

## 'Belonging' in the cosmopolitan imaginary

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In the 1990s, much discourse both in and about global civil society was beset by a false opposition. On the one side was the utopia of cosmopolitan liberalism. On the other was the specter of reactionary nationalism or fundamentalism. And, of course, in a variety of settings, some national and some diasporically transnational, the value loading was reversed: fundamentalist or national utopia, threatening specter of cosmopolitan liberalism.

September 11 and the ensuing conflicts and upheavals refocused the discussion, but did not altogether dislodge the false opposition. They gave renewed emphasis to the image of Islam as the bad other to liberalism and progress. They encouraged the US government to demonize Islam and gave it license to extend the condemnation to the secular (if extraordinarily ill-governed) Arab state of Iraq. Commentators reconfigured the false opposition in the contrast of the alleged medieval character of the Taliban to the more modern West. Leaders who had not previously shown any strong interest in gender equality embraced it when it worked to reinforce the contrast. Not only equality and human rights issues, but numerous other indicators were harnessed to show the lack of 'progress' in Islamic societies, including even the sheer high-tech military prowess of America. The language of liberal democracy was invoked to explain the need for externally imposed regime change in Iraq (and possibly other Islamic societies). But at the same time, the September 11 attacks and the dominant western responses to them upset the widespread 1990s vision of an easy, happy progress towards cosmopolitan democracy. The US government's post-September 11 policies undermined multilateralism; security policies of many countries impeded flows of international visitors and migrants; already growing economic problems and protectionist impulses were exacerbated.

The prospects for cosmopolitan democracy, and the more general discourse of liberal internationalism of which it is a part, look less promising

today than they did in the 1990s. But the basic rhetorical opposition between the liberal cosmopolitan and the illiberal local remains influential. It is not only misleading, but part of an ideological tendency to misrecognize the character of globalization and the conditions of liberal discourse within it. The opposition implies that its two terms operate separately from the shaping of the global order by capitalist economic relations (and others, like flows of loans and aid). It encourages a substitution of ethics for politics, accounts of what is good or bad in individual action for how collective struggles might change social structure or institutions. And it permits, at most, a thin appreciation of the sociological character of group formation and membership, including changes in 'belonging' and efforts to transcend particular solidarities.

The present article focuses on the way in which social solidarity – and its individual manifestation in a sense of belonging in specific cultural and social settings – is marginalized and often stigmatized in the asocial imaginary characteristic of the new self-declared cosmopolitan variants of liberalism. In particular, I ask whether there is any place for culture or ethnicity in such theory except as the stigmatized other, more or less tolerated. Put otherwise, can cosmopolitan theory value humanity not merely in the abstract, but in the concrete variety of its ways of life?

I argue that cosmopolitan liberals often fail to recognize the social conditions of their own discourse, presenting it as freedom from social belonging rather than a special sort of belonging, a view from nowhere or everywhere rather than from particular social spaces. The views of cosmopolitan elites express privilege; they are not neutral apprehensions of the whole. I argue also that an approach that starts with individuals and treats culture as contingent cannot do justice to the legitimate claims made on behalf of 'communities,' and the reasons why 'thick attachments' to particular solidarities still matter – whether in the forms of nations, ethnicities, local communities, or religions.

Cosmopolitanism need not be presented as the universalistic enemy of particular solidarities, but it often is. I will concentrate here on the theories for which this is most true. Because of their sociological deficiencies, and despite their good insights, these theories fail to make sense of the world as it is and the next steps people might take to make both it and their lives better. Indeed, they offer an abstract normative structure which, however much occasioned by real-world social change, can only have the standing of 'abstract ought', with all the potential tyranny over the immanent projects of social improvement that implies. They both underestimate and potentially undermine the gains made in spanning important lines of difference precisely *by* developing new solidarities. Ironically, these gains suggest better than abstract universalism how cosmopolitanism (in its best senses) could grow.

## COSMOPOLITANISM, LIBERALISM, AND BELONGING

Liberalism has grown up in close relationship to the modern state. Ideas of citizenship and rights both reflect the attempt to construct the proper relationship between individual subject and sovereign state. Liberals often rely at least tacitly on the idea of 'nation' to give an account of why particular people belong together as the 'people' of a particular state. But, for the most part, liberal theory has not focused on the sources or nature of solidarity, but rather the relationship of individuals to states mediated by citizenship. So long as the fiction of a perfect match between nations and states was plausible, this was relatively unproblematic, though it meant liberal theory was sociologically impoverished (despite repeated efforts to integrate more attention to participation and difference, both, in part, issues of social solidarity).

Problems did arise with both the system of nation-states and the political theory of liberal democracy. Wars and refugees, for example, posed recurrent challenges. As Hannah Arendt (1973[1951]) emphasized, Jews and others were denied citizenship by both the Nazi Germany from which they escaped and the other countries into which they fled. That ideas of individual rights could not protect them revealed the extent to which rights were really reflections of state power (and only limits on such power for those accorded legitimate membership). After the war, a variety of efforts attempted to make better provision for stateless people, including signing several treaties and founding such organizations as the United Nations (UN) High Commission for Refugees. Nonetheless, states were the signatories on the treaties and states formed the UN and the high commission. Even though ideas of human rights would become increasingly important, especially after the Cold War, they did not escape the issue of state sovereignty.

Capitalism, too, posed challenges to political liberalism, even though the idea of the property-owning individual was closely bound up with that of the autonomous political subject. Free-market individualism produced a libertarian (and sometimes liberal) resistance to state power, but still treated state and individual as the fundamental units of analysis. At the same time, capitalism produced a substantial arena of economic power that demanded autonomy from not only states, but liberal conceptions of participatory rights and democracy. Not least of all, though the growth of markets and capitalist firms often depended on systems of state support, capitalist economic relations transcended states. Capitalism produced global organization of production and global flows of goods, and indeed people, that states could not effectively control.

During the 1990s, these challenges intensified. A variety of humanitarian crises, often products of civil wars and ethnic conflicts, pressed human rights

issues to the fore and linked them in complicated ways to notions of intervention by an 'international community' into the ostensibly sovereign affairs of states. The (somewhat nebulously conceived) international community itself included a growing range of nonstate organizations, but interventions, especially military ones, generally reflected state power even when they were organized through multilateral organizations. At the same time, capitalist globalization grew enormously.

Faced with these challenges, many liberals began an important effort to rethink liberal theory. John Rawls, the most important liberal theorist of our era, revised his monumentally influential theory of justice. This presumed an individual state as the necessary context of analysis (1971). A well-ordered society, Rawls insisted, was precisely not a community or an association:

... we have assumed that a democratic society, like any political society, is to be viewed as a complete and closed social system. It is complete in that it is self-sufficient and has a place for all the main purposes of human life. It is also closed, in that entry into it is only by birth and exit from it is only by death. (Rawls, 1993: 41)

Rawls initially postponed analysis of relations among states and transnational phenomena to a later step in analysis. The 1990s pressed the further step on him. Rawls' (1999) own approach was to retain the notion of 'peoples', or discrete societies, and then to propose a 'law of peoples' regulating relations among these. Liberal cosmopolitans generally do the opposite, extending 'domestic' (i.e. interpersonal but putatively universal) criteria of justice to the scale of humanity as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the prioritization of the individual society came to seem increasingly untenable. It began to seem fundamental, and not contingent, that markets and other social relations extend across nation-state borders, that migration and cultural flows challenge nationalist notions of the integral character of cultures and political communities, that states are not able to organize or control many of the main influences on the lives of their citizens, and that the most salient inequalities are intersocietally global and thus not addressed by intrasocietal measures. Accordingly, an important project for liberals was to work out how to extend their theories of justice and political legitimacy to a global scale.

Many of the most important leaders in these efforts to rethink liberalism adopted the notion of 'cosmopolitanism' as a frame.<sup>2</sup> This draws on classical and early modern sources for a moral vision in which all humanity is equally valued. Cosmopolitanism is presented not only as a timeless good, but as a specific response to current historical circumstances. The extension of markets, media, and migration has, advocates of a new cosmopolitan liberalism argue, reduced both the efficacy of states and the adequacy of moral and political analysis that approaches one 'society' at a time. At the

same time, 'identity politics' and multiculturalism have in the eyes of many liberals been excessive and become sources of domestic divisions and illiberal appeals to special rights for different groups. Accordingly, cosmopolitan theorists argue that the 'first principles' of ethical obligation and political community should stress the allegiance of each to all at the scale of humanity.

The new cosmopolitans retain, however, one of the weaknesses of older forms of liberalism. They offer no strong account of social solidarity or of the role of culture in constituting human life. For the most part, they start theorizing from putatively autonomous, discrete, and cultureless individuals. Reliance on the assumption that nations were naturally given pre-political bases for states had helped older liberals to paper over the difficulty of explaining why the individuals of their theories belonged in particular states (or conversely could rightly be excluded from them). The new cosmopolitanism is generally antinationalist, seeing nations as part of the fading order of political life divided on lines of states. Its advocates rightly refuse to rely on this tacit nationalism. But as they offer no new account of solidarity save the obligations of each human being to all others, they give little weight to 'belonging', to the notion that social relationships might be as basic as individuals, or that individuals exist only in cultural milieux – even if usually in several at the same time.

Indeed, much of the new liberal cosmopolitan thought proceeds as though belonging is a matter of social constraints from which individuals ideally ought to escape, or temptations to favoritism they ought to resist. Claims of special loyalty or responsibility to nations, communities, or ethnic groups, thus, are subordinated or fall under suspicion of illegitimacy. To claim that one's self-definition, even one's specific version of loyalty to humanity, comes through membership of some such more particular solidarity is, in Martha Nussbaum's (2002[1996]: 5) words, a 'morally questionable move of self-definition by a morally irrelevant characteristic'.

The individualism the new cosmopolitanism inherits from earlier liberalism is attractive partly because of its emphasis on freedom, and this encourages suspicion of arguments in favor of ethnicity, communities, or nations. These, many suggest, can be legitimate only as the choices of free individuals – and to the extent that they are inherited rather than chosen they should be scrutinized carefully, denied any privileged standing, and possibly rejected.

Against suggestions that individuals derive their identity from such solidarities, and thus have just reasons to defend them, Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) have argued that it is a mistake to speak at all of identity in this sense. Rather, they suggest, we should treat individuals as primary and speak of their 'identifications'. Brubaker and Cooper offer important criticism of both overly fixed (and often simplistic) claims for 'identity' and a thoroughgoing constructivism that essentially dissolves into

relativism.<sup>3</sup> To speak only of identifications, however, implies that individual persons are real in a sense in which groups and social relationships are not. It is only a short step to Jeremy Bentham's (1982[1789]: 13) famous injunction that 'the community is a fictitious body composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. The interest of the community then is, what? – the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it'. And from Bentham, of course, it is only another short step to former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's famous assertion that 'society does not exist' (which she backed up by attacking a great many social institutions).

At least in their extreme forms, cosmopolitanism and individualism participate in this pervasive tendency to deny the reality of the social. Their combination represents an attempt to get rid of 'society' as a feature of political theory. It is part of the odd coincidence since the 1960s of left-wing and right-wing attacks on the state. This has made it harder to defend welfare states (let alone socialism) and harder to resist neoliberalism in both domestic and international policies. Hayekians and postmodernists have led the way in this denigration of the social, seeing it as restrictive and potentially authoritarian. Mainstream liberalism has followed suit partly because it had grasped the social overwhelmingly as the national (and sometimes quasi-national claims to ethnic solidarity or autonomy). It conflated society with nation in order to posit the pre-political basis for social order, the 'people' to whom a democratic government must respond in order to be legitimate. But when the national seemed fundamentally illegitimate, as it did to many liberals in the 1990s, the theory offered little other approach to social solidarity.

Nonetheless, it is impossible not to belong to social groups, relations, or culture. The idea of individuals abstract enough to be able to choose all their 'identifications' is deeply misleading. Versions of this idea are, however, widespread in liberal cosmopolitanism. They reflect the attractive illusion of escaping from social determinations into a realm of greater freedom, and of cultural partiality into greater universalism. But they are remarkably unrealistic, and so abstract as to provide little purchase on what the next steps of actual social action might be for real people who are necessarily situated in particular webs of belonging, with access to particular others but not to humanity in general. Treating ethnicity as essentially a choice of identifications, they neglect the omnipresence of ascription (and discrimination) as determinations of social identities. And they neglect the extent to which people are implicated in social actions that they are not entirely free to choose (as, for example, not liking the current US President and Vice-President, or the idea of invading Iraq, does not get one out of being an American). Whether blame or benefit follow from such implications, they are not altogether optional.

Moreover, when the limits of belonging to specific webs of relationships

are transcended, this is not into a freedom *from* relationships but into a *different* organization of relationships. If feuding Hatfields and McCoys (or Nuer and Dinka, or French and Germans) reorganize to deal with their collective enemies or new opportunities, this is not a matter of escaping social solidarity but of changing it. Paradigmatically, this is what the growth of nationalism did with regard to more local or sectional solidarities (village, province, caste, class, or tribe). Nations usually worked by presenting more encompassing identities into which various sectional ones could fit. But sometimes transcendence of particular solidarities involves no neat larger whole but rather a patchwork quilt of new connections.

Identities and solidarities, thus, are neither simply fixed nor simply fluid, but may be more fixed or more fluid under different circumstances. It is certainly true that many solidarities – and not least of all ethnic ones – have been produced partly to engage in new conflicts, not simply to foster a larger peace. It would be a mistake, however, to think that this is the only work that ethnicity or community do for people. They provide networks of mutual support, capacities for communication, frameworks of meaning. Crucially, differential resources give people differential capacities to reach beyond particular belongings to other social connections – including very broad ones like nations, civilizations, or humanity as a whole. Not only options, but needs for solidarities are unequally distributed. And, as I shall argue, the idea of escaping from particularistic solidarities into greater universality may look very different for elites and for those with fewer resources.

### THE VARIETIES OF COSMOPOLITANISM

Appeals to the idea of cosmopolitanism have been advanced in the context of different theoretical and empirical projects, and take on different meanings in each. Different articulations overlap, however, and to some extent the common term is a source of reinforcement as well as fuzziness.

In all cases the term has a normative aspect; sometimes this is focused more at the level of ethics and sometimes more at that of politics. The most purely normative uses tend to be the most abstractly universalistic and rationalistic as well as the most decontextualized. Some other uses are more empirical, and offer more openness to concrete forms of social belonging, take cultural differences more seriously, and, sometimes, take up cosmopolitanism as a social psychological variable. I am most concerned with the problems of the abstractly normative cosmopolitanisms, and will concentrate on two of these – or what might be described as extreme and moderate variants. More briefly, I will describe appeals to cosmopolitanism that give it more empirical content and stress particularity, hybridity, and

social-psychological openness to difference. The latter are vulnerable to only some of the criticism I will direct to the former – notably to the charge of elitism. They also suggest some of the ways in which a more satisfactory cosmopolitanism might be developed, one which would complement, not oppose, solidarity.

The first and most radically universalistic approach to cosmopolitanism starts with the ethical obligations of individuals. Many cosmopolitans thus argue that the highest and strongest obligation of each person is owed to humanity as a whole. This is the position of Martha Nussbaum (2002[1996], 1997). She would recognize other attachments, even strong ones, such as those between particular parents and their own children. But she would recognize and value them only on the grounds that this particularism is the best way to meet the requirements of universal good (2002[1996]: 13, 135–6). In other words, it is right for parents to care most for their own children, but only because this will ensure the best possible global childcare arrangements.

Nussbaum roots her idea of cosmopolitanism in Stoic thought, and especially Diogenes Laertius and others of the often-wandering Stoics of the late Roman Empire who sought to be citizens of the world rather than of any place in particular, and to defy all sorts of social norms. She is willing to accept that it is a 'lonely business' and even an 'exile' from 'the comfort of local truths, from the warm, nestling feeling of patriotism' (2002[1996]: 15). It involves forsaking the 'props of habit and local boundaries'. As the imagery suggests, Nussbaum presents the cosmopolitan not only as a deracinated individual, but as one who must demonstrate personal strength to achieve this, a kind of virtuoso performance of freedom. Though she sees in this a basis for a better world, one in which human rights would be respected and developmental goals advanced, her examples of it tend more to emphasize personal life and individuals breaking free from the restrictions of social norms.<sup>4</sup> At its best, this involves a self-examination in which the point of view of the other helps us to grasp the nonessential character of that we might otherwise think to be universal and necessary. But in her accounts, the 'other' is sharply universal, not an embodiment of distinctive culture and belonging. I have argued elsewhere that there is a tendency in this sort of cosmopolitan theory to substitute ethics for politics, resulting in demands for individuals to recognize obligations for analysis of institutional conditions that join them in solidarities and oppositions (Calhoun, 2002).<sup>5</sup>

Samuel Scheffler has called this 'extreme cosmopolitanism'. Typified by Nussbaum, this takes world citizenship as fundamental, clearly and always morally superior to more local bonds – such as ethnic or national solidarities – which are good when they serve the universal good and tolerable only when they do not conflict with world citizenship. The more moderate alternative 'is to say that, in addition to one's relationships and affiliations with particular individuals and groups, one also stands in an ethically

significant relation to other human beings in general' (Scheffler 2001: 115). David Held (1995) is a good exemplar of moderate cosmopolitanism since he stresses more clearly than most the importance of multiple and overlapping allegiances of different scales.

This second approach starts with rights rather than obligations, and holds that wherever people are joined in significant social relations they have a collective right to share in control of these. It is rooted more in democratic theory and less in individual ethics. Thus advocates of this view argue that there ought to be a democratic polity to administer affairs at every level at which people are connected to each other. This underwrites the appeal to cosmopolitan democracy that David Held has laid out most forcefully. 'People would come, thus, to enjoy multiple citizenships – political membership in the diverse political communities which significantly affect them. They would be citizens of their immediate political communities, and of the wider regional and global networks which impacted upon their lives' (Held, 1995: 233). Held's approach is moderate, among other ways, because he doesn't suggest that people necessarily put the universal ahead of the particular in all cases, nor does he conceive of cosmopolitanism as a form of deracination, of freedom from cultural particularity.<sup>6</sup>

In a sense, Nussbaum argues that there should be a pre-political, moral basis for politics – but this should rest not on the alleged priority of ethnic, national or other specific loyalties but on the general loyalty of each person to all humanity. Held, by contrast, holds that there are no pre-political moral bases for politics, and offers an intrinsically political theory, advancing cosmopolitanism as an alternative way of establishing the appropriate units of democratic government. It is still a theory of what is right, however, rather than of how people might pursue the right, or of how they come to be who they are in their different groups.

These two kinds of arguments are what I want mainly to consider here, but at the outset we should distinguish them from two other ideas of cosmopolitanism. In each case, the connections among the different usages inform the connotations of the term, but this is sometimes misleading. For example, another important sense of cosmopolitanism is to be at ease with strangers and in unfamiliar surroundings. It is a sociopsychological usage associated especially with urban life, rather than political organization. Richard Sennett evokes this sense in his accounts of 18th- and 19th-century cities (and corresponding critiques of 20th-century suburbs). He cites a French usage of 1738: 'a cosmopolite . . . is a man who moves comfortably in diversity; he is comfortable in situations which have no links or parallels to what is familiar to him' (Sennett 1977: 17). This connotation of the term implies that cosmopolitanism involves an appreciation of diversity, not just in the sense of toleration for the peaceful co-existence of separate spheres, but as a fact of common spaces within which one 'moves'. It is not obvious that this is altogether compatible with Nussbaum's strong universalist

appeal. At most, Nussbaum's view would seem to imply toleration for diversity so long as it did not interfere with a primary commitment to equality. Equally, Nussbaum does not seriously confront the possibility that cultural diversity involves necessary and deep differences in understandings of the good, or human rights, which make the imposition of one vision of the good problematic.

Still other scholars claim the term 'cosmopolitan', not for any singular overarching view of the good, or of universal norms, but for the coexistence and mutual influence of multiple cultural influences and values. Homi Bhabha's calls for hybridity, or Salman Rushdie's argument for the importance of impurity, mixture, and novelty, rather than appeals to purity, thus exemplify this sense of the cosmopolitan. As Rushdie (1991: 394) writes: 'Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world.' Or in the phase of Pollock et al. (2000: 580): 'Cosmopolitanism, in its wide and wavering nets, catches something of our need to ground our sense of mutuality in conditions of mutability, and to learn to live tenaciously in terrains of historic and cultural transition.'

The emphasis here is cultural rather than sociopsychological. It is focused more on creative bricolage than on the flâneur as observer of urban difference. But in any case, the cosmopolitanism they evoke is not the universalism of Nussbaum, but an infinitude of potential weavings together of more or less local traditions, cultural productivity that seeks to transcend particular traditions, and practices that seek to express traditions but not only to themselves. Necessarily, then, there is no singular cosmopolitanism adequate to the world as a whole – nor even any fixity of humanity as a whole – but rather a plurality of cosmopolitanisms. Likewise, it is not enough simply to contrast vernacular to cosmopolitan, the local tradition of small places to the larger traditions of broader spaces. It is crucial to see that these constitute each other. There is 'dialectic between cosmopolitan and vernacular that creates them both' (Pollock, 2000: 616).

Each of these third and fourth notions of cosmopolitanism starts from the premise of diversity. For the third, that of the urbanite at ease with difference and strangeness, diversity is in fact the core value. The paradigmatic urban could also be a tourist, a reader of heterogeneous literatures, or an habitué of exotic foods, languages, or spiritual experiences. The point is his openness, and the strength of individual personality he manifests in (and indeed acquires from) his relations to such plural contexts.<sup>7</sup> This does not depend on his membership in any specific culture, nor does it focus attention on the mixture of cultural traditions. The fourth sense of cosmopolitanism does both. It presents diasporas, the interplay of oral and literate traditions, the relations among village, nation, and transnational society as matters of multiple memberships and mixture. It is more fully focused on participation than the third, less constituted by observation. Alone of the four versions of cosmopolitanism it incorporates, rather than only tolerates,

ethnicity. To be sure, it does not incorporate the illusory claims of many advocates of ethnicity (as of nationalism) to discern a pure core to ethnic culture or precise boundaries to the ethnic community. But it understands participation in cosmopolitan relations as participation in specific cultural traditions and cultural relations that partially transcend and partially incorporate others – including others that may be more particular and others that may be comparably general. It refuses the notion that the cosmopolitan is somehow above or outside the particularities of culture – though he or she may participate in cultural production and change, and in multiple cultural contexts and traditions.

The third and fourth versions of cosmopolitanism are different from each other, thus, but even more distinct from the first and second. The third and fourth each seem to me to escape much of the criticism I shall pose with regard to the first two, and especially the liberal universalism I have used Nussbaum to represent. They may be guilty of similar elitism – though I think not as extreme – but they are not rationalist, universalist or individualist in the same way. On the other hand, the third and fourth are both largely disconnected from politics – or at least the constitution of politics. They identify modes of social and cultural relations that may be of political as well as intrinsic importance. But though tolerance, interest in others, and openness to change may all be political virtues, they are not in themselves bases for constituting politics; they do not explain patterns of allegiance. At the same time, all four sorts of cosmopolitan theories share some important virtues. Not least, all appropriately recognize that the factors shaping human lives are not contained within discrete societies. All four approach existing cultures and communities with recognition that these are internally complex, that members struggle with each other, interpret common heritage differently, and take different positions on cultural norms that are in tension with each other. Though this is recognized most by the second (e.g. Held) and fourth (e.g. Pollack), all recognize to some degree the extent to which memberships are typically multiple and overlapping. People do not cease to live in Bradford and Britain because they are of Pakistani origin, Muslim faith, and perhaps Sindi ethnicity.

As a result of the last, all point up one of the great weaknesses of much communitarian thought. This is the tendency to treat communities as though they were individuals. Some kinds of advocacy for multiculturalism treat cultures as similarly integral. This is commonly diagnosed in nationalist thought. The US pledge of allegiance, for example, repeats a claim common to many nationalisms in referring to the 'indivisible' character of the nation. Advocates for ethnic communities and other 'identity groups' too often speak as though all members of a group might share the same interests and indeed be much more identical to each other than they are – and as though there were much more agreement about both interests and identity than there is. This sort of simplification motivates arguments

against 'identity' such as that of Brubaker and Cooper (2000). Elsewhere, Brubaker (2002: 164) calls it 'groupism': 'the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis'. Communitarians often slip into speaking of *the* community, or *the* culture of a community as though either could be more unitary and clearly bounded than is possible. This sort of slip among communitarians provides cosmopolitans with a convenient straw man to knock down. But that culture and community are never quite so simple does not mean that they lack force or legitimate value, let alone that they are mere illusions.

One way of distinguishing the four versions of cosmopolitanism is to consider how each approaches the idea of citizenship. Extreme ethical cosmopolitanism asserts that citizenship of the world is direct and unmediated – it is an inherent attribute of humanness – and is fundamental and unqualified. Moderate political cosmopolitanism (especially in the 'cosmopolitan democracy' version of Held) values citizenship of the world, but also citizenship in a variety of intermediate associations of different kinds, including corporations and other institutions as well as territorially based populations; it sees world citizenship as at least in part mediated through these other forms of association. The cosmopolitanism Sennett associates with urban life is also linked to an idea of citizenship. Not only is there a strong tradition of locating citizenship in cities (rather than nations), but there is an ideal of citizenship focused on the virtue of citizens rather than their belonging to any group. The city is a place in which the virtue of good citizenship can be acquired and displayed, in part because the loyalty of an urban citizen to a city is not to the category of people who happen to be there, but to the place and the life it supports. Finally, however, the critical cosmopolitanism suggested by Pollock and his colleagues questions whether the notion of citizenship is 'a necessary common frame to be shared universally', and worries that exalting the ideal of citizen typically depends on certain notions of public life (and restriction of intimacy to the private sphere), and on the idea of the individual – and especially autonomous interest-bearing individuals – as the subjects of citizenship (Pollock et al., 2000: 584).

Indeed, Pollock and his colleagues suggest that while focusing on rights has been important in many contexts, 'the fetishization of liberal individualism has, in the past few years, created a cosmopolitan imaginary signified by the icons of singular personhood' (Pollock et al., 2000: 581). Advocates for global issues from AIDS to land mines, business leaders with global visions and power, philanthropists working internationally, and public figures communicating to audiences around the world (whether on politics or simply as entertainment) thus figure as icons for cosmopolitanism. But individualism is just part of what this reveals. It also

suggests how much the 'imaginary' behind cosmopolitan social theory is rooted in the way elites participate in globalization. It is accordingly somewhat skewed.

I have elsewhere (Calhoun, 2003) referred to this as 'the class consciousness of frequent travelers'. I mean to call attention not just to the elite occupational status of those who form the archetypal image of the cosmopolitans, but to the grounding certain material privileges give to the intellectual position. 'Good' passports and easy access to visa, international credit cards and membership in airline clubs, invitations from conference organizers and organizational contacts, all facilitate a kind of inhabitation (if not necessarily citizenship) of the world as an apparent whole. To be sure, diasporas provide for other circuits of international connectivity, drawing on ethnic and kin connections rather than the more bureaucratically formalized ones of business people, academics, and aid workers. But though these are real, they face significantly different contextual pressures.

Post-September 11 restrictions on visas – let alone immigration – reveal the differences between those bearing European and American passports and most others in the world. The former hardly notice the change and move nearly as freely as before. The latter find their international mobility sharply impeded and sometimes blocked. The global border control regime thus encourages a sense of natural cosmopolitanism for some and reminds others of their nationality (and often of religion and ethnicity as well). However cosmopolitan their initial intentions or self-understandings, these Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans are reminded by the ascriptions and restrictions with which they are confronted that at least certain sorts of cosmopolitanism are not for them. Normative cosmopolitans can (and do) assert that this is not the way the world should be, and that borders should be more open. But they need also to take care not to deny the legitimacy of any anti-cosmopolitan responses people may have to this regime of borders, including not just resentment but renewed identification with nations and even projects of national development which hold out the prospect of enabling them to join the ranks of those with 'good' passports.

The point is not simply privilege. It is that a sense of connection to the world as a whole, and of being a competent actor on the scale of 'global citizenship' is not merely a matter of the absence of more local ties. It has its own material and social conditions.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the cosmopolitan elites are hardly culture free; they do not simply reflect the rational obligations of humanity in the abstract (even if their theories try to).

To some extent, the cosmopolitan elite culture is a product of western dominance and the kinds of intellectual orientations it has produced. It reflects 'modernity' which has its own historical provenance. To quote Pollock and his colleagues again, 'this revenant late liberalism reveals, in a more exaggerated form, a struggle at the heart of liberal theory, where a genuine desire for equality as a universal norm is tethered to a tenacious

ethnocentric provincialism in matters of cultural judgment and recognition' (Pollock et al., 2000: 581). But the cultural particularity is not simply inheritance, and not simply a reflection of (mainly) western modernity. It is also constructed out of the concrete conditions of cosmopolitan mobility, education, and participation in certain versions of news and other media flows. It is the culture of those who attend Harvard and the LSE, who read *The Economist* and *The New Yorker*, who recognize Mozart's music as universal, and who can discuss the relative merits of Australian, French, and Chilean wines. It is also a culture in which secularism seems natural and religion odd, and in which respect for human rights is assumed, but the notion of fundamental economic redistribution is radical and controversial. This culture has many good qualities, as well as blindspots, but nonetheless it is culture and not its absence.

Nussbaum and other extreme cosmopolitans, and to a lesser extent many of the moderates, present cosmopolitanism first and foremost as a kind of virtuous deracination, a liberation from the possibly illegitimate, and in any case blinkering, attachments of locality, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. But like secularism, cosmopolitanism is a presence not an absence, an occupation of particular positions in the world, not a view from nowhere or everywhere. All actually existing cosmopolitanisms, to be more precise, reflect influences of social location and cultural tradition. The ways in which any one opens to understanding or valuing of others are specific and never exhaust all the possible ways. Secularism is again instructive. The parameters of specific religious traditions shape the contours of what is considered not religious, or not the domain of specific religions. The not-specifically-religious, thus, is never a simple embodiment of neutrality. What is 'secular' in relation to multiple Christian denominations may not be exactly equivalent to what is secular in the context of Hindu or Muslim traditions (let alone of their intermingling and competition). So, too, cosmopolitan transcendence of localism and parochialism is not well understood as simple neutrality towards, or tolerance of, all particularisms. It is participation in a particular, if potentially broad, process of cultural production and social interconnection that spans boundaries.

To say that the cosmopolitanism of most theories reflects the experience of business, academic, government, and civil society elites is not merely to point to some reasons why others may not so readily share it, but also to suggest sources of its particular character. It is neither a freedom from culture nor a matter of pure individual choice, but a cultural position constructed on particular social bases and a choice made possible by both that culture and those bases. It is accordingly different from the transcendence of localism on other cultural and social bases. Cosmopolitanism has particular rather than solely universal content, although its advocates sometimes fail to recognize this. Moreover, the content and the misrecognition are connected to social bases of relative privilege.

Much thinking about ethnicity and the legitimacy of local or other particularistic attachments by self-declared cosmopolitans reflects their tacit presumption of their own more or less elite position. I do not mean simply that they act to benefit themselves, or in other ways from bad motives. Rather, I mean that their construction of genuine benevolence is prejudiced against ethnic and other attachments because of the primacy of the perspective of elites. Any prejudice by elites in favor of others in their own ethnic groups or communities would amount to favoring the already privileged (a very anti-Rawlsian position). So the cosmopolitans are keen to rule out such self-benefiting particularism. But ethnic solidarity is not always a matter of exclusion by the powerful; it is often a resource for effective collective action and mutual support among the less powerful. While it is true, in other words, that in-group solidarity by those in positions of power and influence usually amounts to discrimination against less powerful or privileged others, it is also true that solidarity serves to strengthen the weak. Indeed, those who are excluded from or allowed only weak access to dominant structures of power and discourse have especially great need to band together in order to be effective. Of course, elites also band together to protect privilege (and as Weber 1978 [1922] emphasized, exclusivity is a prominent elite weapon against the inclusive strategies of mass activists). And elites manipulate solidarities to pursue their own advantages rather than considering equally the interests of all. Nonetheless, elites are typically empowered as individuals in ways non-elites are not.

In short, when cosmopolitan appeals to humanity as a whole are presented in individualistic terms, they are apt to privilege those with the most capacity to get what they want by individual action. However well intentioned, they typically devalue the ways in which other people depend on ethnic, national, and communal solidarities – among others – to solve practical problems in their lives. And they typically neglect the extent to which asserting that cultural difference should be valued only as a matter of individual taste – ‘identifications’, in Brubaker’s and Cooper’s terms – undermines any attempt to redistribute benefits in the social order across culturally defined groups. They can extol multiculturalism, in other words, so long as this is defined as a harmonious arrangement in which all cultures are seen as attractive parts of a mosaic, but not when members of one cultural group organize to demand that the mosaic be altered. In the case of Hawaii, for example, Jon Okamura (1998) has not only challenged the myth of a multicultural paradise, but noted the extent to which this enshrines an existing distribution of power and resources. It not only encourages the idea that individuals from each cultural group should be treated equally (as against, say, affirmative action). It especially inhibits self-organization by members of any group traditionally on the losing end – say native Hawaiians – to alter the terms of the distributive game. Such organization can only appear as hostile to the idealized multicultural harmony.

## ETHNICITY AND THE VALUE OF SOLIDARITY

So far, my argument has been mostly cautionary and critical. I have suggested that most cosmopolitan theories are individualistic in ways that obscure the basic importance of social relationships and culture. I have argued that reducing the diversity of cultural and social identities to different tastes or possible 'identifications' inhibits attention to the ways in which they are both basic to individual lives and undermines recognition of why those on the losing end of processes of globalization (and other social arrangements) may have special reasons to understand their place in the world and organize their action through such solidarities. I have also suggested quite simply that culture and social relationships are as real as individuals, even if they lack bodies. My critique has been strongest against the 'extreme cosmopolitanism' that promotes elimination of all loyalties lesser than that of each individual to humanity as a whole, but raises questions also about the 'moderate cosmopolitanism' that would recognize at least some such loyalties though only in 'thin' versions that are compatible with an integrated global polity. What I want to do now in closing, and all too briefly, is to say a little about social solidarity itself – or more precisely, the forms of social solidarity in which people organize their lives.

A first thing to recall is that no one lives outside particularistic solidarities. Some cosmopolitan theorists may believe they do, but this is an illusion made possible by positions of relative privilege and the dominant place of some cultural orientations in the world at large. The illusion is not a simple mistake, but a misrecognition tied to what Pierre Bourdieu (1990) called the '*illusio*' of all social games, the commitment to their structure that shapes the engagement of every player and makes possible effective play. In other words, cosmopolitans do not simply fail to see the cultural particularity and social supports of their cosmopolitanism, but cannot fully and accurately recognize these without introducing a tension between themselves and their social world. And here I would include myself and probably all of us. Whether we theorize cosmopolitanism or not, we are embedded in social fields and practical projects in which we have little choice but to make use of some of the notions basic to cosmopolitanism and thereby reproduce it. We have the option of being self-critical as we do so, but not of entirely abandoning cosmopolitanism because we cannot act effectively without it. Nor should we want to abandon it, since it enshrines many important ideas like the equal worth of all human beings and – at least potentially – the value of cultural and social diversity. But we should want to transform it, not least because as usually constructed, especially in its most individualistic forms, it systematically inhibits attention to the range of solidarities on which people depend, and to the special role of such solidarities in the struggles of the less privileged and those displaced or challenged by capitalist globalization.

Second, it is important to think of solidarities in the plural, avoiding the illusion that plagued much earlier thought of ethnicity and nationalism that there was some one basic identity common to all members of a group. Nations and ethnic groups are internally differentiated in a variety of ways, overlap with, and are crosscut by, various other identities, and figure with greater or lesser salience when members are in different interpersonal situations and when different large-scale factors – say economic change – affect their overall positions. Family comes to the fore sometimes, and may push ethnic solidarities to the background. Ethnicity may shape a certain interaction more than class, or class provide the basis for a cross-ethnic solidarity, without either of these being clearly prior to, or more real than, the other. Indeed, this is an important reason not to see any of these solidarities as entirely ‘pre-political’. Though they may be bases for political action, they are also recurrently remade by political efforts. These efforts include not only organizing and material changes, but intentionally produced changes in discourse – like those wrought by feminism as well as by some ethnic and nationalist movements. With Brubaker (2002), we can emphasize the variable and shifting qualities of group membership, the distinction between groups and organizations that facilitate action in their names, and the extent to which groups are projects rather than fixed realities. We should emphasize that groups seldom contain whole persons or command all their allegiance – family and nation are often in conflict, after all, nationalist ideologues notwithstanding. But none of this makes solidarities or ‘groupness’ less important, only more complex and problematic. Moreover, we should not dismiss the invocation of ‘groupist’ notions of sharp boundaries and clear composition as merely errors made by practical participants to be avoided by analysts. We need to understand these as partly constitutive of group identity and solidarity, even though it never can fully match them.

Third, not only are people shaped by, and participants in, a variety of different solidarities, these are organized in different ways. Without going into any detail, let me just evoke six:

1. Solidarity may be underwritten by mutual interdependence in exchange, which may be more or less readily recognized. At a micro-level such connections may appear as concrete exchanges, at a macro-level they are more likely to seem to be systems, and to be understood without reference to the interpersonal transactions that make them up. This is how we think of ‘the economy’ for example, but a sense of economic interdependence can be powerful.
2. Solidarity may also be produced by common culture. Speaking the same language, having the same referents – goods to think with, in Lévi-Strauss’s sense – even participating in the same habitual arguments, can all produce a sense of shared belonging. This is

reinforced by the simple extent to which it is easier to interact when more of the 'ground rules' are clear from the outset.

3. Distinct from cultural commonality of the sort mentioned above is membership in culturally defined categories. Nations are perhaps the most important of these categorical identities in the modern world, but class, gender, race, clan, and others work in similar ways. Indeed, the very notion of humanity as a whole evoked by cosmopolitans is such a categorical identity. It posits a 'set', the members of which are equivalent in some crucial regard. Ethnicity is sometimes understood this way, especially when it is made an object of bureaucratic administration or large-scale media and political attention. More often, though, ethnicity is understood to be more than simply a categorical identity; it implies relatively dense interpersonal relationships (e.g. marriage within the group).
4. Structures of social relations – networks – are a fourth form of solidarity. Here groupness is less a matter of equivalence among members or a single label that fits all. Rather, it is the product of the way in which members are joined to each other in direct or indirect relationships. Without going into it very much, direct ones are those in which the parties are clearly known to each other as persons – mainly, but not exclusively face-to-face relationships. Indirect ones are those in which some sort of mediation is involved that makes the connection without direct interaction and mutual awareness – as one might be related by marriage or by a bureaucratic organization – to people one has never met.
5. Though not always recognized as such, public communication is itself a form of solidarity. It is often presumed that people must be already joined in solidarity to form a public, but this seems wrong in so far as the very notion of public has to do with communication among those who are not bound to each other by private ties. Communication may take place among strangers and yet knit its participants into a sense of a common undertaking. This is true in many social movements – say the antiglobalization or antiwar movements – which have enormous scale and mobilize people who share no single categorical identity or strong personal network. It is also true of the collective discourse of many countries, and is an element of national connection distinct from common culture or mere categorical membership.
6. Finally, people are sometimes – too often, in fact – joined to each other by material power. They are conquered, drafted into armies, enslaved, or evicted from traditional landholdings and organized into new settlements. Their connections are neither the product of common culture, nor of pre-existing networks, nor of public choice.

Yet people joined to each other by impositions of power do form relationships and do develop collective self-understandings that shape their lives together and their relations with others. Even where we should regard the actions that create these groupings as illegitimate, it does not follow that the groupings themselves are.

The different forms of solidarity may be chosen and reshaped by their participants in different degrees. The first and the last appear mainly as impositions of material necessity, though perhaps not immutably so. It is hard to imagine individuals wilfully transforming common culture, but cultures do change as a result of cumulative processes and individuals also exercise choice – conscious or unconscious – in their acquisition of, and participation in, culture. They may move to another society and learn another language, for example; less radically, they may also claim or reject various ostensibly common cultural values, delve into and reproduce historical traditions, or let them fade. Categorical identities are open to choice, though also pressed on people by ascription. Social networks are shaped by available choices, proximity, and other structural factors, but are also partly products of choice. And certainly opening possibilities for collective choice is one of the most basic virtues of public communication.

A central point here is that we do not need to choose between two caricatures of social solidarity, identity, ethnicity, or, more generally, groupness. It is neither simply a matter of inheritance and essential commonality nor a matter of free-flowing ubiquitous and undetermined construction. It is socially produced, shaped by material factors, culturally organized and yet also open to human action. Neither should we oppose 'category' to 'group' (equating the later with network). Rather, it is one dimension of solidarity or groupness.

Solidarity, thus, is not the 'bad other' to individual choice. Not only may it be chosen, it may be a crucial condition of other choices. And absence of solidarity may eliminate possibilities for choice. Solidarity may, for example, be the basis of an effort to restrict allegedly 'free' market relations – for example by limiting the right of 'outsiders' to buy land held by members of 'local' groups. Absent restrictions, the apparently greater net freedom of choice – all the world is free to buy – becomes a radical loss of freedom to the locals (especially where these are less wealthy than most outsiders). That restrictions appear at first blush to be clearly reductions in freedom is an expression of the extent to which a certain liberal ideology is dominant and also the extent to which most of us are in positions of relative privilege and so can readily imagine ourselves primarily as buyers. But an approach to the world in which cosmopolitan diversity simply opens a greater range of consumer options is clearly a limited one. And, as evoking this suggests, buying into some neoliberal discourses about freedom actually means celebrating the tyranny of the market.

I do not mean here to accuse Nussbaum or other strong cosmopolitans of neoliberalism or celebrations of consumerism. I do mean to suggest that inattention to social solidarity may make for slippage between cosmopolitanism based on strong ethical universalism and that based on misrecognized personal advantage. It is important not to sacrifice sociological analysis of why people seek and reproduce social solidarity to a more or less abstract account of individuals, states, and humanity at large. And it is important not to think that valuing humanity as a whole eliminates – even potentially – the need for valuing various more intermediary solidarities.

Cosmopolitanism is not wrong, but by itself it is inadequate. Taking seriously the whole of humanity need not preclude taking seriously the various particular relationships in which humans are constituted and connected to each other. Cosmopolitanism remains attractive, and arguments linked to it have offered important insights in political theory. But it needs the complement of greater attention to social solidarities. Cosmopolitanism need not be abandoned in order to take community, culture, and other forms of solidarity seriously. On the contrary, it may well be improved.

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### **Notes**

- 1 The cosmopolitans build on an important line of criticism of Rawls' theory of justice which focused on its limitation to single societies. Many critics favored eliminating the notion of 'a society' smaller than the population of the globe and simply trying to rewrite the theory on this new scale. Among the first to argue thus was Charles Beitz (1979). Rawls (1999) did not accept this approach because he held that in any foreseeable near-term future there would be distinct societies, and thus the more universal theory would be unrealistic enough to lack purchase on the problems of regulating their legitimate relations with each other. For this a 'law of peoples' was needed.
- 2 Anthologies representing diverse approaches include Archibugi (2003), Archibugi and Held (1995), Archibugi, Held, and Kohler (1999), Cheah and Robbins (1998), and Vertovec and Cohen (2003).
- 3 Brubaker (2002) has separately presented an argument for treating 'groupness' as variable, and as more often a project than a fixed reality – notably in regard to ethnic groups and conflicts. I sympathize with this approach, but it need not be based on an ontological priority of individual persons with emphasis only on their identifications. Groups – or, following Nadel (1951: ch. 7), 'groupings' – are

- sometimes forcibly created. They may also be fluid without being strictly optional.
- 4 Nussbaum (2002[1996]: 16–17) likes the example of Hipparchia and Crates. Theirs was a very philosophical romance because, as she quotes Diogenes' account, Hipparchia 'fell in love with Crates' arguments' rather than his wealth, pedigree, or looks. In any case, she forsook the privileged family and class into which she had been born and joined him in a life without possessions, but not without its more or less universally available entertainments: 'they copulated in public and they went off together to dinner parties'. The point seems to be that cosmopolitanism can be fun. It is not entirely clear how to elevate it to the level of international politics.
  - 5 A number of self-declared cosmopolitans would qualify or dissent from Nussbaum's strongest claims. For examples of some of these less extreme cosmopolitan positions, see the other contributions to *For Love of Country*, and to the 1994 *Boston Review* symposium in which Nussbaum's paper first appeared.
  - 6 To be sure, many cosmopolitans who accept the value of Held's notion of multiple and overlapping (and therefore limited) sovereignty would place greater stress on the practical difficulties of achieving such a complex political order (see the various contributions to Archibugi and Held, 1995). This is a different question, though it may limit the purchase of the theory in actual processes of political change.
  - 7 See Sennett (1970) on the ways in which growing up amid complex heterogeneity may nurture stronger individuality than protection from diversity in suburbs or other such spaces. A similar insight informs Georg Simmel's (1950) classic account of 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'.
  - 8 Consider this description of the contrast between the backward Scottish Highlands and the more cosmopolitan Lowlands in the 18th-century: 'If hunting-gathering and pastoral-nomadic Scotland chained people to a life of destitution and ignorance, commercial Scotland opened them up to the rest of the world, and the rest of Britain' (Herman, 2001: 112). The contrast is in some ways quite apt, and yet also reminds us that the solidarities of the Highlanders – within and across clans – were the products not merely of a lack of progress, but of exclusion from it. Their resistance to the enclosures that 'freed' them from primitive livelihoods was not unrelated to their resistance to certain versions of cosmopolitanism which offered them, in the first instance, displacement. Conversely, the Lowland Scots were not merely more open-minded relatives of the Highlanders. They were the products of an expanding commercial society, as well as of the different localism of Presbyterianism, and the struggle to overcome it.

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## Neither individualism nor 'groupism'

*A reply to Craig Calhoun*

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Craig Calhoun rightly, and eloquently, criticizes the impoverished sociology on which much contemporary political and moral theory is built. He focuses on the deficiencies of cosmopolitan theory, and notably on the individualist social ontology that implicitly or explicitly underlies much cosmopolitan theorizing. Calhoun also notes in passing some weaknesses of what I have elsewhere (Brubaker, 2002) called 'groupist' moral, political, and social theory,<sup>1</sup> though he minimizes these deficiencies, treating them as a 'slip' that 'provides cosmopolitans with a convenient straw man to knock down'.

In my view, the tendency to take sharply bounded, putatively homogeneous groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis is no mere slip. Grounded in what Pierre Bourdieu called 'our primary inclination to think the social world in a substantialist manner' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 228), this is a deeply entrenched tendency in social analysis and in moral and political theory, especially in writing about ethnicity, race, and nationhood. And the groupist social ontology that underlies and informs much theorizing about ethnicity is, I believe, every bit as impoverished, and every bit as analytically disabling and politically constricting, as the individualist social ontology rightly criticized by Calhoun.

To be sure, the treatment of groups as real, substantial things-in-the-world has been challenged by several traditions of social analysis. These include not only individualistic approaches such as rational choice, game theory, and agent-based modeling, but also network theory, cognitive theory, feminist theory, and micro-interactionist approaches such as ethno-methodology and conversation analysis. More generally, many constructivist stances treat groups as constructed, contingent, and fluctuating, while a diffuse postmodernist sensibility emphasizes the fragmentary, the ephemeral, and the erosion of fixed forms and clear boundaries. These developments are disparate, even contradictory in analytical style, methodological orientation, and epistemological commitments, but they all problematize groupness and question axioms of stable group being.

Yet despite these broad shifts in the wider field of social theory, ethnic groups continue to be understood as entities and cast as actors. Everyday talk, policy analysis, political and moral theory, and even ostensibly constructivist social scientific writing routinely frame accounts of ethnic, racial, and national conflict in groupist terms as the struggles 'of' ethnic groups, races, and nations. Somehow, when we talk about ethnicity, and even more, when we talk about ethnic conflict, we almost automatically find ourselves talking about ethnic groups.

Yet ethnic (or ethnicized) conflict need not be understood as conflict *between ethnic groups*, just as racial (or racially framed) conflict need not be understood as conflict between *races*, or nationalist conflict as conflict between *nations*. Participants may well represent such conflicts in groupist or even primordialist terms. They may well cast ethnic groups, races, or nations as the protagonists – the heroes and martyrs – of such struggles. This is entirely understandable, and doing so can provide an important resource in social and political struggles. But this does not mean analysts should do the same. As a social process, reification is central to the *practice* of politicized ethnicity, as indeed to other forms of politics. Reifying groups is what ethnopolitical entrepreneurs (like other political entrepreneurs) are in the business of doing. When they are successful, the political fiction of the unified group can be momentarily yet powerfully realized in practice. As analysts, we should certainly try to *account* for the ways in which – and conditions under which – this social process of reification works. But we should avoid unwittingly *doubling* or *reinforcing* the reification of ethnic groups in ethnopolitical practice with a reification of such groups in social analysis.

Does this mean we should adopt an individualist social ontology? Of course not. To criticize an analytical focus on bounded 'groupness' is not to posit an asocial individualism. We are not faced with a stark choice between a universalist, individualist analytical idiom and an identitarian, 'groupist' idiom. That is a classic false opposition; it is the analytical counterpart of

the normative opposition between cosmopolitan liberalism and reactionary nationalism or fundamentalism with which Calhoun introduces his argument. To frame the options in this way would be to miss the variety of forms (other than bounded groups) which affinity, commonality, and connectedness can take. It would also be to miss the variety of ways in which ethnicity 'works'.

Ethnicity cannot be reduced to individual choice, as some political scientists would have it (Hardin, 1995; Hechter, 1987); but it cannot be reduced to bounded groups either. Groupist idioms are as flat as individualist ones. This is not surprising, for groupism is itself a species of individualism, in a double sense, treating groups as collective individuals, and as collections of individuals (Dumont, 1970: 33). As Calhoun and others have observed elsewhere, this sort of 'groupist individualism,' as one might call it, is central to nationalist discourse (Calhoun, 1997: 42ff; Handler, 1988: 32, 39-47).

The alternative, then, to conceptualizing ethnicity, race, and nation as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals - as the imagery of discrete, concrete, tangible, bounded, and enduring 'groups' encourages us to do - is not to adopt an analytical idiom of individual choice, but rather (as Bourdieu never tired of emphasizing) to think in relational, processual, and dynamic terms. This means thinking of ethnicity, race, and nation not in terms of substantial groups or entities, but in terms of practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects, and contingent events. It means thinking of ethnicization, racialization, and nationalization as political, social, cultural, and psychological processes. And it means taking as a basic analytical category not the 'group' as an entity, but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable.<sup>2</sup> Developing a non-groupist analytical vocabulary along lines such as these, it should be emphasized, does not require any form of individualism.

It is puzzling, then, that Calhoun takes an essay on the conceptual difficulties and ambiguities surrounding the term 'identity' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) as exemplifying an asocial, radically individualistic cosmopolitanism. On Calhoun's reading, our essay suggests that 'we should treat individuals as primary and speak of their "identifications"'. But, Calhoun continues, 'to speak only of identifications ... implies that individual persons are real in a sense in which groups and social relationships are not'. From this point, Calhoun observes, it is only a short step to Jeremy Bentham's radically individualist social theory, and 'another short step to Margaret Thatcher's famous assertion that "society does not exist" '.

Calhoun seems to imply further that we (or at least other liberal cosmopolitans, in whose company we are placed) posit 'individuals abstract enough to be able to choose all their "identifications" '; that we treat 'ethnicity as essentially a choice of identifications' and 'neglect the

omnipresence of ascription'; and that we assert 'that cultural difference should be valued only as a matter of individual taste – "identifications", in Brubaker's and Cooper's terms'.

In fact, our essay holds no brief for normative cosmopolitanism or analytic individualism. We do not treat individuals as primary; nor do we treat identification as freely chosen by abstract individuals. Self-identifications, as we argue, always exist in dialectical interplay with ascribed identifications and categorizations, especially those employed by powerful, authoritative institutions – above all, the modern state (although the state is by no means the only powerful 'identifier').

Nor do we 'speak only of identifications'. We argue that 'identity' has become an overburdened term, riddled with ambiguity and riven by contradictory meanings. Seeking to disentangle the many different strands of conceptual and explanatory work done by 'identity', we ask if that work – much of it, as we stress, legitimate and important – might better be done by alternative, less ambiguous analytical terms. 'Identification' is *one* such term. But in addition to identification (and categorization), we argue that other sorts of terms are also needed to do the varied work done by 'identity'. Thus we propose 'self-understanding' as a dispositional term that designates what we call 'situated subjectivity': 'one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act'. As a dispositional term, 'self-understanding' is part of what Bourdieu called *sens pratique*, the practical sense – at once cognitive and emotional – that persons have of themselves and their social world. A further cluster of terms we propose is 'commonality', 'connectedness', and 'groupness'. We do so in order to distinguish the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group from looser forms of affinity or affiliation. Both are important, but, as we note, they 'shape personal experience and condition social and political action in sharply differing ways'.

We conclude our essay as follows: 'to criticize the use of "identity" in social analysis is not to blind ourselves to particularity. It is rather to conceive of the claims and possibilities that arise from particular affinities and affiliations, from particular commonalities and connections, from particular stories and self-understandings, from particular problems and predicaments in a more differentiated manner. Social analysis has become massively, and durably, sensitized to particularity in recent decades; and the literature on identity has contributed valuably to this enterprise. It is time now to go beyond "identity" – not in the name of an imagined universalism, but in the name of the conceptual clarity required for social analysis and political understanding alike'.

It will come as no surprise, then, that I agree entirely with Calhoun that people are 'situated in particular webs of belonging'; that ethnic and other forms of solidarity provide 'networks of mutual support, capacities for communication, [and] frameworks of meaning'; that 'culture and social

relationships are as real as individuals'; that 'no one lives outside particularistic solidarities'; that 'it is important to think of solidarities in the plural'; and that solidarities are organized in a variety of ways. Cooper and I make similar observations in our own paper. I would like to think we are all engaged in the same enterprise: that of constructing an analytical language that can do justice to the complexity of social affinities and affiliations, without falling back on the easily accessible yet impoverished social ontologies – individualist *or* groupist – on which moral and political theories too often rest.

### Notes

- 1 I have drawn freely on parts of that argument here.
- 2 For a development of this line of argument, see Brubaker, 2002.

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## The variability of belonging

*A reply to Rogers Brubaker*

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Rogers Brubaker's generous response clarifies much, but raises an intellectual puzzle: just what is it we disagree about? Like him, I suspect we are mostly in accord – and more in accord with each other than with most others in the field. While this is good news – I would rather play on the same team as Brubaker – it also makes me worry that my representation of his work was unfair. I hope not, but let me try to clarify what is at stake, where we agree, and where I may wish to claim something different from (though not necessarily contradictory to) Brubaker. At the same time, encouraged by the editors, I will expand a bit on some aspects of this related to the importance of ethnicities.

What is at stake for me is understanding social solidarities, especially those formed at levels between what were once called 'primary groups' (immediate families and close friends) and humanity as a whole. This entails grasping the ways in which the social is co-equal to the personal, constitutive of it, and therefore not merely legitimate, but necessary and important. The converse is also true: that persons constitute the social through their actions, and that though these actions are never entirely free of social determinants they do offer us at least a little chance to shape social reality as well as our own place within the social world.

In other words, as human beings we make our histories, but we do so both under conditions not of our own choosing and also in ways that are not independently individual. Each of us is 'social' as we pursue our individual ends, as well as on those occasions when we consciously pursue collective ends. Being 'social' involves being inescapably determined by, dependent on, and committed to other people, patterns of social organization, and culture. We may recognize none of these determinations, dependencies, or commitments – or only recognize them in distorted ways; even if we recognize them more or less accurately we may complain of them rather than honoring them. But they are real, both 'objectively' as phenomena in the world and 'subjectively' as conditions of our own action. Of course, their reality can be grasped dynamically and processually, not only in problematically substantialist ways.

My guess is that Brubaker would agree with all of this. But my worry is that in his generally salutary critique of 'groupism' (Brubaker, 2002) he both underestimates the importance of particular collectivities and adopts language that obscures the necessity and some of the importance of the social. I do not mean to imply that Brubaker advocates an asocial

individualism (and if my original phrasing implied this, I apologize). Nor do I think that most other advocates of cosmopolitan democracy intend this, but I do fear that their arguments and Brubaker's may encourage such a view. Likewise, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) clearly recognize that particularity is important. But I think too much gets tossed out along with the genuinely specious notion that ethnicities, nations, or other social groups are internally homogeneous, sharply bounded, and self-subsistent.

Specifically, I think Brubaker underestimates the constitutive role of culture and the ways in which the general phenomenon of human embeddedness in social relations also necessarily, but unequally, takes the specific form of embeddedness in particular collectivities.

Culture plays a necessary role in making persons – that is, enabling biological humans to be psychological and sociological humans. It also enables our access to each other and to the rest of the world, not least, but not only, through language, and in doing so shapes this access and the people who participate in it. This means not only that culture is in itself an important topic of study, but that it is inherently productive of groupings of those who share more of a common access. I say 'groupings' to avoid for the moment the implications of 'groups' in the strong sense which Brubaker rightly challenges. Cultural differences and commonalities generally do not admit to sharp boundaries. New differences are continually produced within otherwise common cultures, and of course the extent to which reproduction is achieved or innovation encouraged also varies.

What is meant by common culture could of course be unpacked – language, norms, beliefs, and tacit assumptions all matter and are linked but not sharply coupled to each other. I have in mind Raymond Williams' (1989[1968]: 38) stress on the ways in which people marked by class inequalities and domination may nonetheless join in a 'common process of participation in the creation of meanings and values'. E.P. Thompson's (1993) account of 'customs in common' is similar. Common culture is at work in each of the three analytic dimensions Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 17) propose as alternatives to identity: greater or lesser cultural commonality is thus one of the variables contributing to groupness; culture shapes processes of identification and categorization, and culture informs self-understanding. But culture is not simply always already there as though external, but produced and reproduced in a shared process of practical action. Moreover, common culture not only contributes to 'groupness', it contributes to the extent to which groups appear to their members (and sometimes others) as natural and necessary rather than arbitrary and optional. And this is not merely a folk understanding to be supplanted by an academic one.

Brubaker draws on Bourdieu's (1990) account of a practical sense that people have of themselves and their social world. Part of what Bourdieu draws attention to in his analyses of *le sens pratique* is, however, the

intuitive sense people have of what is possible or not possible for them. This helps to shape the direction of their activity (as the dual meaning of 'sens' suggests). It shapes the ways working-class youth collude in their own academic failures, the reasons Béarnaise peasants fail to find wives and account for their own celibacy, and the fatalism with which Kabyle labor migrants accept the inequalities they face. It also shapes, conversely, the ways in which the privileged and consecrated feel the world is open to them, its prizes theirs for the taking, success the result of a meritocratic competition.

All of these examples involve people located in social space and actions shaped by social relations. But it is important that some of them create experiences of individual empowerment while others create experiences of individual incapacity. The privileged feel free as individuals precisely because their habituses are well attuned to the dominant socio-cultural organization. But the less privileged experience a mismatch between their embodied capacities to generate action and some of the fields in which they are forced to act – notably those of economy and state. These contradictions are especially profound and problematic when people with 'habitus' formed in one social setting are confronted with the necessity to try to act on a larger stage, as Bourdieu (1976, 1977, 2002; Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964) saw most strikingly in the transformation of Algeria in the 1950s (but also in contemporary France). This systematic disempowerment has the effect also of binding them to others who share was of seeing and taking hold of the world. In some settings – schools, marriage markets in which girls have new options and urban tastes, broader market economies – their capacities for taking hold of the world and organizing effective action are undermined. They are like rugby players trying to play soccer – and being consistently called for fouls. They are more effective with others who play the same game.

Ethnicity is often like this. It is not merely an attribute of individuals, nor is it any specific attribute shared by all members of one set of people and no others. It is a commonality of understanding, access to the world, and mode of action that facilitates the construction of social relationships and provides a common rhetoric even to competition and quarrels. In one sense it is helpful to say something like people *participate* to varying degrees in ethnicity, rather than that they simply are or are not members of ethnic groups. It is indeed a relational phenomenon not simply a substance. But it is also reproduced in ways that bind people into certain relationships and not others. That ethnicity is not a substance, thus, does not mean it is not productive of groupness. It is, and especially in settings of ethnic diversity and among those who are least empowered as individuals, within the dominant field of social organization and competition. Of course the rich and powerful also benefit from habits that make their interactions with each other smoother. But these tend to be shared more narrowly than with what

are usually called nations and ethnic groups. In any case, objections to this reinforcement of privilege do not necessarily apply to the practical 'groupism' of the subaltern. And ascription and discrimination reinforce this.

Take Islamic identity politics in Algeria. Bourdieu insisted that Islam should not be seen as simply an a priori identity that created political projects or divisions. He stressed the ways in which colonialism, the secular state and, above all, the economic situation led to the production of Islamism. Already in the 1950s he had analyzed increased wearing of the veil as a response to colonialism. In showing that it was not simply a *reflection* of identity, he did indeed stress the larger field of relations. But the same analysis (as well as subsequent cultural-political history) shows that the newly produced or refashioned identity was highly efficacious. Statically presented prior identities explain little in social analysis and mislead us about how the world works, but the projects of establishing identity are crucial to social and political life. They are often contentious. The projects may achieve only minimal success, with loose markers of 'identities' that actors may regard as optional. But they may also produce identities which deeply enough shape actors' self-understandings and understandings of how the world itself is organized that they feel compulsory and are powerful variables in social analysis.

Something of the same problem has long been apparent in studies of nationalism. Author after author has slipped from showing the artificially constructed and sometimes false character of national self-understandings and histories into suggesting that nations are somehow not real. Traditions may be no less real for being invented, however, or even for incorporating falsehoods. The critique of these claimed histories – and especially claims that they justify contemporary violence – is important. But it is a sociological misunderstanding to think that the reality of nations depends on the accuracy of their collective self-representations (Calhoun, 1997).

Brubaker and Cooper put forward several terms as alternatives to 'identity'. 'Identification' and 'self-understanding' distinguish two of the many processes that may be confused if only the omnibus term 'identity' is used; 'groupness' emphasizes the variability of outcomes. But even together these don't adequately get at the ways in which common culture enables some people to work more effectively in relation to specific others than to the world at large. They don't get at the extent to which cultural reproduction is organized inside such commonalties. And accordingly they turn our attention away from the ways in which people are disadvantaged when these commonalties are undermined. Threats to such 'commonalties' of culture and the social practices and relationships they help to make possible produce greater self-consciousness about the scope of their operation. Put another way, challenges to the reproduction of cultural patterns engender efforts to defend them that may contribute to making them sharper

identities. It is not only the categorizations of outsiders that have this effect. Brubaker and Cooper are right to point out how much governing institutions are responsible for substantialist views of ethnicity, thus, but this is not the whole story. People often label the groupings within which they feel most at home and actively defend these.

I agree with Brubaker that for most research purposes it makes sense to treat groups less as fixed entities than as variables. Indeed, 'the tendency to take sharply bounded, putatively homogenous groups as basic constituents of social life' is truly troubling. As it happens, I think that the contrasting tendency – to see individuals as ontologically primary and groups and social relations as secondary or derivative – is even more ingrained in contemporary social science and indeed the modern world. This was the tendency against which I argued in the article published here because of the way in which it informs much cosmopolitanism. But both positions are problematic and I have argued in a variety of places against the versions of the 'groupist' tendency (from Calhoun, 1980 to Calhoun, 1999). Nonetheless, Brubaker may be right that I should have made more of the problem, not just mentioning it in passing as a 'slip' towards which communitarians tend (though it is by no means restricted to them).

For what it is worth, not all who praise community and culture claim that these are sharply bounded or internally homogeneous. For Charles Taylor, thus, to speak of 'the' culture or 'the' community is truly a *lapse* not a consistent commitment to 'groupism'. He has elsewhere made clear that he recognizes not just fuzziness at the boundaries and internal heterogeneity but the interrelationship of a variety of cultural traditions and influences that overlap each other only partially. I stress this because I think communitarian arguments have been taken somewhat unreasonably as exemplars of negative 'groupism' by self-declared cosmopolitans. And in this regard, Brubaker is right to note that individualists are just as prone to substantialist presumptions as groupists.

In any case, as I suggest in the present paper, it is important to pay attention not only to variation in the extent of 'groupness' but also in its form. Whether it is more a matter of networks, of categorical similarities, or of functional interdependence matters a good deal. Likewise, I agree with Brubaker about the value of relational analyses (such as those of Pierre Bourdieu) in trying to overcome the hypostatization of both individuals and groups as self-subsisting entities. But I would stress more than Brubaker and Cooper do that what should be overcome is hypostatization and notions of self-subsistence, not all reference to identity or solidary groups. The problems lie not in the terms 'group', or even 'identity', but in certain tendencies of usage. I agree that the terms are not analytically precise, but they are useful signifiers of analytic issues.

Groups should not be presumed to be sharply bounded or internally homogeneous; they should be seen as variably solidary, salient, and stable.

They should not be presumed by sociologists to be the self-subsistent building blocks of society. But it should be recognized that, from the point of view of actors at least, some of them may appear as always already there, more or less immutable, and powerfully coercive over individuals. It would be a mistake to confuse this with historical priority, but it should be apparent that the (always variable) formation of groups is inherent to social life.

Likewise, collective identities should not be assumed to be attributes common to clearly demarcated collectivities, let alone definitive of the persons in those collectivities. We should be wary of an 'idiom of identity' that leaves us with a 'blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary' (Brubaker and Cooper 2003: 2). But we should also recognize the cultural commonality that encourages 'identification', similar 'self-understandings', and 'groupness'. And even if we reject the facile notions of self-discovery and claims to identity we should see the importance of claims about being distinct from doing – who I am, which is a crucial basis for what I should do.

This is evident, I think, in Bourdieu's (1976) account of the Kabyle peasant guided by the pursuit of honor. The fundamental principle of *nif* is precisely one of identity – as a man of honor (and it is a male principle). Honor accrues to the man who does what is right in itself (not strategically effective). One may manifest *nif* to greater or lesser degree, but central to Bourdieu's contrast of traditional Kabyle society (as he reconstructs it) to colonial Algeria and modern France is the extent to which the Kabyle hierarchy is based on inequalities that are truly personal rather than inherited. The institutions of modern society he shows to be reproducers of an unequal accumulation of social capital (in its various forms) which is bestowed on certain persons for reasons other than their own character and actions.

In all settings, people find themselves in, and actively work to situate themselves in, groups. These groups are composed of relationships that are more or less bounded, more or less dense, more or less richly multiplex (rather than single-purpose), and more or less systematic. They may be of trivial significance, mere demonstrations of human propensities to construct 'us' and 'them' distinctions (as in Tajfel's 1970 classroom experiments). Or they may be profoundly meaningful to the persons involved, or profoundly consequential. Let me revisit one of Brubaker's and Cooper's (2000) examples.

In his famous study of the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard (1940) laid out a brilliantly concise model of a segmentary lineage system. Brubaker and Cooper rightly recognize that such a system constructs the social world in terms of degrees of connectedness and difference, and that affiliation along a 'sliding scale' is a common pattern. Indeed, 'in almost all societies, kinship concepts are symbolic and ideological resources, yet while they shape norms,

self-understandings, and perceptions of affinity, they do not necessarily produce kinship "groups" (2000: 24). As others have emphasized, identities may be situational. Lineage segments don't exist in and of themselves; while people identify with them under some circumstances they are insignificant in others. What scale of 'identification' is significant varies with the social relationships in play in a particular situation.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) stress the evanescent character of lineage segments in the 'sliding scale' of identity. But there is another side to this. Lineages and clans are sometimes the units of struggle or competition in a feud. Feuds seldom involve the organization of collective action precisely at the scale of clan or lineage segment; raids are carried out rather by individuals and smaller groups. So in one sense, 'groupness' looks low. At the same time, all members (or at least all male members) of the relevant category share both liability to attack and responsibility for avenging the honor of the clan or lineage. Brothers and more or less distant cousins are fair game until a balance is achieved. In another sense, thus, there is a high level of groupness. Collective responsibility also translates into an incentive for members of the group to exercise social control over their fellows – since each may be affected by the actions of others. And in these cases, at least, it works with a fairly high level of boundedness and equivalence among members of the group (even though this does not amount to homogeneity on other dimensions). This is what anthropologists have meant by speaking of the 'corporate' character of such descent groups (Smith, 1956; Moore, 1972). And of course it is almost always descent and not affinal ties that organize such groups.

The significance of collective responsibility is not limited to lineage-based societies. This version of it is distinctive because of the logic of honor that binds members of the group. We see this, as Bourdieu (2001) noted, in the concern for purity of the lineage that structures male-dominance among the Kabyle; it also structures loyalties and collective responsibilities of lineage members. But we also see this in the tit-for-tat murders frequent in ethnic conflicts. And while the escalation into genocide reflects the loss of any traditional notion of balance, it still reflects a logic of collective liability. Stories of prior atrocities would circulate and encourage killing of Muslims in Bosnia or Tutsi in Rwanda. These categories were artificially constructed and not precisely bounded, and thus Brubaker's and Cooper's argument about the problems of simply blaming ethnic struggles on identities is on target. But, once called into action as units of collective liability, the categories also gave members compelling reasons to join together in mutual solidarity and defense, and thus to make what had been previously a more abstract groupness more real.

Colonial rule, Brubaker and Cooper note, attempted to impose a more fixed, more sharply bounded, one-to-one mapping of peoples to territories and, in the process, of individuals to groups. One of the products of this was

treating the Nuer as a singular, bounded 'tribe' and failing to recognize that the boundaries of 'Nuer' were fuzzy, situational, and negotiable – much like those of segments within Nuer lineages. Brubaker and Cooper cite Hutchinson's (1995) study of the Nuer in the midst of later civil war, and its refusal 'to reduce the conflict to one of cultural or religious difference between the warring parties and insists instead on a deep analysis of political relationships, struggles for economic resources, and spatial connections'. On this basis they suggest that 'it becomes difficult to see Nuerness as an identity'.

This seems to set a very high standard for recognizing identity – only perfectly bounded, fixed, and internally homogenous categories share identity; family resemblances are not accepted. I would rather say that Nuerness is clearly an identity – but perhaps not a clear one. It is mobilized by some, evaded by others, used, perhaps abused, lacking in clear boundaries and shifting over time and with contexts. It is not a trump card against other identities. What Brubaker and Cooper show is that it is not sharply bounded, fixed, and prior to the relationships and struggles of social life. The Sudanese civil war didn't result from differences among internally homogenous groups, and it certainly can't be reduced to that. Reasoning about ethnic conflict often makes precisely this error – and not just in the Sudan but in the former Yugoslavia and USSR, in Indonesia, and in the Middle East. And in rejecting this I am completely in accord with Brubaker, Cooper, and Hutchinson. Yet it is cold comfort to those shot because they are on the wrong side, those whose children starve because the government blocks the delivery of food aid, or those who wonder whether their way of life and indeed their lineage(s) can survive.

The Sudanese civil war – it still drags on – is about region as well as ethnicity, and about economic resources, language, and religion – and each of these in ways influenced by international actors as well as competing national projects in the Sudan. Chevron developed the oil fields near Bentiu, Arabicization of the Sudanese educational system was bankrolled by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and the resurgent Islamism that helped to reopen conflict and intensify some of its latest phases was stimulated by the Iranian Revolution and participates in a far-reaching network of teachings, contests over orthodoxy, and political struggles. So the civil war certainly can't be reduced to a priori tensions among ethnic groups defined on the basis of hard and fast identities. Against this target Brubaker and Cooper are in the right and deserve every success.

But this doesn't entail quite so much criticism of 'identity' as they level at it. First, we should note that 'Nuer' means one thing in the Rubkona or Ruweng countryside, another thing in Juba (the main regional city), and still another thing in Khartoum. It is a fluid identifier, or 'identification', thus, and Brubaker and Cooper are right that Evans-Pritchard's account probably made it too self-contained. But part of the difference among the

three settings I mentioned is that Nuer make up less of the social universe as one moves from countryside to small city to capital. In Khartoum, during the lull between the two main phases of the civil war, Nuer migrants were much in evidence – partly because of a distinctive occupational niche. A bit like the Iroquois in some US cities in a different era, they were heavily over-represented in construction work and especially up on the beams and scaffolds. They stood out all the more for their thinness, height, and the elegance of their movements. Dinka, the traditional enemies of the Nuer (but also distinguished by a much fuzzier boundary than Evans-Pritchard had suggested) were more apt to show up in jobs requiring a modicum of education and a more ‘western’ presentation of self – as doormen at international hotels, for example, or public officials (not to mention basketball stars).

Ethnicity isn’t simply something Nuer ‘have’ which always and indelibly marks them (though in southern Sudan one ought not to ignore physical markings like scarification and tooth removal). Such an implication is part of what bothers Brubaker and Cooper in many uses of ‘identity’. Certainly ethnicity was attributed to the Nuer by the British colonial state, and both the colonial and the new Sudanese states reified boundaries like that between Nuer and Dinka. But ethnicity is also constructed out of the juxtaposition of Nuer to others in a social field expanded by state-making, market economies, and migration to cities. Ethnicity becomes significant largely because the relational identities of the kinship system do somewhat less work. They don’t disappear, and they still organize a good deal of Nuer life. The categorical identities of clanship are also potent. But the larger categorical identity – Nuer – becomes newly salient. Rather than simply a sliding scale of connectedness, what Granovetter (1973) called ‘the strength of weak ties’ becomes operative. Now, to be sure, Granovetter identified strong ties as ‘in-group’ and weak ties as those of mere acquaintanceship often outside primary groups (thus perhaps participating in Brubaker’s ‘groupism’ even though he is clearly a relational analyst). But the relevant point is that scattered ties, those not reinforced by being knit into dense networks or accompanied by distinctively strong normative constructions, play a significant role in organizing relationships. In Khartoum, thus, the ethnic (or ‘tribal’) identity organizes relationships among Nuer who are genealogically distant (or would seem so back in the grazing lands). Being Nuer thus matters in a new way in the cities.

If this involves a dilution of the kinship system, it also commonly brings a sharpening of categorical boundaries and identity pressures within them. Sharing ethnicity does not automatically make the Nuer a strong group. It yields a category of relatively similar people. Within such a category, there may be pockets like families or neighborhoods in which ties are denser and more binding. And of course what counts as ethnicity is subject to manipulation and the claims of some to represent others. The Nuer have very little

capacity for organized collective action on the scale of the whole ethnic category, though various subgroups and leaders may claim to speak for all.

There are a variety of stakes in ethnicity; strong collective liability is extreme and capacity for collective action at the level of the group as a whole rare to the point of non-existence. But mild versions of collective responsibility structure relationships as people help their co-ethnics and feel implicated in the actions of others. The behavior of each Nuer – or each Sikh in Toronto or Korean in New York – reflects on the larger ethnic group in ways other members can't easily escape. One may make more or less of ethnicity, both as a collection of cultural contents and as a predisposition to certain relationships. As in the main example of the strength of weak ties, ethnicity can help one get a job. But one may also 'pass' as a member of a different group (or simply as someone not marked by a stigmatized identity). Indeed, the example of passing suggests some of the purchase the notion of identity retains (even if, as Brubaker and Cooper suggest, it is imprecise and overworked). With its implications of a 'real' identity foresworn, the idea of passing is clearly ideologically loaded, different from the simpler notion of changing group affiliation (which, of course, is also possible, though usually difficult in the case of ethnic groups).

It is common to speak of 'discovering' one's identity – in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, or more individual definitions. This is, of course, misleading. It involves misrecognizing as natural that which is socio-culturally produced, and as always already there that which is at least in part the product of action. Nonetheless, the common usage reveals the extent to which 'self-understanding' can be experienced as a matter of gaining a 'substantive' right answer to the question of 'who I am', or as a matter of recognition not construction, compulsory not optional. Ethnicity is neither clearly bounded, nor fixed, nor always already there. Brubaker is quite right about this. But in debunking substantivist illusions about groups, we ought not to lose sight of the reasons why ethnicity may *feel* binding, may be not only an effect of social relations but itself part of the organization of practical action, and may predispose people to form and value groups – even if these are not perfectly bounded, internally homogenous, or the a priori building blocks of social structure.

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