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Connecting Self to Society

Belonging in a Changing World

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connection to the surrounding world. Belonging can be characterized as a sense of ease, often unnoticed until disturbed or under threat. Because we undergo change, for example as the result of ageing, and because the surrounding world never stays static, our sense of belonging undergoes change over time. The concept also allows us to focus on the complexity of people's connection with the world, because belonging can have multiple sources, including people, cultures and the material world. Belonging is a concept that allows for a sociology that is situated 'where we are actually located, embodied in the local historicity and particularities of our lived worlds' and connects this with 'the powers, processes, and relations that organize and determine the everyday context of that seeing' (Smith, 1987: 8, 9).

In Chapters 7–9, I examine three different sources of belonging – culture, relationships and the material world – and their impact on our sense of self. Although they are treated as distinct domains, it is important to remember that they are interlinked and are therefore not experienced as singular, nor can their independent impacts always be determined. These overlaps will be discussed throughout Chapters 7–9.

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Introduction

In his highly entertaining book *Pies and Prejudice: In Search of the North*, Stuart Maconie (2007: xii), 'a northerner in exile', recounts his 'attempt to rediscover … my own inner northerner'. Maconie describes how the idea for the book came after a Sunday brunch, during which one of his friends asked 'Where are the sun-dried tomatoes?', to which Maconie had replied 'They're next to the cappuccino maker'. Maconie attributes this as a key moment in realizing that he had become a 'southerner':

> A ghastly, pregnant silence fell. Slowly, we turned to meet each other's gaze. We didn't say anything. We didn't need to. Each read the other's unspoken thought; we had changed. We had become the kind of people who rustle up brunch on Sundays … the kind of people who had sun-dried tomatoes and cappuccino makers. Southerners, I suppose. (Maconie, 2007: xi)

Whichever country you live in, you will no doubt recognize the sentiment expressed by Maconie regarding the boundary between 'us' and 'them', with 'them' having laughable habits such as drinking cappuccino, whereas 'we' do not bother with such frivolities. From a sociological point of view, this is how cultures operate, by demarcating *our* way of life in contrast to *their* way of life. Another culture can feel alien and uninviting, whereas one's own culture means 'home':

> Good or bad, 'the north' means something to all English people wherever they hail from. To people from London … it means desolation, arctic temperatures, mushy peas, a cultural wasteland with limited shopping opportunities and populated by aggressive trolls. To northerners it means home, truth, beauty, valour, romance, warm and characterful people, real beer and decent chip shops. (Maconie, 2007: 2)

Chapter 4 discussed relational theories of the self, according to which we develop our sense of self within a system of shared norms that we use to judge

our own behaviour, as well as that of others (Melucci, 1996: 31). Furthermore, in order to gain a sense of belonging, a person must understand these (often unwritten) moral and behavioural codes and be able to hold themselves accountable to them (Mead, 1934). We come to understand who we are as individuals by being members of a group, which Calhoun (2003b: 563) argues is a universal tendency among humans: 'In all settings, people find themselves in, and actively work to situate themselves in, groups.'

This chapter explores belonging in relation to culture by focusing on three sources of cultural belonging, namely social class, ethnicity and nationality. I begin by attempting a definition of 'culture' and how it operates as a source of belonging.

The meaning of 'culture'

As discussed in Chapter 6, people are 'necessarily situated in particular webs of belonging' (Calhoun, 2003a: 536). We cannot choose *not* to belong 'to social groups, relations, or culture', and there is no person who can choose all their identifications (Calhoun, 2003a: 536). From these groupings, **cultures** emerge: shared ways of seeing the world, of thought and action, which, in turn, engender collective identities, a shared sense of 'us', of 'who we are and what we do'. Culture helps make us into persons by 'enabling biological humans to be psychological and sociological humans' (Calhoun, 2003b: 559). This is because people create a sense of self partly in relation to these collective histories and traditions that help make up culture, and make claims for belonging by citing these shared understandings of who 'we' are and what 'we' do in terms of, for example, language, religion or cultural habits (Fortier, 2000; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

Cohen (1982a: 11) has described culture as 'nebulous threads' that are 'felt, experienced, understood, but rarely explicitly expressed', leaving much of culture at a subconscious level. Members of a culture 'just know' how to behave, or 'just happen to' think alike. As Bourdieu (1977: 80) points out, this is not 'natural' but the result of the 'orchestration of habitus', as a consequence of which there is consensus over what certain behaviours or things mean, and other people's behaviour seems intelligible and foreseeable. As a result, we do not constantly have to ask each other 'What do you mean?', nor explicitly enquire as to each other's intentions. This perhaps helps explain why sharing a common culture is 'inherently productive of groupings', and why groups appear to their members (and sometimes others) as 'natural and necessary rather than arbitrary and optional' (Calhoun, 2003b: 559).

Much of culture is learned and internalized at an early age, and becomes 'second nature' that remains unspoken, which is why a culture can be difficult to access by an outsider. It is, however, these unspoken aspects that are 'the substance of belonging' because they 'bind members to their culture so closely that they take from it the means by which to make the world known to themselves, and to make themselves known to the world' (Cohen, 1982a: 11–12).

Social class helps exemplify how difficult it can be for an 'outsider' to access a culture. Skeggs (1997) notes how middle-class women have been brought up with a habitus of ease, restraint, luxury, dependence and passivity, which is equated with 'respectability'. Working-class women, traditionally defined as hardy, robust, vulgar and tasteless, can find it difficult to achieve 'respectable' femininity. Partly, this is because 'being respectable' requires the ability to behave in a particular classed way, as well as having access to forms of cultural capital – derived from education and being brought up to appreciate certain cultural tastes – all of which is 'not part of their [working-class women's] cultural baggage' (Skeggs, 1997: 100). For the women in Skeggs's study, a middle-class habitus denoting 'respectability' was not 'second nature' and they lacked a certain 'feel for the game'. As a result, they were prone to make 'mistakes' that belied their working-classness, such as saying or wearing the 'wrong' thing, which meant that their claims for belonging within 'respectable' femininity were frequently questioned by others.

So, why don't working-class people just define their own standards and ignore those of middle-class people? To an extent they do, as shown by Willis's (1977) classic study of how working-class men come to reject middle-class values, such as education, and form a counter-culture. Nevertheless, there are some important consequences if one does not have access to a privileged habitus. One possible consequence is that one's habitus is not attuned to 'the dominant sociocultural organization', which, in turn, can limit one's capacity for action within important fields and organizations, such as education, business or politics (Calhoun, 2003b: 560).

Consider, for example, an important state institution such as the education system, which is imbued with many middle-class norms. Those with a privileged habitus are likely to find it easier to act within this field, because they already have some 'feel for the game' from the outset (cf. Walkerdine et al., 2001). As Calhoun (2003b: 560) notes, a mismatch between people's 'embodied capacities to generate action and some of the fields in which they are forced to act' can undermine their ability to act 'on a larger stage' (cf. Shotter, 1993). As Calhoun (2003b: 560) describes, in moments like these, people are like rugby players trying to play football and 'being consistently called for fouls'. It is not surprising therefore that people tend to gravitate towards others 'who play the same game'.

The 'subterranean' nature of culture also means that people are not always conscious of their cultural membership except when 'brought up against its boundaries: that is, when we become aware of *another* culture, of behavior which deviates from the norms of our own' (Cohen, 1982a: 4). People are generally not aware that their behaviour is distinctive until they meet others who behave differently. For example, a person who has learned to eat with a knife and fork only becomes aware of this as a *cultural* habit once they realize that there are other ways of eating food, for example with chopsticks.

There is a tendency to see cultures and cultural identities, for example national identity, as homogeneous; think, for example, of the American pledge

of allegiance that talks about a 'nation indivisible'. This means that members of a culture tend to be viewed as similar, based on the assumption that:

> 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. (Calhoun, 2003a: 541)

Such a view does not allow for the complexity that 'a culture' holds *within* it. Cultures are not unified but can contain groups that have different interests, sometimes even opposing viewpoints. At the heart of any negotiation or competition that ensues between such groups is the question of who has the right to make claims over how 'we' do things – that is, who 'really' belongs. Some groups' claims for belonging are successful, while others have theirs rejected. It tends to be those belonging to the majority whose claims for belonging are seen as uncontroversial, while people belonging to various minority groups, such as ethnic minorities, can find that their claims are not accepted by the majority groupings (for example Weedon, 2004; Wemyss, 2009; Skey, 2011). For example, Jamaican immigrants who came to live in postwar Britain, who in many ways had culturally been brought up to think of themselves as 'British', experienced 'a sometimes violent repudiation of what they had seen as their own British identity' (Miller, 2010: 106–7).

Thus, fundamental to 'culture' is people's awareness of a difference between 'us' and 'them' in terms of thought and practice, and constant negotiations over where the boundary between these lies. Cultures are not unified, but consist of internal divisions and tensions as different groups jostle for the right to define 'who we are'. I now explore in more detail this issue of boundaries and how they are drawn.

Drawing boundaries

If a culture only gains meaning in relation to other cultures, then the drawing of boundaries is also inherent to culture. These boundaries distinguish between self and other, both on a personal and a collective level (Lyon, 2007: 212). Drawing on Lamont's (1992) work, Lyon (2007) distinguishes between three types of boundary. When interviewing Dutch and Italian women about immigrant women, Lyon found that they drew *moral boundaries* between themselves and 'the other' by expressing suspicions over immigrant women's respectability and sexuality. They alluded to *cultural boundaries* around perceived differences in intelligence and manners, while *socioeconomic boundaries* were drawn on the basis of wealth and professional success, for example by arguing that immigrant women are dependent on men. Distinctions such as these are one way of patrolling the borders of 'our' group.

Similarly, in their study of 'split' communities, Meinhof and Galasiński (2005) found that people use negative out-grouping devices that revolved

around work, status or taste. In a German community that straddled the former border between West and East Germany, 'easterners' were depicted by 'westerners' as greedy because they did not accept differential rewards for work, and as instantly recognizable because of their old-fashioned taste in clothing (Meinhof and Galasiński, 2005: 90).

The boundaries between 'us' and them' are never fixed or given, but are constantly contested, as discussed below. Nor are these boundaries always clear-cut, but exhibit a permeable character. In some instances, a person who is defined as 'one of them' on the basis of nationality, for example, could be counted as 'one of us' on the basis of their religion (Lyon, 2007: 219–21). In other words, the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' are, to an extent, dependent on the situation and context, and are therefore not immovable.

'Ideal types' versus categories in practice

In our everyday lives, we have a general sense of a rather abstract group of people that we may belong to. For example, one may feel British or French – and feel that there is something that unites people of the same nationality – or that one is 'working class'. We may also experience a sense of belonging to an ethnic identity, such as 'African Caribbean' or 'Flemish Belgian'. This sense of identifying with a larger group is not based on knowing everyone in this group personally. Instead, we feel an affinity with a general construct of what we think that group represents in terms of shared values or behaviours. In other words, such groups constitute 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) based on 'ideal types' that emerge not out of our experiences with a particular person, but from a synthesis of our experience of others (Schutz, [1932]1967). People belonging to the same ideal type, for example police officers or postal workers, are expected to behave in particular ways.

Thus, culture offers us 'identity categories' or collective identities, such as 'French' or 'mother'. These can be 'mobilized by some, evaded by others, used, perhaps abused, lacking in clear boundaries and shifting over time and with contexts' (Calhoun, 2003b: 565). We should not make the mistake of assuming that people automatically feel a sense of belonging to the identity categories they seemingly fit or that they feel a sense of affinity with others within the same category. Take the category of lone motherhood, for example, which is used to categorize particular women as 'lone mothers', often with stigmatizing effect. Yet, lone mothers themselves do not necessarily feel a sense of 'groupness', of belonging to the same group, merely on the basis of their family structure (May, 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 4, such external categorization is not something that the categorized person can necessarily ignore, given the 'looking-glass' character of the self. What others think of us is of no little importance because 'we know who we are because others tell us' (Jenkins, 2000: 11). In other words, individuals can never fully choose their own identity, because identities are, to

a degree, ascribed to people, for example on the basis of gender, ethnicity or family structure (Calhoun, 2003b).

This does not mean that people do not try to 'escape' negative categorization as best they can. This is something that Bourdieu's theory of habitus fails to account for, namely why a person who is in 'their own' social field can nevertheless experiences a sense of *not* belonging. For example, the working-class women in Skeggs's (1997) study did not feel at home in the social field they had grown up in, but aspired towards a middle-class habitus and tried to distance themselves from what it meant to be 'working class'. As Skeggs (1997: 1) explains, this is the understandable result of the stigmatization of the working classes, who have 'consistently been classified as dangerous, polluting, threatening, revolutionary, pathological and without respect'. It is interesting to note that Paul Willis (1977) encountered a very different attitude towards working-class culture among young men, who expressed pride in their own culture and defiance against middle-class culture and authority (more on this study below). This is a good example of internal divisions within a 'culture', such that being 'working class' can, for example, be experienced differently by women and men.

Melucci (1996: 32) argues that a gap always exists between self-identification and identification by others. The tension this gap produces tends to be kept in check due to 'a certain level of reciprocity of recognition', and it is in situations when this reciprocity fails – for example if someone denies another's claim for belonging – that conflict and competition ensues:

> what people struggle for is always the possibility to recognize themselves and be recognized as subjects of their own action. We enter a conflict to affirm the identity that our opponent has denied us, to reappropriate something which belongs to us because we are able to recognize it as our own. When during a conflict we secure solidarity from others, when we feel ourselves part of a group, identity is reinforced and guaranteed. (Melucci, 1996: 32)

Hopkins (2008: 364) proposes that group cultures should be viewed as 'providing a set of symbolic and argumentative resources with which alternative visions of who we are, and could be, are advanced'. These resources can be used by groups to change or redefine stigmatizing or exclusionary identity categories, such as when ethnic minority groups have challenged exclusionary definitions of what it means to be 'British'. In this way, group identities are constantly being contested, both within and between groups.

The use of shared cultural products

As we have discussed, people construct a sense of belonging to an 'us' as distinct from 'them'. The understanding of 'who we are' is partly based on, and mediated by, cultural products such as language and tradition, which are part of

'the intersubjective world common to us all' (Schutz, [1932]1967: 218). We not only internalize these cultural products as we grow up, but also use them as we build a sense of belonging, and they come to help characterize 'who we are' (Calhoun, 2003b: 559). A person comes to understand themselves as someone who speaks English or Hindi, who celebrates Christmas or Diwali, and who wears jeans or a sari, and these cultural products are symbolic of which culture we belong to.

Language is a key element of any culture, and plays a pivotal role in terms of our sense of belonging. Language is our means of making sense of the surrounding world by attributing names and categories to things and events. The words we have comprise (to a degree) the boundaries of what we can comprehend. We also use language to communicate and build relationships with those around us. For example, one British interviewee in Bagnoli's study (2009: 552) talked about how important learning Italian was for him to start feeling at home in Italy: 'My Italian is getting a bit better, I'm now able to have relationships with my friends properly, I can talk about things … so I feel I can live in this world a bit easier.'

But we also use language in a more fundamental way in our constructions of self, because language provides us with a way of seeing and interpreting not only the world but ourselves as well. For example, while men tend to view themselves as autonomous individuals, women are more likely to understand themselves as embedded within relationships (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1993). Learning a language entails not just learning the meaning of words, but also understanding which words are 'fitting' for one to use, given one's age, gender, class and so on, and speaking these in an appropriate manner (cf. Bourdieu, 1979; Burkitt, 1999: 88; Adams, 2007: 146). So, for example, women often speak with a higher pitch than men, and in a more hesitant and uncertain manner (Krøløkke and Sørensen, 2006).

Our culture also provides us with narratives that enable us to make sense of our experiences and to communicate to others who we are. These stories are 'like containers that hold us together' by giving us a 'sense of coherence and continuity' and 'imposing a comforting order on our experiences' (Mason-Schrock, 1996: 176). The key thing to remember in relation to belonging is that the narratives we use to construct and convey a sense of self do not originate from within the individual, but are shared cultural tools: 'We come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making' (Somers, 1994: 606).

Cultures share some assumptions about what a life looks like and how it can be told, and these shared narratives or frameworks are part of the cultural package or toolkit we internalize as children. We develop our capacity to tell self-narratives in interaction with other members of our society, and acquire culturally appropriate ways of thinking, remembering, feeling and behaving. Children are taught, in everyday interactions with their parents, for example, to pay attention to particular aspects of their experiences, and to put these

experiences together in a culturally shared framework of understanding (Wang and Brockmeier, 2002). This framework lets them make sense of themselves and others, and provides a source of cultural belonging. At a fundamental level, these narratives are not only about 'who I am' but also about 'who we are'.

A good example of how children learn to do this comes from Emily, whom we met in Chapter 4. The recordings of Emily's bedtime monologues reveal that in trying to make sense of her experiences, Emily is figuring out whether she can expect particular experiences to be 'canonical', or whether they are one-offs. She does so by practising the use of words, such as 'again', 'once', 'usually', or 'not supposed to'. Emily is also trying to understand what the people involved in the action intended, her own opinion of what happened, and how her perspective compares with the point of view of others (Bruner and Lucariello, 1989). In these monologues, Emily is constructing herself as part of a community that acts in unison and understands each other's actions. Benhabib (1992: 198) borrows from Hannah Arendt, who has emphasized that from birth we are immersed in a 'web of narratives' that we tell and that others tell about us. The individual with a coherent sense of self-identity is the one who succeeds in integrating these tales and perspectives into a meaningful life story. In other words, we lead storied lives: we understand our lives in narrative form, seeing events as related sequences in an unfolding story (Riessman, 1993).

By the time we reach adulthood, we are equipped with the ability to convey our life events within shared narrative frameworks, such as the tragedy or romantic epic (Gergen and Gergen, 1983: 263). In this sense, we are always working with 'hand-me-downs', with 'derivatives of what has come before' (Freeman, 1993). In order to communicate with each other, the stories we tell must be comprehensible to others:

> Life stories must mesh, so to speak, within a community of life stories; tellers and listeners must share some 'deep structure' about the nature of a 'life', for if the rules of life-telling are altogether arbitrary, tellers and listeners will surely be alienated by a failure to grasp what the other is saying or what he [sic] thinks the other is hearing. (Bruner, 1987: 21)

Thus, life stories, as we come to understand them, are not 'natural' ways of telling the story of a life, but rather one of numerous possible ways of doing so. This becomes apparent when we compare how people from different cultures tell autobiographical stories, as Wang and Brockmeier (2002) did in their study of how children learn what to remember and how to convey these memories in narrative form. Interactions with parents are a key part of this process of acquiring culturally appropriate ways of thinking, remembering, feeling and behaving.

Wang and Brockmeier observed American and Chinese parents interacting with their children, and found that the American children were encouraged by their parents to tell self-focused stories about what they had done and felt at a particular time. In doing so, American children learned to present themselves as

the central character of their own story, and to draw a clear distinction between an independent and autonomous 'I' and a 'we'. In contrast, the Chinese children drew a less clear distinction between 'I' and 'we', instead presenting an interdependent and relational self. Chinese parents encouraged their children to tell stories that depicted collective activities and centred on relationships. The end result of such parental coaxing is two very different cultural understandings of the self as either independent or interdependent:

> the promotion of individuality, self-expression and personal sufficiency in Western societies facilitates the development of an *independently oriented* self that is essentially well-bounded, distinct and separate from others and from natural and social contexts. In contrast, the emphasis on social hierarchy, interpersonal harmony and personal humility in many East Asian cultures gives rise to an *interdependently oriented* self that is fluidly defined and inextricably connected within a relational network that localizes the individual in a well-defined social niche. (Wang and Brockmeier, 2002: 50)

Thus, social scientists are interested in the narratives people tell about themselves, not only for what these say about individuals, but also the social contexts they are embedded in. In particular, second wave feminists used women's personal narratives to demonstrate that the 'private troubles' of women were, in fact, collective and therefore political problems (Gluck and Patai, 1991). The Personal Narratives Group (1989) proposed that it is important to study women's life stories because these give us an insight into the power relations between men and women, and the ways in which 'ordinary' women have fought against oppression in their everyday lives. Black feminist theorists have emphasized the importance of findings one's voice, of having the right to define oneself, in the face of racist and sexist oppression (hooks, 1981; Collins, 1990). Thus, the narratives that people tell about themselves matter, and the right to be able to tell one's story and to have that story heard can be said to be a key step in making a claim for belonging in society (cf. Shotter, 1993).

Culture as 'tradition'

I discussed above how culture is not simply 'already there', but is produced and reproduced in a shared process of practical action. Particular ways of thinking and doing, if repeated by enough people for long enough, can become sedimented as 'the way to do things'. These ritualized and formalized practices come to be understood as 'tradition', and participating in them can act to reinforce 'a sense of belonging to, and inheritance of, a particular ethnic [or other] background' (Fortier, 2000: 111). We participate in such practices from childhood onwards, whereby culture becomes an embodied part of who we are. We grow accustomed to wearing particular types of clothing, eating specific foods and performing certain bodily movements, such as kneeling in church. This

sedimentation of bodily practices has been termed 'body hexis' by Bourdieu (1977), a concept that is examined in more detail in Chapter 9.

Calhoun (2003a) argues that individuals can exercise choice in relation to their participation in a culture. The most extreme choice is to move to another country and perhaps reject a culture altogether, or a person may 'claim or reject various ostensibly common cultural values, delve into and reproduce historical traditions, or let them fade' (Calhoun, 2003a: 549). Thus, belonging to a culture is not a passive state but rather the product of (some degree of) active choice as well (Calhoun, 2003a: 549).

As discussed in Chapter 4, tradition has been understood by many theorists as relatively fixed, as a 'historicized segment of a social structure: tradition as the surviving past' (Williams, 1977: 115). But it is more than this because tradition is always the result of a process of selection, whereby certain meanings and practices are selected, and hence preserved, while others are neglected, and hence die away. In this way, the creation of a shared collective memory is not only a process of remembering but also of forgetting (Sargin, 2004). Once particular ways of thought and action have been selected, they are 'presented and usually successfully passed off as "the tradition", "*the* significant past"' (Williams, 1977: 115).

This selection does not happen of itself, but is done by particular (powerful) groups and thus tradition is an actively *created* history that reflects not only past but also *contemporary* social and cultural organization, and that serves the interests of the most powerful groups. What becomes selected as tradition tends to be a version of the past that connects with and helps validate the present, such as hierarchies between 'us' and 'them'. What tradition offers is a sense of '*predisposed continuity*' (Williams, 1977: 116), a sense that this was the only way that things *could* have turned out.

Contested belongings

Collective understandings of 'who we are' change over time as the result of continued power struggles during which different groups in society vie for *their* version of history to be included (Williams, 1977: 117). Who belongs or is allowed to claim belonging to a particular collectivity is linked to issues of power and inequality of, for example, gender, ethnicity, class, age or sexuality (Miller, 2003). National histories are based on hegemonic constructions of national identity, which exclude the experiences of certain sections of the population who are deemed not to 'fit'. For example, women and ethnic minority people have learned to exist inside a discourse that is not theirs and that does not reflect their everyday experiences of sexism or racism (Smith, 1987; Shotter, 1993).

I now turn to the East End of London to exemplify the contested nature of belonging. Both Eade (1997) and Wemyss (2006) have found a hierarchy of belonging in terms of who is considered an 'East Ender'. In the postwar period, many traditionally white working-class areas have experienced a significant

shift in the ethnic composition of residents, and have seen intermittent racial unrest. At the top of the hierarchy of belonging we find white people, who are 'normalized as being the natural and historically legitimate occupiers of East End spaces in the discourses of the local and national media' (Wemyss, 2006: 228). Ethnic minority people are often aware that their claims to being an East Ender are controversial:

> Of course I would call myself an East Ender … a number of people, particularly white people would disagree (Saif).
>
> I sometimes feel a bit pressured, a bit like I shouldn't be calling myself an East Ender because I'm black (Alice).
>
> White East Enders, to some extent they do see me as one [an East Ender], but I don't have the same rights as they do, in terms of belonging, because they have been here for generations, I don't have the same sort of status as other East Enders. A recent arrival like my [Bengali] parents I suppose (Julekha). (Wemyss, 2006: 230)

So when it comes to discussions about 'us' East Enders, ethnic minority people often feel excluded. As Wemyss points out, such hierarchies of belonging are not necessarily based on 'facts' of how long a particular group has resided in an area. Instead, versions of history are constructed that present whites as having a long history of residence going back several generations, while the residence of other ethnic groups is downplayed. For example, South Asians, who have lived in the East End since the 1600s, are nevertheless 'constructed as having had no relationship with the area prior to the 1970s', and therefore as having little right to claim belonging (Wemyss, 2006: 233). Ethnic minorities have contested such exclusions in the East End and elsewhere. Eade (1997: 140), for example, found that second-generation Bangladeshis challenged dominant definitions of what an 'East Ender' is and claimed belonging to the East End on the basis of having a Cockney accent.

Belonging is thus linked to debates about citizenship (Young, 1990). People develop a feeling of belonging to a citizenry through everyday activities, such as participating in civic life as well as having the right to use and inhabit public spaces (Hodgetts et al., 2008: 934; cf. Fenster, 2004, 2005). It is through taking part in the everyday life of a community that people gain a sense of belonging, but the right to be included is not equally distributed.

Nationhood

One important form of collective identity that has received much attention from researchers examining belonging is nationhood, which acts as 'a salient idiom of belonging' (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 542). Nations tend to have shared narratives about 'who we are' in relation to other nations. National

identity is often built on symbolic myths and sites of commemoration 'because they serve as a strong mechanism to construct belonging and collective identity' (Fenster, 2004: 405). Collective identities are symbolized by national anthems, flags, monuments, buildings and landscapes, such as the Palace of Westminster, Uluru (Ayers Rock) or the Lincoln Memorial (Urry, 2000: 137), which 'help to create and sustain narratives about who we are and where we have come from' (Weedon, 2004: 24). The choice of such symbolic sites is rarely straight-forward, as can be seen in Israel, where opposing Jewish and Palestinian claims for belonging have impacted on the choice of places deemed 'historic sites' that are to be protected from development (Fenster, 2004).

It is through such production of nationhood that governments and other ruling groups define what is worth remembering, that is, what constitutes the 'correct' history for that nation and what its shared memories and values are. This helps to produce a 'national heritage' that is classed, gendered and racial-ized. There are, however, always competing definitions of what constitutes 'national heritage'. As a result of these power struggles, the meaning of national identity never stands still but is 'contingent upon the dynamics of an on-going conversation' (Hopkins, 2008: 364) between different groups in society. For example, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission offered a public, official channel through which people could voice and give testimony to their experiences of apartheid, thus helping to rewrite a nation's history (McEachern, 1998). Such collective acts of remembering can also help recon-stitute understandings of who 'we' are, which can then have a profound impact on people's sense of self.

In Britain, for example, ethnic minorities were, until quite recently, excluded from what it meant to be British, and their role in British history was silenced. As ethnic minorities have gained social, economic and political standing in the country, they have been able to affect a partial rewriting of this history and chal-lenge dominant definitions of 'Britishness' (Eade, 1994; Ifekwunigwe, 1999; Weedon, 2004). Britain's role in the slave trade and the impact this had on millions of slaves and their descendants is now more openly discussed, for example in school textbooks, and commemorated, for example at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. Furthermore, books such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and films such as Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* have brought the lives of migrants from the former colonies into main-stream consciousness. Weedon (2004: 44) argues that this ability to impact on British culture and the writing of British history is important because it can help create 'a space in which non-white Britons can belong'.

Although there is a top-down cultural and political production of meanings of nation, nationhood is not solely produced by states or other powerful insti-tutions such as the media, but is 'simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in routine activities' (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 537). Thus, alongside 'official' histories and monuments, we can find vernacu-lar traditions that produce alternative iconic landscapes and memorials, such as coal mines, docks and mills, thereby offering alternative versions of 'our

history'. For example, in Scotland, Gaelic culture has been a strong cultural heritage competing against 'Britishness' (Urry, 2000). Meanings of nation are thus negotiated, understood and expressed at the grassroots level.

This is where local context becomes important. Meinhof and Galasiński (2005: 7) argue that although individual identities draw on shared social resources, such as linguistic resources or 'ready' patterns of speaking, this 'grammar of identity' is nonetheless adapted within a local context of inter-action (Meinhof and Galasiński, 2005: 65). It is not unusual for people to reassess collective narratives if there is a lack of fit between the 'grammar of identity' and the local experience (Meinhof and Galasiński, 2005: 10). This is perhaps particularly the case for those groups who have experienced the redrawing of national boundaries, such as people in Belarus and the Hungar-ians in Romania. The Belarusians have responded to being annexed by several different nations over time by defining 'us' and belonging in terms of locality rather than nationality: those who belong are those who come 'from here' (Pershai, 2008: 88). The Hungarians in Romania, who are technically of Romanian nationality but who feel they belong to a 'greater cultural nation of Hungarians', affirm this sense of belonging with (formerly forbidden) public displays of Hungarian national symbols, such as the Hungarian flag and national anthem (Fox, 2006: 223).

But it is not only what happens within (or to) national borders that has an impact on people's sense of national belongings. These can also be strengthened as a result of globalization, that is, the global movement of people, culture, information and money. Eriksen (2007) notes, for example, that Norwegians have become increasingly keen on celebrating Constitution Day on 17 May, which for many includes wearing traditional dress. Emphasizing national iden-tities in this way can aid the maintenance of 'a predictable and secure group identity' in the face of social change (Eriksen, 2007: 104).

Migration and local belongings

As discussed above, belonging to a culture remains largely invisible except at the boundaries when two different cultures interact with each other. It makes sense therefore that belonging becomes particularly visible in the case of transnational migration. Indeed, migration is another key area of interest for researchers studying belonging. As a result of transnational mobility, self-understandings of identity and belonging come under stress, not only for those who migrate but also for those who are already established residents in the receiving countries. There is a consequent need for adaptation, reconfiguration and reconceptual-ization of cultural identity, which is 'keenly experienced at the everyday level of ordinary identity and human relations' (Meinhof and Galasiński, 2005: 1).

One such reconfiguration comes about as migrants create *local* belongings in their new home country. When migrants settle, they engage with 'locals' in a politics of belonging over what it means to be 'from here' (Bönisch-Brednich

and Trundle, 2010: 3; Benson; 2010). For example, people of European descent living in New Zealand, whose families settled there several generations ago, define 'localness' through a connection to the land (Trundle, 2010). When talking about who does and does not belong in New Zealand, the 'locals' draw moral boundaries between 'foreigners' (especially Americans), who are seen to view land merely as a commodity, and 'locals', who have a right to claim belonging because they see land as embodying history and representing a 'community'. The reader will probably know that this claim is somewhat controversial to say the least, given the history of the colonization of New Zealand and the impact this had on the existing Māori population, who themselves had originally migrated from Polynesia.

As mentioned above, there is a politics of belonging involved, where both migrants and 'locals' negotiate claims for local belonging. So, it is important to look at how 'locals' view incomers and their willingness to engage with incomers (Benson, 2010). This is a collective process of claims-making and acceptance or rejection of another group's claims. It is also in connection with this process that individuals must decide how much they are willing to adjust aspects of their self in order to 'fit in' (see Chapters 4 and 6). Ifekwunigwe (1999) points out that in Britain, the 'majority' group (white British) tend to 'accept' a non-white person if they feel this person is 'like them' rather than fundamentally 'other'. It is therefore not surprising that some migrants wish to highlight their similarity with 'locals', such as the Americans living in New Zealand and the British living in France who wished to distinguish themselves from stereotypical expats who fail to integrate (Trundle, 2010; Benson, 2010). They did so by aligning with 'local' values as a way of claiming 'legitimate' belonging, as if to say 'I am one of *you*, not one of *them*'. In effect, this requires that one dilutes one's 'otherness', as remarked by one of Ifekwunigwe's respondents:

> Gradually, I realized just how racist this culture is, and how many people it excludes – how I found I was excluded from very many areas. Which isn't really so because, if you want to, *you can actually claim to be, you can sort of assimilate yourself* into this culture on sort of fairly decent terms if you are willing to. You can do it if only you are willing to take on its prejudices. How can I be more specific? You can get into there on the terms of you're the one 'good nigger'. Right? You can actually do it. I think. So, I have come to the realization that sometimes actually sussing it out that when someone is being friendly to you, they're doing it because they are so relieved that they have found a Black person that they can relate to. (Ifekwunigwe, 1999: 144, emphasis added)

Having one's claims for belonging rejected can be a powerful negative experience with profound consequences for the person. For example, some of the second-generation Bangladeshi Muslims living in Britain who Eade (1994) interviewed expressed a wish to leave Britain because of the rejection they had experienced from the majority white population.

Multiple belongings and hybrid cultures

As discussed in Chapter 6, we generally do not have a single source of belonging but many. Cohen (1982a: 16) notes that 'much of social life is involved with the consequences of "plural membership": of the imperatives, strains and strategies which follow from it'. Thus, all of us will experience belonging to different types of 'entities', as Cohen calls them. Family, neighbourhood, friendship and nationality are but a few examples. These sources of belonging do not exist in isolation from each other, but are interlocking. For example, our experience of nationality is mediated by where we live and who we interact with. This means that belonging 'is the almost inexpressibly complex experience of culture' (Cohen, 1982a: 16). Melucci (1996: 43) proposes that such multiplicity is characteristic of contemporary societies, where 'we find ourselves enmeshed in multiple bonds of belonging created by the proliferation of social positions, associative networks, and reference groups'. Each of these worlds we participate in has 'a culture, a language, and a set of roles and rules to which we must adapt whenever we migrate from one of them to another' (Melucci, 1996: 43), creating a pressure on us to change.

In a similar vein, Calhoun (2003a: 547) suggests that ethnicity and nationality are never expressions of 'one basic identity common to all members of a group', but within any ethnic or national group, we can find internal differentiations on the basis of, for example, social class. It is not therefore a given that people of the same ethnic background will experience a sense of solidarity with each other, because at times these other identities can provide the basis for solidarity *across* ethnic boundaries (Calhoun, 2003a: 547). Members of a culture will be familiar with, and can even enjoy, these internal differences:

> We are ... comfortable with particular ways of expressing ourselves and with particular sorts of differences from others, as well as with sameness or identification with 'people like us'. We even enjoy, I would posit, particular ways of feeling different from others, and one of the unsettling things about entering new cultural contexts is that we lose some of those familiar differentiations, not just familiar identifications. (Calhoun, 1999: 222–3)

In other words, knowing what the internal differences are, for example being able to distinguish between people from different class backgrounds, can offer a sense of belonging to a culture.

When they move, migrants have various ways in which they can set up a life in their new home country. They can self-consciously mix cultural forms into hybrid cultures; they can take on new cultural forms and, to an extent, 'assimilate' with the local culture; they can maintain a sense of belonging in their country of origin; or they can form transnational attachments to several places (or none) (Eriksen, 2007: 113). It is likely that most migrants adopt elements of a few if not all of these strategies.

Some strategies that emphasize belonging to a country of origin – such as seeking a spouse there, or retaining a distinct ethnic identity – can be seen as a 'rational' response to the lack of citizenship or acceptance in one's new home country (Eriksen, 2007: 93, 95; Kennedy, 2010: 93).

Hall (1992) notes that the meeting of cultures – for example as a result of transnational migration – can go one of two ways: tradition or translation. Whereas tradition involves each culture holding on to their own cultural traditions, perhaps even emphasizing the differences between them, translation means that when a local and an 'imported' culture meet, both interact and undergo a process of translation, forming a new hybrid culture. For example, Bhangra music mixes traditional South Asian music with London garage and hip hop, while the Chinatowns in many Western cities, such as Manchester, London and San Francisco, are a mixture of Chinese and Western culture (Urry, 2000).

Not only hybrid cultures but also hybrid identities can be produced in this process of translation. In her study of an Italian émigré community in London, Fortier (2000: 107) found that the émigrés had established familiar cultural practices and institutions as a way of creating a sense of belonging in their new country of residence. Fortier (2000: 2) uses the phrase 'migrant belongings' in order to capture 'the productive tension that results from the articulation of movement and attachment, suture and departure, outside and inside, in identity formation'. She argues that migrant populations vacillate between 'national identity' and 'émigré identity', producing a 'cultural citizenship that is grounded in multilocality' (Fortier, 2000: 97). Younger, British-born generations have a sense of belonging to Britain, but because they grow up embedded in Italian language and cultural practices, they also develop a sense of belonging with Italy.

Another term that has been used to describe such migrant belongings is 'diasporic identity'. Diaspora is used to describe people who share a geographical or cultural origin, but have migrated to different countries, such as the 'Irish diaspora', 'Kurdish diaspora' or 'South Asian diaspora'. Nash (2002: 32) argues that the identities of such diasporic people challenge notions of identity as based on one nationality or as linked to a specific geographical location, 'because they are based on multiple identifications and multiple belongings that are always in motion between the place of residence and other places'. Take, for example, the Italian Americans and the Irish Americans, who hold on to an American identity and a sense of being Italian or Irish. Even fourth-generation descendants of Irish migrants, who have perhaps never even been to Ireland, can consider themselves as 'Irish' (Eriksen, 2007: 101–2).

People of mixed heritage or migrants may experience manifold, and at times contradictory, senses of belonging (Ifekwunigwe, 1999). Eade (1994: 386) found that second-generation Bangladeshi Muslims living in Britain can formulate complex national, regional and religious belongings. Many saw their different forms of belonging as competing, and reconciled this by constructing 'composite, hierarchically ordered identities' (Eade, 1994: 391), where some aspects of their identity were seen as more important. As one respondent explained:

If you had to go on one to ten scale of who you are, what you are, it [goes] Muslim, then Bengali and then British and then whatever the things that make me up. If you take the top two away that wouldn't be me. If you take the British bit away, I think that would still be me. (Eade, 1994: 386)

Hybridity of this kind can also create conflicts and tensions with the 'host' population (Kennedy, 2010), as can be seen in the ongoing debates over the current hot topic in Europe and the USA, namely Muslim identity. For example, the British Prime Minister David Cameron announced in a speech in 2010 that multiculturalism had 'failed' because 'too many' Muslim youths did not integrate into British society. Leaving aside the complex reasons why Muslims have become a source of concern for many (especially rightwing) politicians and laypeople alike, what is interesting to note about Cameron's speech is that he used the level of 'integration' (that is, adopting British culture) as a measure of the success of migration, as well as his lack of focus on the role that the 'host' population play in achieving such integration.

Yet the testimonies of people with hybrid or diasporic identities belie any such simplistic pronouncements. In *Scattered Belongings*, Ifekwunigwe (1999) focuses on the lives of people who have multiple sources of belonging, who belong 'nowhere and everywhere'. Although her particular focus is people of 'mixed race', many of the issues that she identifies are perhaps common to all people with some form of 'mixed parentage': belonging on the margins, uncertain of one's identity, being questioned by others over one's claims for identity and belonging ('You're not *really/fully/authentically* x'). Ifekwunigwe (1999: 40) describes her own experiences of having a mixed heritage:

'Where are you from?' On an empowered day, I describe myself as a diaspora(s) daughter with multiple migratory and ancestral reference points in Nigeria, Ireland, England, Guyana and the United States. On a disempowered day, I am a nationless nomad who wanders from destination to destination in search of a singular site to name as home.

For people with mixed heritage, the unanswerable question can sometimes be 'Where is home?', because 'home' seems to evoke an image of a singular hearth, the one place of origin we can call our own. Bisi, one of Ifekwunigwe's respondents who has a white British mother and black Nigerian father, and who has lived in both England and Nigeria, sums up this dilemma:

Where I would call home is very difficult, because now I have been here. Well, I came [to England] when I was 17, and then I went back for a year, so I'm, right at the middle. I'm 36 now, so, I've lived as many years here as I did there. I know I grew up there [in Nigeria] and yet, how can I call that home? It's a very fond experience to grow up, you know. But I had my children here, and I changed a great deal through that. So, I don't know where I would call home. (Ifekwunigwe, 1999: 145)

It would seem that despite the existence of hybrid identities, cultural belongings are still mainly understood in the singular. When it comes to people with hybrid identities in terms of, for example, nationality, ethnicity or social class, they are regularly asked to pick which identity category they 'really' belong in.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a discussion of what 'culture' means and how it operates as a source of belonging. By 'culture', I mean a group's way of thinking and doing, which is often sedimented in 'tradition'. This culture is not a given, but the result of remembering and forgetting, of doing things one way rather than another. It is the product of ongoing power struggles within and between social groups, and often reflects the interests of the most powerful groups. Therefore, it is important to focus on who gets to define not only what a culture is but also who is allowed to claim belonging to it. Claiming cultural belonging is thus always a political act that takes place within broader systems of power.

This chapter has also explored the complexity of culture at the level of everyday life. Cultures are internally complex, and always in motion. In addition, many people come to form multiple belongings, for example on the basis of their different social affiliations, such as ethnicity and social class, or on the basis of a hybrid cultural identity as a result of transnational mobility. I have discussed the ways in which these multiple or hybrid belongings are constructed, but also the ways in which they can lead to political contestation, as in the current debates over 'multiculturalism'.

Of course, these definitions of who 'we' are and how 'we' are expected to behave are, to a large degree, learned and negotiated in concrete relationships and interactions with other people. But we create a somewhat different sense of belonging to specific people as compared to cultures. In the latter, belonging entails a fairly anonymous, indirect or abstract way of relating to other people. When it comes to our interactions with specific people, 'you and I can grasp each other's living stream of consciousness simultaneously' (Schutz, [1932]1967: 219). It is the sense of relational belonging that will be explored in Chapter 8.

Relational Belongings

8

Introduction

This chapter explores relationships as a source of belonging. Chapter 4 introduced the notion that people's sense of self is relational, that is, created in interaction with others and partly constructed in terms of similarities with or differences from other people. In other words, we understand who we are partly on the basis of whom we feel we belong (or do not belong) with. But our social and personal relationships matter at another fundamental level as well. As discussed in Chapter 6, it could be argued that humans have a need for stimulus and company (Cooley, 1902: 49–50). Empirical research shows us, for example, that people who are integrated in a social network are likely to experience a higher sense of meaning in life compared to those whose links with others are weak (Krause and Wulff, 2005: 82).

Our experience of others ranges from intimate face-to-face contact through to more remote ways of connecting with, or being aware of, others. Schutz ([1932]1967: 180–1) distinguishes the following six types of 'others' that we can be aware of: people whom we interact with face-to-face such as friends; those whom a person I know knows personally (for example 'your friend'); those whom I am just about to meet; contemporaries who I know exist, but who I am not aware of as individuals but through their organizational or social function, such as a postal employee; collective entities that I know exist, but whose members I cannot name individually (for example, parliament); and anonymous entities of which I can never have direct experience such as 'state' or 'nation'. The further along this list we go, 'the more anonymous its inhabitants become' (Schutz, [1932]1967: 181). These anonymous entities have already been explored in Chapter 7 under national belongings and imagined communities. This chapter explores the earlier parts of this continuum, each offering qualitatively different sources of relational belonging: family and friends, acquaintances and strangers, and neighbourhood and community. Although the sources of belonging do become more anonymous as this chapter progresses, I will argue that this does not necessarily mean that they are any less important for achieving a sense of belonging.