

Ethnicity: the social organisation of cultural distinctiveness

(after Hylland Eriksen)

- ethnicity: a 'dual' concept
 - it defines and categorises 'the other', creating cognitive maps of relevant others
 - it defines the self, it is the collective aspect of self-identification
- ethnicity: a labelling system where collective identities ('cultures') are negotiated and fixed, making social groups stable across time (generations), and boundaries more permanent ('cultural' by being 'second nature')

Ethnicity: the social organisation of cultural distinctiveness

Types of boundaries, as empirical foci of anthropological studies:

- modern migrants (urban ethnic minorities)
 - indigenous peoples
 - proto-nations (ethnonationalist movements)
 - ethnic groups in plural societies
 - post-slavery minorities
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- The role of symbols (labels, tropes, icons) in creating boundaries ('order')
 - Which symbols are used for mutual demarcation, and how do they become effective?
 - In what does the power of symbols reside?
 - multivocality
 - legibility
 - 'good to think'
 - creating attachment
 - the use of them in group formation (particularly as reinforced by states)

Studying ethnicity, anthropologically

Whatever the 'cultural stuff' (what symbols refer to) is, it can be studied as

- (a) representations (emblems, symbols) we use for social navigation, prompting rules of social behaviour
- (b) representations we use for belonging, prompting social affiliation or emotional attachment, thus enabling membership

(a) is studying the fixing of group representations, typically by analysing boundary dynamics or labelling processes involving, for instance

- Stereotyping
- Stigmatisation
- Under- and over-communication of differences
- Reification (e.g. turning practices/customs into stable symbols or representations)
- Dichotomisation (separating by contrasting)
- Complementarisation (matching; making equal in value)

auxiliary disciplines: semiotics, communication theory

Studying ethnicity, anthropologically

(b) is studying the fixing of social groups (internal cohesion) by analysing

- the collective identities of the self
- the construction of the community (us and them; we and you)
- processes of inclusion and exclusion (and marginalisation)
- rules of membership
 - in affiliative groups, by descent or kinship
 - in political communities, by citizenship
- contrasting case: epistemic communities (instrumental?)

Ethnicity and Power

The role of power in allowing membership (fixing meaning) and stabilising hierarchies

- The role of violence (state power) / the uses of affiliation & categorisation to unite and control
- From social class to ethnic group (South Africa)
- From occupational specialisation to ethnic group (India)
- Incorporation by conquest and colonisation
- Exclusion/inclusion (migratory control)
- Ascription of rights and human rights
- Identity politics
- Law as an instrument /a regulatory power in all this

Towards a legal concept of community

(after Cotterrell)

Seeing society as a unit, defined by having common norms (laws):

- internally (its 'culture', conventions about right and wrong and accepted behaviour)
- externally, i.e., as defined by the reaches of the law (laws of the nation-state)

This duality is a departure point for discussing legal pluralism or plural legalities:

- Does law create community?
- Or are laws expressions of communities?

Also a departure point for investigating 'modernity':

- law an expression of modern social solidarity (Durkheim)
- law is reason-based sociality (Weber) taking precedence

Towards a legal concept of community

Four pure (fundamental) types of social action (orientation) (after Weber) corresponding to four pure types of collective involvement (that engender communities):

1. Habitual or traditional form – traditional (local) community
2. Convergence of interest (purpose-rational) – instrumental community
3. Sharing of belief (value-rational) – community of belief
4. Mutual affection (affective) – affective community

(What type is a 'clan'? Which communities are you a member of?)

Cultural and legal diversity

- For next class:
apply the types-of communities approaches (Cotterrell) and boundary-dynamics centred approaches (Hylland Eriksen) (both social constructivist rather than primordialist perspectives) to analyse a case of conflicting groups in your country
- strengths and weaknesses? useful or not?