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Daring Theses on Identity

The concept of *identity* has cropped up in the past few decades, not only in philosophical, sociological and social psychological texts, strictly understood, but also in the fields of anthropology, history and political science. In fact, the concept has made appearances in political statements, TV talk shows, bank fliers and commercial home pages. We can infer, on these bases, not only the trivialization – at times banalization – of the concept, but also its inherent disorderliness.

A number of paths stand open to the social scientist to avoid this disorder. She/he can exchange the expression 'identity' for *representation, life history*, etc. or can hang on adjectives such as *political, national, ethnic, gender*, etc. to the concept, in order to better define the subject of study. The former, on the one hand, necessitates extraordinary determination and theoretical talent and, on the other – one swallow does not make a summer – is not sure to fundamentally alter the scientific and public discourse on identity. The latter, in turn, only masks, but does not solve, the theoretical problems hidden in the disarray. My paper seeks to place itself between the two extremes above. It accepts the disarray as the status quo and endeavors only to append explanations. It considers as its main task to identity of the context of particular uses of concepts, with special attention to ethnic identity as reflected by minority studies joined.

Identity (politics) and modernity

Almost all social science literature assumes that the question of identity is a specialty of the modern age.¹ The dissolution of pre-modern society has

¹ The statement above cannot be expounded on within the narrow framework of this paper. I don't even attempt to introduce the existing voluminous literature. I consider the following works authoritative of the virulent scientific discourse of the mid-eighties on the connection between identity and modernity. Habermas, Jürgen: *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne. Zwölf Vorlesungen*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1985; Habermas, Jürgen: *Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt*. Leipzig: Jürgen Verlag, 1990; Bauman, Zygmunt: *Modernity and Ambiva-*

rendered the formation and recognition of identity problematic: modernity re-ordered not only forms of collective identity (reference is most often made to family and feudal links) but also fundamentally affected the formation of personal identity. Modernity – because it has radically changed previous relationships to space and time – has left us, individuals, with the challenge of establishing our personal and social selfhood over and over again. In other words, we must be capable of relating a coherent *life history* considered and accepted as authentic by our environment. Our mere 'ancestry' does not make who we are obvious – our personal life history must also support our identity.

This other identity arises not through the homogenous cultural systems of previous times, but out of sizable competing, cultural discourses that emphasize exactly the *incompleteness, fragmentation and contradiction* of collective and personal being – or the growing insecurity of identity. At the same time certain groups continue to call for categorical and fixed forms of identity. While in earlier times the primary goal of identity formation and perception consisted of self-expression and of the fulfillment of autonomy, the diversity of competing identity models make recognition the real challenge. Moreover, new social expectations have led to the institutionalization of identity creation and to the development of *identity politics*. While personal identity was diverted into political space, and private life into the public sphere – lesbian and gay identity politics, for example – the close interconnection between personal and social identity, and power relations became manifest.²

lence. Cambridge: Polity, 1991; Giddens, Anthony: *Modernity and Self-Identity – Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Oxford/Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991; Bauman, Zygmunt: *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity, 1991; Hannerz, Ulf: *Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organisation of Meaning*. New York: Columbia U. P., 1992; Beck, Ulrich – Giddens, Anthony – Lash, Scott: *Reflexive Modernisation – Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Oxford/Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994; Lash, Scott – Friedman, Jonathan (eds.): *Modernity and Identity*. Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992; Appadurai, Arjun: *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimension of Globalisation*. Minneapolis/London: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996; Hall, Stuart – du Gay, Paul (eds.): *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London/Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 1996; Castells, Manuel: *The Power of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. 5–67; Sakai, Naoki: *Modernity and It's Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism. South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 87, Nr. 3, 1988. 475–504; Bauman, Zygmunt: From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity. In Hall, Stuart and du Gay, Paul (eds.): *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, 1994. 18–36.

² On this, see Foucault's 1976 lecture. Foucault, Michel: In Verteidigung der Gesellschaft. Vorlesungen am Collège de France (1975–76). Vorlesung vom 17. März 1976. http://www.momo-berlin.de/Foucault_Vorlesung_17_03_76.html. As to the gender aspect, not to be discussed here, see Fehér, Ferenc and Heller, Ágnes: *Biopolitics*. Ashgate/Aldershot, 1994. <http://www.euro.centre.org>. Foucault, Michel: *Technologies of the Self*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

Surely, not only social scientists, but also the competing cultural discourses and newly arisen identity politics are 'responsible' for the disorder generated around identity. Nonetheless, few empirical studies seem to have taken notice of these changes.³ Sociology occasionally operates with a concept of identity that sees the latter as categorical and fixed – the aggregation of functions inherited by descent and acquired by socialization. Identity is seen as a compound of characteristics that may even be mapped graphically. Unfinished, fragmented and contradictory identities are grouped in the category of 'inexplicable,' assuming quantification even allows for their visualization. The constitutive nature of identity and its embedment in space and time – its historicity – cannot be evaluated in such a framework. Sociological snapshots may thereby – in a veiled or open manner – conserve an essentialist understanding of identity that is already seen as outmoded and is, in political terms, outright dangerous. This *reduction* is one of the factors causing the terminological confusion noted above.

Identity, Time, Narration

The chaos is only heightened by the disappearance of interpretations of difference (*alterity*) from discussions of *identity* – at least in the sphere of survey-based identity studies – despite the conclusions of classic social psychological, social historical and ethnological studies to the contrary. How could we show *what* we are, if we didn't experience our difference from and similarity to the Other? How could we be something without designating, over and over again, the boundary of this *something*? I am not speaking only of boundaries here, but of the *continuous* transformation of these boundaries – or the performative nature of identity.

Sociology – orienting itself by the requirements of the dominant cultural and political discourse and mistakenly alluding to its role as the science of social phenomena – seems to have forgotten a crucial feature of individual or collective identity, namely its basis in *individual experience*. In other words, social

³ It seems that today, even the ability of sociology to acknowledge the social changes taking place around it is questionable. See: Lepenies, Wolf: *Die drei Kulturen. Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft*. München, Wien: Hanser, 1985; Boudon, Raymond: European Sociology: The Identity Lost? In Nedelmann, B. – Sztompka, P (eds.): *Sociology in Europe – In Search of Identity*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993. 27–46; Wallerstein, Immanuel: The Heritage of Sociology; The Promise of Social Science. Presidential Address, XIVth World Congress of Sociology. Montreal, 26 July 1998. In *Current Sociology*, Vol. 47, Nr. 2, 1998. 1–37; Bauman, Zygmunt: Parvenu and Pariah: The Heroes and Victims of Modernity. In Beilharz, Peter (ed.): *The Bauman Reader*. La Trobe University/Blackwell, 1990.

systems, cultures,⁴ etc. are unable to create and maintain identities unless the individuals constituting the former esteem these identities and assign them personal meaning. It is, for example, difficult to imagine a 'Hungarian collective identity' without individual regard. This means, on the one hand, that collective identities can emerge only *on the basis of the analogic transmission* of similarities (also) individually perceived.⁵ On the other, it means that we are led back to the embedment of identity in *time*, specifically the phenomenological theory that perception, in time, is approachable only in a narrative manner.⁶ To put matters more simply: individuals are always entangled in (*his*)stories.⁷ This entanglement doesn't just help orientation in life, by means of cultural competences inherited through narration. Narration means much more than this: we get closer to ourselves with the help of our stories. And now we have arrived at the point where we can ask the question of what it means to be identical with ourselves.

Personal Identity

Personal identity is created from the tension between temporal continuity and its lack or insecurity.⁸ One example of this peculiarity is the self-image we create of our bodies and ourselves, through the perception of our bodies. Our bodies have constant 'borders;' but within these borders – with the passage of time – change constantly, while our perception of them as ours remains unchanged. Our physical identity extends as far as our life span.

The 'accidents' that befall us – destabilizing our identity – cause deviation and, as 'events of fate'⁹, create accordance, so long as our identity is re-

⁴ I use the word 'culture' in the sense of a 'creative culture.' Compare Greverus, Ina Maria: Culture: Creation – Captivity – Collage. A Plea for a Controversial Term. *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, Vol. 5, Nr. 1, 1996. 127–160.

⁵ Halbwachs and Ricoeur formulate similar assertions in the context of collective memory. Halbwachs, Maurice: *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; Ricoeur, Paul: *Memory, History, Forgetting*. University of Chicago Press, 2004. See also Welzer, Harald: *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*. München: Beck, 2002.

⁶ Ricoeur, Paul: Threefold mimesis. In Ricoeur, Paul: *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. 53.

⁷ Schnapp, Wilhelm: *In Geschichten verstrickt. Zum Sein von Mensch und Ding*. Hamburg: Richard Meiner V. 1953.

⁸ I follow Paul Ricoeur's train of thought in this portion of the paper. Ricoeur, Paul: *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

⁹ I cannot expound on the concept of 'event of fate' in this paper. Instead, I cite László Tengelyi, who explained the concept as follows: "The concept of fate builds on the idea that life history, as the carrier of identity, is a closed whole; but the expression 'event of fate' denotes an occurrence as a result of which identity as the casing for life history shatters and opens up." Tengelyi László: *Élettörténet és önazonosság*. [Life history and Ident-

stored. The continuity and instability of identity, the contradiction between its correspondence and confrontation, is regularly resolved by our determination to *seem who we are*. This inner determination compels us to continuously self-correct – to redefine our identity.¹⁰

Even in its simplest form, the question of identity can be posed in two ways: What am I? And, who am I? These questions point to the two essential dimensions of personal identity. The question 'what am I' is linked to the type of identity identified by Ricoeur as *identity of the same* (*idem*-identity or *memeté*), based on the correspondence of external features, traits and characteristics. The moral unity of these latter, the *character*, makes the discovery of similarities possible: character is in effect the 'what' of 'who.' This is what we can demonstrate with linguistic tools, since characteristics are specifiable and countable. Identity of the same is, on the one hand, a *numerical* correspondence – we say something is 'one and the same' – and, on the other, a relational one – 'I am like the Other' – in other words, a *qualitative* sameness allowing for substitution. In addition, our *idem*-identity is *continuous*, durable in time: in this manner we can speak of ourselves from birth until the moment of death as male or female, French and/or Hungarian. We can attribute to ourselves values, ideas, models and heroes, despite the fact that difference constantly threatens this sameness. Character is thus the aggregation of stable dispositions on the basis of which an individual can be identified.

Paradoxically, in contrast to 'what am I' we cannot answer the question 'who am I' with narrative tools: 'I am me' ('I am who I am,' etc.) we answer. *Identity of the self* (*ipse*-identity, *ipseité*) is in reality a feeling, nourished by inner experiences, that necessarily comprises the time-horizon strung between past incident and future expectation, while being unable, itself, to reveal this horizon.

"The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the *Thou*; and as I become the *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting."¹¹

While I may feel that, through stories, allegories, metaphors and countless other linguistic tropes, I have clarified to the Other who I am, the Other only retains a sensation of what she would feel in my place. Naturally,

tity.] In Tengelyi, László: *Élettörténet és sorseseemény* [Life History and the Event of Fate]. Budapest: Atlantisz, 1998. 43.

¹⁰ Ricoeur, Paul: The Self and Narrative Identity. In Ricoeur: *Oneself as Another*, 140–168.

¹¹ Buber, Martin: *I and Thou*. 2. Edition, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958. 24–25.

the 'place' of the I for the Other only emerges through the narration of the I, while the Other relies on her selfhood in the construction of what we deem: I in the Other's place. The moral conception of *ipse*-identity is accordingly not character, but *self-preservation* – the attempt to ensure that the Other can rely on me. Ricoeur formulated the moral problem hidden in personal identity as the following:

"The term 'responsibility' unites both meanings: 'counting on' and 'being accounted for.' It unites them, adding to them the idea of a *response* to the question 'Where are you?' asked by another who needs me. This response is the following: 'Here I am!' a response that is a statement of self-constancy."¹²

Narrated identity creates a relationship between selfhood and sameness. But we do not have a need for narrative identity only in extreme cases. Our personal identity cannot do without a linguistic formulation of it.

"In narrativizing the aim of the true life, narrative identity gives it the recognizable features of characters loved or respected. Narrative identity makes the two ends of the chain link up with one another: the permanence in time of character and that of self-constancy."¹³

If this is so – and here it would not be futile to work out philosophical and literary theories with the help of the fresh results from cognitive psychology and life history studies – then what kind of conclusions can a social scientist (searching for the empirical) draw from the foregoing? What does one who studies 'identity' really study?

It can be ventured that, empirically, one gets closest to identity through (life history) narration. I don't imply thereby that through the study of life history identity itself becomes 'findable' or reconstructable by means of scientific tools; since, as the history swings between *idem* and *ipse*, so we also hear-read only this history, namely with the help of another history (our scientific text) in which we interpret the original (itself no longer identity, merely a story narrating the I). Thus, the biographical method, in essence, interprets *narrative identity* – the tension between character and self-preservation and its narrative corrective mechanisms. This is the case even if some representatives of the approach have exchanged the word identity for life history.¹⁴

¹² Ricoeur, *ibid.* 165.

¹³ Ricoeur, *ibid.* 166.

¹⁴ The literature on this topic could (also) fill a library. For this reason, I only refer to summaries of the growing influence of the biographical method in the social sciences. Chamberlayne, Prue – Bornat, Joanna – Wengraf, Tom (eds.): *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science*. London: Routledge, 2000.

At first glance, it may seem that large, quantitative surveys move in the realm of *sameness*, insofar as they take as their foundation the correspondence of external features, traits and characteristics, established and acquired abilities, and fixed similarities – in other words, those permanent dispositions that make individuals and groups identifiable. Thus, we would need to conclude that these studies quantify the ‘supports’ of selfhood, abolishing the narration so troubling to quantitative understandings (due to the difficulty of measuring histories). But is this really the case? Does it make sense to study sameness – character and its specific features – when the individual or community is uprooted from the realm of narrative knowledge?¹⁵ Can we attribute meaning to quantified features without taking account of the histories of these features? It is highly likely that this is not the case. Behind models of sameness lurk muted sounds – histories muttering softly.

Until this point, we have focused only on personal identity, or the individual perception of collective identities. Though I believe the alternative model of identity sketched above fundamentally questions the usage of the concept in everyday and scientific discourse, many may perceive only a nuance of difference magnified into philosophy and psychology. The identities discussed here are, after all, only feelings without any effect on social action, the stubborn empirical social scientist may respond. They are mere narratives without power, she may continue, which barely filter through the uproar of common talk. But let us not give up so easily: let us turn our inquisitive gaze from the personal to the collective, from emotion to action, from narrative to discourse. It is time to bring together the relational nature of identity with the concepts of social relationships and social action.

Ethnicity as social relationship

Identity – whether individual or collective – on the one hand assumes personal meaning and, on the other, manifests itself only in interpersonal *webs of reference*. Our sameness becomes visible, perceivable and thereby examinable in social actions (understood as any external or internal hu-

¹⁵ Other than Ricoeur, see Lyotard, Jean-François: *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984; Habermas, Jürgen: Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt. In: Welsch, W. (ed.): *Wege aus der Moderne. Schlüsseltexte der Postmoderne-Diskussion*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994. 177–192; Rorty, Richard: Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity. *Praxis International*, Vol. 4, Nr. 1, 1984. 32–44.

man behavior or activity, its omission or countenance) which, according to the intended understanding of the actor, relate to the behavior of others and orient themselves according to these latter.¹⁶ External interaction, however, becomes *internalized*, again with time, into familiarity, craft and tradition. The next question to be put to quantitative studies of identity would thus run as follows: Does it make sense to study identity if the individual or community examined is torn from the realm of social actions and thereby that of custom?

But let us go further, since social actions only appear peripherally in studies of social identity (though much more in conflict-oriented media.) The concept of social relationship brings us closer to group identity.

“The term ‘social relationship’ will be used to denote the behavior of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus consists entirely and exclusively in the existence of a pronality that there will be a meaningful course of social action – irrespective, for the time being, of the basis for this probability. Thus, as a defining criterion, it is essential that there should be at least a minimum of mutual orientation of the action of each to that of the others... Hence, the definition does not specify whether the relation of the actors is co-operative or the opposite.”¹⁷

Collective identities are thus social linkages that merely create the *possibility* that a national or ethnic community with a sense of group will emerge.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hereafter, – accepting the charge of being old-fashioned – I follow Max Weber. In other words, I use the ‘weapon’ of empirical sociology in order to critique it. Weber, Max: *Economy and Society*. Vol. 1. (ed. By Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich) Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1978.

¹⁷ Weber, *ibid.* 26–27.

¹⁸ Weber discusses the links of ethnic communities in a separate chapter. (*Ibid.* 385–398.) He refines the concept above in the following manner: “The belief in group affinity, regardless of whether it has any objective foundation, can have important consequences especially for the formation of political community. We shall call ‘ethnic groups’ those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (*Geneinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. This belief tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community, unless drastic differences in the custom, physical type, or above all, language exist among its members. This artificial origin of

Weberian terminology questions all essentialist understandings (grown increasingly popular in recent years) that accept collective identity-formations as given and fixed; at the same time romantic notions that consider solidarity the main organizational principle of social groups are done away with. Ethnic, national, etc. social relationships are only presumed forms of belonging that create the *probability* that certain social acts will take place. These relationships must be created anew from act to act, while even their intended meaning may change – to the point that they disintegrate and break off.

Social relationships conceal alterity and identity. The equivalent of alterity in Weberian terminology is ‘struggle’ (the singling out and displacement of difference); that of alterity is ‘community’ and ‘association.’

“A social relationship will be called ‘communal’ (*Vergemeinschaftung*) if and so far as the orientation of social action – whether in the individual case, on the average, or in the pure type – is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together.”¹⁹

It is an important condition here that social relationships are ‘very heterogeneous states of affair,’ since every single participant endows them with a different meaning. Thus, for example, there may be those who perceive social relationships aimed at national or ethnic identity as a community, and those who view them as an association. The second group does not take part in term because of feelings of subjective belonging, but on the basis of the equalization or connection of interest. Common characteristics, situations or forms of behavior are not sufficient to create a community. A uniform answer to possible exclusion is also, in itself, insufficient for this purpose. Community comes about with a *collective* answer: the orientation of individuals toward each other (not the environment). Common language – one of the cornerstones of identity studies – is only a *tool* of understanding according to the Weberian approach, not a primary content of community. Only the *conscious contrast* that emerges between members of a linguistic group and outsiders creates a community, of which language is one – also conscious – foundation.²⁰

the belief in common ethnicity follows the previously described pattern of rational association turning into personal relationships.” Weber, *ibid.* 389.

¹⁹ Weber, *ibid.* 40.

²⁰ Weber, *ibid.* 42–43.

It is foreseeable that this approach will be inadequate to bolster empirical sociological efforts that unilaterally and pre-emptively construe collective groups.²¹ But even if we are more understanding and permissive of quantitative social scientific approaches to the measurement (or appraisal) of collective identity, the classification of community feeling by the Weberian definition as a thing within the realm of ‘beliefs in belonging’ looms large. Does this mean, ad absurdum, that the constant identity surveys that form the basis of political, social welfare, etc. programs and that, in part, require common discussion of community are really only the summaries and typologies of beliefs and opinions? The next question can hence be formulated as follows: which are the communities – assuming they even exist – whose members’ social action is really guided by ‘subjective belief in belonging’?

National and ethnic landscape

It would be only right to construct my argument in this chapter on the basis of theories of nation and nationality, as I did in the context of personal identity in chapter III and collective identity in chapter IV. However, such an approach would, I feel, burst the bounds of this study. I hope it will therefore suffice to state that scientific and common discourse in these areas is as contradictory as on the subject of identity²² and that some theorists’ conceptions are not far removed from the Ricoeurian model presented above.²³ My argument will thus continue

²¹ A number of anthropologists have launched serious attacks against such reduction. Brubaker, Rogers: *Ethnicity without groups*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. 2004; Calhoun, Craig: *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. In Calhoun, Craig (ed.): *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Blackwell: Oxford 1994. 9–36.

²² I only refer to the milestones among the basic works on nation and nationalism. Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983; Gellner, Ernest: *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983; Smith, Anthony D.: *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986; Hobsbawm, Eric J.: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge University Press, 1990; Smith, Anthony D.: *National Identity*. London: Penguin, 1991.

²³ Anthony Smith, for example, states the following about national identity: “Finally, a sense of national identity provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture. It is through a shared, unique culture that we are enabled to know ‘who we are’ in the contemporary world. By rediscovering that culture we ‘rediscover’ ourselves, the ‘authentic self’, or so it has appeared to many divided and disoriented individuals who have had to contend with the vast changes and uncertainties of the modern works.” Smith, *ibid.* 17. Smith naturally does not go so far as to inspect national identities as optional and situational phenomena and refers, in a number of places, to the ‘discovery’ of identity, rather than its construction.

in the context of communities; while the nation will loom only at the foggy horizon of my study.²⁴

The post-structuralist and post-colonial theories of the eighties and nineties²⁵ attempted to rethink the concepts of community, communality and ethnicity. These approaches generally rested on the assumption that modern capitalism and liberalism had created exclusive democracies from which wide social layers and groups were simply shut out.²⁶ Poststructuralist critique ultimately put emphasis on locality, rather than community and communality. However, the theory of the complex of locality has not been worked out to this day. The most attractive attempt is perhaps that of Appadurai, who emphasized not only the complexity, symbolism and connotations of locality, but also sketched a model of the fabrication of locality through the separation of the concepts of locality and neighborhood.

Appadurai works with concepts that protect us from the notion that:

“group identities necessarily imply that cultures need to be seen as spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or ethnically homogeneous forms.”²⁷

Ethnic landscape (ethnoscape), though an important characteristic of social life, is not a given, but must constantly be created anew – this (as social relationship) gives the true social form, *neighborhood* (community), its context and emotional framework. Neighborhood, in turn, construes and forms the foregoing context. With this approach, Appadurai not only deprives group identity of the requirement of ethnic homogeneity, but also radically breaks with earlier theories, as the relationship between ethnicity and neighborhood shows. The theory also crosses the Weberian conception of ethnic community and depicts local ethnos as an ethnically heterogeneous relationship. Through the introduction of *neighborhood* it furthermore directs attention to

²⁴ In this context, I consider Peter Burke’s study authoritative on the link between identity and nation. Burke, Peter: *We, the people: popular culture and popular identity in modern Europe*. In Lash-Friedman, *ibid.* 293–308.

²⁵ Compare Bhabha, Homi K.: *DissemiNation. Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation*. In Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.): *Nation and Narration*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990. 301–327; Featherstone, Mike – Lash, Scott – Robertson, Ronald: *Global Modernities*. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage, 1995; Chambers, Iain and Curti, Lidia: *The Post-Colonial Question*. London/New York: Routledge, 1996; Cvetkovich, Ann and Kellner, Douglas: *Articulating the Global and the Local*. Boulder/Colorado: Westview Press, 1997; Featherstone, Mike – Lash, Scott: *Spaces of Culture*. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage, 1999; Tomlinson, John: *Globalisation and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

²⁶ I will not go into the communitarian discourse that emerged from this approach here.

²⁷ Appadurai, Arjun: *The Production of Locality*. In Appadurai, *ibid.* 183.

communality, one of the loosest forms of grouping characterized by social action and guided by feelings of subjective belonging – seeing as one of the basic principles of neighborhood is exactly that its members maintain distance despite (or perhaps because of) physical proximity.²⁸ Neighborhoods rarely – generally in response to the fact or perception of external threat – appear together and assume distinct form, and again fall apart, loosen ties or narrow to dormant social relationships once danger has passed. The boundaries of neighborhood are fixed loosely and appear, paradoxically, only when they have ceased to exist and have transformed into some sort of ‘closed association.’ The dialectics of distance maintenance and interdependence, in the first place, the low intensity and frequency of community action, in the second, and the malleable aggregation and open circle of participants, in the third, dovetails with the concrete group-formations of post-modern societies.

*Ethnoscap*es are fragile and sensitive – while large scale social formations (including discourses) are most threatening to their existence. Appadurai considers modern nation states²⁹ the most hostile of these formations.

“From the point of view of modern nationalism, neighborhoods exist principally to incubate and reproduce compliant national citizens – and not for the production of local subjects. Locality for the modern nation-state is either a site of nationally appropriated nostalgias, celebrations, and commemorations or a necessary condition of the production of nationals. Neighborhoods as social formations represent anxieties for the nation-state, as they usually contain large or residual spaces where the techniques of nationhood (birth control, linguistic uniformity, economic discipline, communications efficiency, and political loyalty) are likely to be either weak or contested. At the same time, neighborhoods are the source of political workers and party officials, teachers and soldiers, television technicians and productive farmers. Neighborhoods are not dispensable, even if they are potentially treacherous. For the project of the nation-state, neighborhoods represent a perennial source of entropy and slippage. They need to be policed almost as thoroughly as borders.”³⁰

It thus seems that one of the wellsprings of group identity formation today is not so much perceived similarity but rather resistance to the collective

²⁸ Weber, *ibid.* 360–362.

²⁹ Manuel Castells’ observations about the distinction between ‘nation state’ and ‘nationalism’ are worth considering. Manuel Castells, *ibid.* 5–67.

³⁰ Appadurai, *ibid.* 190–191.

identifiers attributed to us. Moreover, locality comes about with the help of familiarities necessary to the formation and maintenance of ethnic landscape. In this manner, however, it is not the feeling of collective belonging – to return to my earlier argument: not the recognition of sameness, and thereby identity support – that is at stake, 'merely' the assurance of the self-validating and self-acknowledging power of associations in the face of oppressive social formations. In other words, if we speak of ethnic landscape as one of the dominant spaces of identity formation we are no longer moving in the dimension of collective identity, but rather in that of institutions. Appadurai's observations do not refer to the Weberian community – though he does speak of neighborhoods –, nor to the transformation of the community's consciousness, nor to the *identity politics and discourses* formed for its acceptance.

At the end of my study, the following, seemingly daring, conclusions offer themselves.

1. Personal identity is a presumably unattainable phenomenon for empirical studies, since only its narrative level, reported similarity, is available for scientific understanding. The quantification of character – or sameness – threatens to bring about an approach whereby situational manifestations are viewed as permanent; and temporary groupings are perceived as solid communities. The haphazardness and incompleteness of character-combinations, moreover, forecasts that in the new millennium it is difference that will be *normal*, not life-long similarity. These social changes urge the elaboration of a sociology of *alterity*, rather than identity.

2. It appears that there is no such thing as ethnic community (at least not in the habitual understanding) – or if there is, not in a relevant sense. This statement is perhaps not so absurd if we take seriously that order, ethnicity, nation, etc. are all historical categories. Possibly, ethnicity is finished in this day and age. From philosophy through the history of ideas to cultural anthropology, ethnicity is being replaced, bit-by-bit, with the concepts of common narratives, social spaces, ethnic landscapes and groupings. The approach to these concepts is limited, however. The silent human groups deprived of their spaces cannot be seen in this new frame yet.³¹

3. Varied loose communities are imagined, configured and embodied, from time to time, in landscapes, spaces, narratives and groupings; generally

³¹ Colonial studies drew attention to the degree to which this is the case. See Spivak, Gayatri C: Can the Subaltern Speak? *Wedge* Nr. 7–8, 1985. 120–130; Chambers, Iain: Signs of silence, lines of listening. In Chambers – Curti, *ibid.* 47–64.

as a consequence of resistance to a (feeling of) threat. In other words, there are politics of identities – or at least these are most visible – that fight for the right to and recognition of the existence of experiences common to the group, but particular in the context of a larger unit.³² It seems that the fixation, inference and enumeration of collective identities, or homogenization, is not so much an efficient tool of science (and thereby understanding) as of power (and thereby control). Science can finally return to the quantitative *and* qualitative analysis of social acts and power relations.

Translated by Enikő Horváth

³² Similar observations guide Clifford Geertz. See Geertz, Clifford: “Primordial Loyalties and Standing Entities. Anthropological Reflections on the Politics of Identity.” Delivered at Collegium Budapest. Budapest, 13. December 1993.
<http://www.colbud.hu/main/PubArchive/PL/PL07-Geertz.pdf>