which makes constructed identities seem to be primordial, is often a means of concealing strategic, manipulative, and political dimensions of identities; but strategic dimensions of identities may go hand in hand with naïve acceptance of the variables being manipulated, even on the part of identity entrepreneurs themselves.¹⁹

Sometimes, it may be possible to demonstrate that the assumption of rationality is valid not only for identity entrepreneurs but for various people, either in special situations of everyday life or in cases of crisis, conflict, and rapid change, when choosing among identity variables becomes unavoidable and the consequences of various choices become obvious. Even more generally, however, the assumption of rationality may be a good predictor of behavior, even when it does not provide an adequate model of actors’ motivations – provided that people’s behavior is viewed against the backdrop of actual conditions and life chances under particular social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances. This is so, not because actors always make complicated calculations, but because, in a sense alluded to in our comments on the concept of practice, behaviors that are known to bring about desired results often have become habituated (Esser 1990, 1991; Gigerenzer 2002). Thus, an emphasis on choice is not necessarily based on the assumption that variables always rise to consciousness or that calculations are explicitly rational.

We turn now directly to a discussion of choice within processes of identification. With reference to the variables outlined in section III, it is possible to conceive of a simple formula, having several conceivable permutations. The basic formula is as follows: *The actor chooses an identity variable in order to appeal to auditors and to induce a response from them, which is then instrumental in achieving a desired result for an intended group of beneficiaries.* Within this formula, there are at least six variables, for each of which alternative values may be substituted, largely independently of each other. These variables include: the actor; the identity variable or variables, as they are defined in section III of this paper; the auditors, i.e., those who register and evaluate the alteration of the identity variables, which is intended to impress them in one way or another; the response which actors hope to elicit from auditors; the results that actors hope to achieve through their actions; and, finally, the people who are the intended beneficiaries of the action. Of course, it is possible to specify other variables as well, such as the actual responses, as opposed to desired responses, and

¹⁸ Presumably, the term identity entrepreneur is derived ultimately from Weber’s (1946 [1919]: 109–110) discussion of political entrepreneurs; cf. Brubaker and Cooper’s use of the terms “political entrepreneurs” (2000: 4) and “identitarian entrepreneurs” (2000: 27).

¹⁹ For example, leaders of the women’s peace movement in Liberia have combined international feminist discourse with essentializing notions of women as natural peacemakers to mobilize other women for collective action. At the same time, these stereotypes constitute important dimensions of their personal female identities (Fuest n.d.).

the actual results, as opposed to desired results; but this complication, though of central importance in any given analysis, is set aside here for purposes of general exposition.

Employing this formula, it is possible to conceive of a “sliding scale” extending from a Durkheimian conception of social solidarity, on one hand, to the most egoistic forms of self-interested exploitation, on the other. For example, an actor – say, a recognized or would-be community leader – may contribute to the *reiteration* of established markers of identity and corresponding definitions in order to renew or strengthen the degree of commitment among members of the community for the purpose of enhancing solidarity, presumably for the benefit of all members equally. Or, to deviate only somewhat from this Durkheimian archetype, the actor may opt for *selection* of particular markers or definitions, which are not the only possible ones but which are the ones best suited for a particular purpose, say, the *mobilization* of community members in the face of danger – again, to derive benefits for the community as a whole.

With these two scenarios, which correspond largely to the basic principles of structural functionalist analysis, the permutations of the formula given in the preceding paragraph have only begun. Assuming, for the moment, that leaders, acting as identity entrepreneurs, are attempting to affect choices made by others within their own (actual or potential) community, it might be that different leaders or even different types of leaders are in competition or conflict with one another. In the course of such competition or conflict, leaders may draw on similar or widely differing identity variables. They may appeal to various auditors, i.e., to members of variously conceived in-groups or out-groups, which are reconstituted by redrawing the boundaries between “in” and “out.” The intended beneficiaries may be the members of a given in-group, considered as a whole; or they may include only the members of an even more restricted group, e.g., a more narrowly defined community or just the actor and members of his or her family or faction – whether or not this restriction of the circle of beneficiaries is publicly acknowledged. That is, there may be a difference between the ostensibly and actually intended beneficiaries of any given manipulation of identity variables. And so on.

Given limitations of space in this necessarily cursory outline of our topic, it is not possible to provide examples for every conceivable permutation of the six or more variables included in the formula given above. Therefore, we cite just a few examples.

Actors may alter identity variables to induce a response less from members of an in-group than from external auditors, e.g., those who control access to desired ends, such as power, security, or other resources, but who restrict access to these ends with reference to identity criteria. If successful, such alterations may induce a response resulting in benefits for the leaders themselves, for the members of a specific group, or for both simultaneously. One example from our research concerns minorities who gain recognition and corresponding political and material benefits from the state or from non-governmental organizations on the basis of identity claims that correspond to official definitions of indigeneity (Donahoe et al. 2008). Further examples include potential expellees who attempt to avoid expulsion by reorienting themselves to the collective identities of potential expellers (Naimark 2000: 28–31) and refugees who gain asylum only if they are able to present themselves as members of a category of persons who are officially recognized as victims of political persecution, expulsion, or genocide (Glick Schiller 2005: 299).

Finally, we rehearse briefly a set of scenarios that can be generated by holding one variable in our formula constant, namely, the end or goal of securing access to resources – scenarios that are important for attempts to think systematically about ethnic conflict, its causes, and its structural

principles. We suggest that, rather than engaging in fruitless arguments over the priority of resource scarcity or ethnic differences in formulating causal explanations for conflicts, it is important to analyze the relationship between scarce resources, on one hand, and the implications of identity alternatives for determining group size – which is relevant for gaining access to or defending resources – on the other (Schlee 2004, 2006, 2008; Donahoe et al. 2008). Our points of departure are the following observations: first, choices among identity variables often alter principles of inclusion and exclusion in collectivities; second, if this is the case, such choices may, with high probability, affect the size of the group in question; and, third, larger or smaller groups may have either better or worse chances of gaining access to desired resources or defending a resource base against outsiders.

In one possible scenario, those lacking resources may attempt to gain access to them by affirming a broadly defined identity that allows them to join others who already have access to the desired resources. Conversely, those seeking to defend their exclusive access to a resource base may advocate definitions of the group of beneficiaries that restrict its size, assuming that the restricted group is still strong enough to defend its privileges against encroachment by others. If, however, those who want to defend their access to resources are unable to do so unassisted, they may try to broaden the definition of the collectivity in order to gain additional members and, thus, to be in a better position to retain control of shared privileges in the face of an even larger number of outsiders. And so on.

Thus, collective identities and processes of identification are still an indispensable part of any adequate analysis of conflict over scarce resources, even when identities cannot be viewed as the cause of the conflict. Analyses in which all attention is concentrated on resources, while identities are neglected, are often characterized by a failure to distinguish two equally important aspects of conflicts: first, the determination of the object of the struggle; and, second, the determination of the social bases of alliance and enmity among subjects in the struggle over the object. In other words, some analysts pose the question of *what* people are fighting over, while failing to ask *who* fights *with whom against whom* and *why*? Resources may be the answer to the *what* question, but in identifying the relevant resources one cannot tell *with whom* actors are allied, *against whom* they fight, or *why*. While a focus on collective identities and processes of identification does not answer all questions about conflicts, it is an indispensable part of an adequate answer (Schlee 2003b, 2004; cf. Besteman and Cassanelli 2003; Cassanelli 2003; Besteman 2005).

In all of these cases, the *strategic alteration* or *manipulation* of identity variables may be conceived in ways outlined in section III. Actors choosing among identity variables may move up and down levels within a taxonomic structure in order to satisfy their requirements, for example, achieving greater inclusion or exclusion in group membership. They may select from competing paradigms of comparable but mutually exclusive variables, while combining compatible variables syntagmatically, thereby forging compound or complex identities. In the process, some aspects of compound collective identities may be newly emphasized and other deemphasized, as selected indices are promoted to the status of emblems and previous emblems are discarded. Practically, the degree to which it is possible to choose freely among identity variables depends on a number of contingencies, including social, cultural, and historical circumstances, on one hand, and the plausibility of some logically conceivable identity constructs on the other. One's ability to choose among alternative collective identities or among variables serving as identity markers necessarily

will be limited by the salience, pervasiveness, and stability of the identities or identity variables in question – which, however, may be affected in turn by the choices that actors have made.

When actors choose among identity variables, not every conceivable option will always be equally realistic or equally persuasive, either in absolute terms or depending on circumstances. And not all actors will be equally skillful in manipulating identity variables, even under circumstances that allow such manipulation. Nevertheless, in our general conception of choice among identity variables, all options should remain “on the table,” given the fact that circumstances vary and are subject to change.

V. Putting It All Together: a program for empirical research, theory-building, and comparative analysis

In the preceding, we have outlined a comprehensive but flexible approach to the analysis of collective identities and corresponding processes of identification. Our point of departure was the conviction that it is time to go beyond sterile debates over the utility of the concept of identity or the relative merit of constructivist, primordialist, or instrumentalist approaches. If properly understood, the concepts of collective identity and identification refer very generally to highly variable representations and processes; nevertheless, these concepts are indispensable in social analysis precisely because the phenomena to which they refer are best understood as variants within a larger set. It is this seemingly paradoxical character of the concepts of collective identity and identification – that they refer to diverse phenomena within a larger replacement set – that makes them so valuable in comparative analysis. They allow us to grasp characteristic aspects of the human condition, rendering them comparable while avoiding reductionism.

Our approach to collective identities and processes of identification is based neither on simple dichotomies, as in much of the secondary literature, nor on analytically distinct categories, as recommended by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), among others; rather, we argue that actual case studies must be analyzed with reference to particular social, cultural, and historical circumstances *and* with reference to systematically outlined variables.

The variables that we have outlined above include dimensions and markers of collective identity, semantic relations among different identities within larger systems of classification, and their varying significance for actors in diverse social situations and under changing circumstances. In accordance with these principles and under particular social, cultural, historical conditions, actors may engage in various identification processes, which, as we have suggested, may be brought to light by considering empirical data from different points of view, corresponding to major schools of thought in social and anthropological analysis. To this end, we have reviewed some of these processes in terms of three concepts or sets of concepts: first, structure and function or culture and meaning; second, practice and power; and, third, choice. These approaches throw identity variables into relief in different ways and to different degrees, and they highlight different processes of identification.

Functionalists, structuralists, cultural relativists, and symbolic anthropologists acknowledge the variability of collective identities and processes of identification, but they have often tended to emphasize variability between different societies or cultures and consensual stability within them. At least, such views number among the characteristic oversimplifications of members of these schools, though, as we have suggested, there are many exceptions to this generalization. However

that may be, such approaches are still important, even indispensable, for understanding fundamental processes pertaining to the formation, maintenance, and transformation of collective identities; and, therefore, they cannot be and have not been dispensed with entirely, even by their critics.

In approaches based on the concepts of practice (or agency) and power, there is a greater sensitivity both to the relativity of social and cultural boundaries and to the ambivalence and variability within any unit of analysis that may be isolated for heuristic purposes. Processes that are most accessible in these terms include unconscious reproduction (which inevitably leads to long-term alteration), unconscious situational or circumstantial variation, and tactical or strategic action undertaken in various institutional settings and with widely varying consequences, depending on the kind and degree of power being exercised. Approaches informed by the concepts of practice and power merge with those informed by the concept of choice, if tactical or strategic action may be understood to be based on calculations of alternative means and ends.

When emphasis falls on the choices that actors make in the pursuit of “self-interest” (i.e., for the benefit of self, family, faction, or interest group), actually or presumably on the basis of rational calculation, all of the identity variables are in full play. In real situations, choices will, of course, always be constrained by contextual variables, by issues of plausibility, and also by the skills of the actor making the choices. Nevertheless, the choice perspective provides a powerful tool for operationalizing our framework in analyses of the formation or manipulation of collective identities and of the mobilization of people with reference to them.

While it is possible to favor one of the three approaches outlined above, as some of the authors of this paper do, the selection among approaches should depend largely on the research questions that have been posed. Each approach brings different, though equally useful kinds of information into focus.

The next step in the program that we have outlined is to employ our framework both in carrying out our various research projects and in making comparisons among them. If we succeed in gathering good data, in rendering our data comparable, and in gaining new insights and formulating new postulates on this basis, then our efforts in this paper will have some justification.

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