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Alterity in Modernity

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Departing from the notion of '*the stranger*' in classical sociological literature (Alfred Schutz and Georg Simmel), the paper discusses the significance of two paradigmatic approaches, one of which has discursively branched off into modernity. In a world where the search for roots has become widespread – from the new social movements to the building of new nation-state, from identity politics to national identities – the multiple expression of exclusion has spread. A new kind of European citizen, a '*stranger*', is being constructed. I argue that scientific discourses related to the intellectual heritage of Alfred Schutz have helped to create the '*stranger*' and the '*non-stranger*'. It is further argued that Simmel's approach is an alternative well worth highlighting.

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And the human being is likewise the bordering creature who has no border.

Georg Simmel

1. Introduction

During the 1980s and 1990s, the quest for identity – and also its complex relationship to modernity – has become one of the most central characteristics of our civilisation's transformation. Crisis, the 'end of history', the demise of the grand narratives of modernity, have come to dominate the academic debate. Transnational amalgamations in the shadows of new international order, together with Eastern Europe's ideological and territorial transformation, have created the background for identity crises in both an individual and collective sense. We live in an epoch characterised by processes of transnational compression which are accompanied by processes of fragmentation. The latter are crucial in the construction of new and new-old individual, local, regional and ethnic identities. These often painful processes are increasingly influenced by wars and crises, as well as by public discourses pregnant with intolerance and exclusivism in relation to 'the other'. This is evident in the current conflicts between different ethnic groups in

the new Baltic States and in former Yugoslavia. Russians in the Baltic states and various 'minorities' in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia no longer 'belong'.

The fabrication of new national and often exclusivist identities – which are imbued with regressive ideologies based on an appeal to a 'lost grandeur' in terms of sacrifice, *Blut und Boden* – frames a world of absolutism behind a myth of 'imagined community'. The 'invention of tradition' in these constructed ethno-national histories often carries the vestiges of an instrumentality in the service of unscrupulous power struggles. The victims – the excluded, 'the other' – which stand in the way of territorial, political or economic gains are often forced to join the ranks of the new 'helots' in modernity's stream of refugees, immigrants, and ethnic minorities. The place of ethnic minorities in contemporary Europe discloses the dilemmas and ambiguities of modern society. In a world where the search for roots has become widespread, the multiple expression of exclusion of 'the other', of 'the stranger', has spread.

I will discuss the specific conditions for becoming 'the stranger' in a contemporary 'multicultural' world. The analysis is based upon the records of Swedish multiculturalism and its inherent paradoxes (Ålund & Schierup, 1991). Sweden, famous in Europe

for its egalitarian multicultural politics, is today marked by a general shift in ideological orientation and a turn in institutional practices. The country is drifting towards a more restrictive formulation of its immigration and immigrant policies, and experiences intense structural polarisation along ethnic lines. We can, in Sweden, see similar tendencies as in, for example, France. Analysing the French context, Michel Wieviorka (1993: 61) argues that 'tendencies to refer to different kinds of boundary-creating roots have been stronger than efforts to participate in the birth of new forms of collective actions'. These tendencies reflect contemporary processes connecting the crisis of the welfare state, fundamental societal transformations and a deterioration of social conditions with anxieties over the future European Union, migration, and the spread of racism and its relationship with contemporary nationalism(s). The situation is a hotbed for the growth of populist movements, localisms and boundary-making between cultures and social modules.

Some imaginative reflections from Georg Simmel's essay *Bridge and Door*, written at the beginning of the century, have come to influence my conceptualisation of processes of alterity under conditions of 'real multiculturalism', closed doors and fragile bridges between different 'others'. 'Belonging', through the accentuation of 'home-space', is a fundamental human social and cultural marker. The symbolic home has symbolic doors and, following Simmel (1994), *door* signifies, in addition to a necessary psychological and cultural demarcation, the possibility of stepping out of its limitation. A door is a metaphor for the connections between social actors, for the public discourse, for the organisation of solidarity and resistance. Modern society's limits – its programmed way of separating in order to connect – are expressed symbolically as bridge. The multicultural society increasingly stands out as a system of bridge construction between separate parts which are discursively regarded as 'finite' cultural products, with culture regarded as unchanging, as essence – as 'roots'. This results in a simplistic singling out of 'parts' from the

dynamics of the whole, the division of people into 'Us' and the 'Others', 'Europeans' and 'Strangers'.

2. The stranger: two paradigmatic approaches

Scientific discourses have helped to create 'the stranger' and the 'non-stranger'. One classical line of thought seems to have discursively branched off in modernity. It is Alfred Schutz's concept of 'the stranger' – written in the USA during his exile from Nazi Germany and Austria. This 'stranger' appears to be an autobiographical reflection of being forced to seek refuge and live in another world; a 'stranger' who can 'cease to be' and 'gear into', hiding himself in order to avoid being the undesirable 'other'. Schutz's 'stranger' develops a self-effacement in exercising the skills of adjustment towards a total assimilation as the only possible way of saving himself. But between the 'stranger' and the 'group' he meets, there yawns an insurmountable gulf – a naturalised breach of cultural and psychological difference.

An alternative line of thought in the discourse of 'the stranger' can be found in the work of Georg Simmel from the turn of the century. Like Schutz, Simmel was also a German sociologist of Jewish background. Simmel, however, was living in a kind of 'inner refuge', specific to the Jewish experience of the time. His analysis represents a precursor to today's interest in the 'global city' and in globalising 'cultural flows'. From his contemporary 'metropolis' Simmel reflected over the linkage between the inner and the outer. Proximity and distance, connection and separation – these are the different dimensions of human interaction. A 'stranger', a *potential wanderer*, is an important sociological category for the study of the process of interaction. In contrast to Schutz, however, Simmel does not see 'the stranger' as a person outside the perceived 'natural' continuity of the group. Rather, Simmel's 'stranger' takes part in a dialogue. Being a 'stranger' is 'a very positive relation: it is a specific form of interaction. The inhabitants of Sirius are not really "strangers" to us, at

least not in any sociologically relevant sense: they do not exist for us at all; they are beyond far and near' (Simmel 1950: 402). The 'stranger' is the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. But the fact that he has not belonged to the group from the beginning means that 'he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself' (ibid.).

The specific form of interaction can, however, create special tensions. The 'stranger', Simmel says, is 'fixed within a group whose boundaries are similar to spatial boundaries'. Thus he calls attention to *how* the 'stranger' is an element of the group itself – 'like the poor and like sundry "inner enemies"'. His position as a full-fledged member involves both being outside of and confronting it' (ibid.: 402–403). Addressing the peculiar unity of the 'stranger's' position of nearness and distance and 'its uniform life', Simmel focuses on the particular relation to the 'stranger' which goes beyond the general 'human commonness'. The 'stranger', not really thought of as an individual, becomes in itself a constructed human category, a 'strangeness'. Through the specificity of the relationship between proximity and distance, Simmel attaches a positional category with an identity and a cultural dynamic. 'There arises a specific tension when the consciousness that only the quite general is common, stresses that which is not common'. This '... non-common element is once more not individual, but merely the strangeness of origin', which in turn becomes 'common to many Strangers' (ibid.: 407).

This understanding goes beyond the incompatibility between cultures, beyond a perception of cultures as being well-defined modules, and even beyond limits in the mainstream discourse of cultural bridging in the real multiculturalism of the present – where, to use Simmel's terms, bridges are seen as connecting 'the finite within the finite' (Simmel 1994: 8). Hence, instead of perceiving bridging as 'the line stretched between two points' (ibid.) which connect isolated entities, interaction and the relationship between the social and the cultural are emphasised. At the turn of the century, accordingly, modern life was perceived as

an 'open door'; 'life flows forth out of the door from the limitation of isolated separate existence into the limitlessness of all possible directions' (ibid.: 8).

While bridging seems to represent an attempt to connect solid points in a search for 'unconditional security and direction' (ibid.), the door displays an agency encompassing both entering and exiting. Closing the door is (culturally) a separation from 'the uniform, continuous unity of natural being' (ibid.: 9), which at the same time means that 'a piece of space was thereby brought together and separated from the whole remaining world' (ibid.: 7). After that, however, a kind of demarcation takes place, 'its limitedness finds its significance and dignity only in ... the possibility at any moment of stepping out of this limitation into freedom' (ibid.: 10). The door, subsequently, becomes a central metaphor for agency; it represents a subtle dialectical relationship between humankind's need to demarcate its unique being culturally, and the ability socially to transgress borders between human beings. The human being is 'the bordering creature who has no border' (ibid.).

The contemporary search for roots reflects the kind of bordering of which Simmel speaks, and it mirrors our contemporary social crises and cultural delusions as well. The latter seem to have more to do with the difficulties of connecting 'the finite with the finite' culturally, as discursively formulated in the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz in his essay on 'The Stranger'. Cultural essentialism is becoming widespread and it finds resonance in neo-liberalism's celebration of the private and the particular. The culturalisation of modern life that should be 'liberated' – in an academic and political sense – from social relationships of dependence (on the institutions of the welfare state, and on the 'structural' in general), goes hand-in-hand with the spread of market styles and the celebration of full expression to our natural instincts. The 'natural' and the 'authentic' form the frames of reference for the national, regional and local. Like a contemporary echo of Schutz's words (1976: 95), 'thinking as usual' appears to be based on a 'relatively natural conception of the

world'. The naturalisation of a cultural 'us' is accompanied by a demarcation of a 'them'; an immigrant's atavistic ethnicity and a discursive banishment to its pre-modern roots. Boundaries are drawn, and the question is *whether* rather than *how* separate cultures can be connected.

'The Stranger', Schutz (1976: 103) writes in his classical essay, 'constructs a social world of pseudo-anonymity, pseudo-intimacy, and pseudo-typicality. He is out-placed from his "home" and uprooted both geographically and culturally, which renders him invalid in the dialogue on the new social environment. The Stranger lives on in an "unbroken" connection with "the cultural pattern of his home group" which becomes an unquestioned, *natural*, frame or reference.' The core of Schutz's stranger is 'Home' or rather *Heimat*; nostalgia for the *Gemeinschaft* of a rural village, *Heimat*. The notion has its roots in Romantic German philosophy and is readily evident in Schutz's essentialistic concept of culture (Schwartz 1993). Paradoxically enough, Schutz – himself an immigrant in the USA – creates 'the stranger' who finds it impossible to belong or feel at home, as a consequence of his own and others' Heimitisation.

While the exiled individual stubbornly preserves an 'ex-world' and thus a (self-inflicted) psychological trauma of pseudo-existence, the *Heimat* that he encounters is perceived as being embodied in the group that, as a 'stranger', he is to approach. Here he is stopped by the rules of 'naturalness'. The result of the naturalness of 'thinking as usual' is again the cultural pattern excluding 'the stranger'. He cannot share the 'essence' owned by the group he meets. 'Any member born or reared within the group accepts the ready-made standardised scheme of the cultural pattern handed down to him by ancestors, teachers, and authorities as an unquestioned and unquestionable guide in all the situations which normally occur within the social world' (Schutz 1976: 95). The group that 'the stranger' encounters appears to be monitored by the unwritten rules of culturally inherited recipes – that is, 'recipes for interpreting the social world' (ibid.). Cultural recipes acquire hereby 'the function of

the cultural pattern to eliminating troublesome inquiries by offering ready-made directions for use' (ibid.). While helping group members to avoid 'undesirable consequences', recipes serve ultimately as guardians of a social order.

The preservation of the social order can thus be seen as the reason why '... only members of the in-group, *having a definite status in its hierarchy* (my emphasis) and also being aware of it, can use its cultural pattern as a natural and trust-worthy scheme of orientation' (ibid.: 99). This also seems to explain why 'the stranger' can only live in a pseudo-world. He can never take part in the mysterious 'belonging' to the deep roots surrounding graves not his own; 'graves and reminiscence can neither be transferred nor conquered' (ibid.: 97). That is also why 'the stranger', 'a border case outside the territory' (ibid.: 99), only approaches the group superficially, and in vivid and immediate experience. While he remains excluded from the foundations of the past, he is also excluded from *home* and *belonging*.

This exposes, mediated through Schutz, the irony of the rootlessness of 'the stranger' who is uprooted and who cannot – on account of his cultivation of old roots – be rooted in the new environment. He is instead to remain rooted as a 'stranger' in the new plantations of the so-called urban villages in the USA. What is at stake here is the immigrants' second exile – to excluded and in turn exclusivist urban ethnic communities. In the face of the devastating effects of urbanisation and modernisation upon the old worlds, the little worlds of *Heimat* disappear. 'The century of exile' as Schwartz (1993) calls it, then begins. The uncertainties which develop are 'organised' through the intolerance of modernity and the various kinds of rigidity and inequality within the *Heimats* of the future – 'havens in a heartless world'. The social psychology of cultural encounters has been reduced to a psychology of the culturally absolute and impregnable. Schutz's phenomenology lays the ground for a type of psychologised and naturalised cultural fundamentalism, which in many ways traverses contemporary academic and popular discourses dealing with 'the stranger' and cultural 'collisions'.

In a world where the search for roots has become widespread – from new social movements to the building of new nation-states, from identity politics to national cultural identities – Alfred Schutz's phenomenology can provide food for thought. A cultural panic has spread in the wake of a globalisation of uncertainties. This essentially social crisis has become a worship of the cultural as it fosters a quest for pluralisation and ethnicisation in an implausible 'roots' radicalism. 'The explosion of invented communities and "reactive" identities is taking place in a situation of hegemonic cultural homogenisation and scattered revolt' (Karlsson 1994). The doors are closing, while possible bridges connect points of scattered ethnic separateness (cf. Ålund & Schierup, 1991).

3. Ethnicity

Modern identities are formed in a dynamic interplay between different cultural elements from the composite living world which stress the meaning of the transethnic. Still, more often than not cultures are classified and ordered in line with prevailing puristic and ethnocentric norms. This results, at our northern latitudes, in a Eurocentric system of hierarchical classification, in which the perceived cultural distance of the 'others' from the (Swedish) centre is decisive (Westin 1987). How far apart *we* and *they* are is expressed in terms of cultural distance and cultural collision. The periphery seems to be associated with the traditional, moreover, and the centre with modernity. The culturally classified and ethnocentrically ordered functions serve as a discriminatory standard – as when, for example, determining suitability within a labour market divided increasingly along lines of ethnic origins. Despite the egalitarian discourse of Swedish cultural pluralism, cultural segregation is constructed on a status-oriented basis, and in accordance with stereotypical and deterministic notions. It leaves the field open for social inequalities and intense tensions between population groups.

Representing ethnic relations exclusively in terms of culture or attitudes does not lead to a proper understanding of integration and

disintegration in modern multicultural societies. In this multifarious, sometimes mixed and often divided world of ours, the notion of ethnicity is a central one. What do we mean? How do we use it? Ethnicity has become a key question in the discussion of multicultural and immigrant policy in Sweden and all over Europe. What we have learned thus far is that ethnicity is an obscure concept – it is used, for example, in contexts relating not only to culture but also to structure, and it addresses both purity and mixture, both imagined closed communities and imaginative processes through which culture is created and boundaries are transgressed.

Immigrant ethnicity is not – if indeed it ever was – solely the expression of pluralism in the cultural sense. Whatever we mean by 'the cultural' associated with ethnicity, the structural constraints of society are rapidly infecting it. Ethnicity is becoming an expression of specific reactions to the growing experiences of multiple exile among the majority of Scandinavian immigrants. The social petrification of a hierarchical ethnic division of labour, and the social/political marginalisation of immigrant populations, are cardinal factors in the development of ethnicity (Ålund 1993).

The widespread static view of ethnicity, with its emphasis upon cultural differences, has come under increasing criticism as a deterministic view that portrays cultural preservation as a goal in itself while presenting social inequality as cultural deviance. Ethnicity, and indeed race, should instead be understood as social construction (Gorelick 1989, Ålund & Schierup 1991). Different types of ethnicity always historically appear – to use the expression of Stuart Hall (commenting on race in *New Ethnicities*) – in articulation, in a formation, with other categories and divisions in society. Being closely related to socio-cultural tensions, ethnicity is 'constantly crossed and recrossed' (Hall 1992b: 255) by the categories of race, gender and class. The primordialist concept (and practice) of ethnicity seems to me to be related, both historically and in the present (as in the states of ex-Yugoslavia, for example), to the problems of exclusion. Indeed, as Stuart Hall (*ibid.*) warns us, there can be no simple

beyond the naturally given, towards processes of social construction of 'the immigrant'.

Ethnicity's gearing of alterity into modernity more often than not takes the character of a forced 'heimatisation', structurally imposed differentiation, and involuntary segregation. We are participants in a repetitive refrain from Dylan's 'I pity the poor immigrant': the poor immigrant 'wishes he would have stayed home . . . he hears but does not see, he turns his back to me . . .' That is how the migrant becomes transformed into 'poor immigrant' related only to homesickness, alluding to pre-modernity, traditionalism and the vulgarity of backwardness. That is also how human beings become transformed into the deindividualised category of 'immigrant', which reminds us of the kind of symbolical metamorphosis encountered in the works of Kafka and Salman Rushdie. The 'poor immigrant' represents yet another symbolical portrait of Kafka's Gregor Samsa who began to live up to the world's definition of himself (as a bug); he had a real desire to change that warm, snug room, pleasantly furnished with inherited furniture, into a cave into which he could creep undisturbed, but where he, at the same time, would quickly and completely forget his human past. But, 'what do I have in common with the Jews? I hardly have anything in common with myself and should calmly and quietly withdraw into a corner, satisfied to be able to breath.' This is what Kafka wrote in his diary on 8 January 1914. One can understand this as a human search for one's own sanctuary in the world – where one can freely breath and hide from a forced placement into a shell of ethnicity, race, gender or immigrantship. Immigrants are still (un)seen as Kafka's bugs; excluded to exile in their segregated homes, free to desperately crawl on the walls of their depowered belonging to the cultural periphery of public space (Ålund 1992, 1993).

Immigrants are commonly treated in terms of what Michel Foucault would designate as 'negative fame' and ethnicity is still described – for example, in the front line of Swedish youth culture research – as 'those traditional roots that still survive'. This is a position assumed by Johan Fornäs

(1992: 14) in the introduction to an anthology dealing for the first time with the connection between research on youth cultures and ethnic cultures in Sweden. Fornäs (ibid. 15) poses the question, 'what is then the dominant symbolic place of ethnicity?' As a consequence of immigration, 'ethnicity may more often signify spatial and social differences and diversity and be understood as the ultimate form of alternative relations with modernity, grounded in various backgrounds and roots. This is the way in which I think ethnicity may symbolise surviving pre-modern traditions in general. But how does it mix with youth?' (ibid.). Youth and ethnicity are, accordingly, polarised. Youth stands for continual change and reflexivity in contrast to ethnicity as self-evident and static. Immigrants appear to be trapped in their pre-modern ethnicity and to represent 'otherness'. 'If the young are quick to respond to modernisation and its demands and resources for individualisation, makeability and reflexivity, what about immigrants? *Do they* (my emphasis) also form innovative avant-gardes, experimenting with new ways of life that are included in the spectrum of youth cultures, or do they function rather as culturally conservative factors, upholding traditional forms of life and opposing cultural modernity?' (ibid.: 15). This, the most common type of discourse on multiculturalism in Sweden, severs ethnicity from its societal context.

Opposing youth and ethnicity, ethnicity and modernity, help to create discourses on inclusion/exclusion and to construct and reconstruct insiders and outsiders. In this way the misrecognition of ethnicity is grounded. Politics of recognition (Taylor 1992) are transformed into the recognition of differences (cf. Ålund 1993). Multiculturalism is subsequently constructed as an organisation of differences in parallel worlds. Real multiculturalism, however, could be characterised as a two-sided ethnicity which jeopardises the 'new roots' (cf. Røgilds 1988 and Ålund & Schierup 1991). New urban ethnic cultures are severed from their historical context, as well as from their present by the agency of

what we, with Gilroy (1993), may designate as the cultural forces of modernity.

A contemporary interest in the cultural codes of belonging brings to the fore the importance of processes which mediate a phenomenology of 'not-belonging'. Looking from this perspective, Schutz can illuminate for us how 'the receiver' constructs 'the stranger'. 'The receiver' is the mirror self. In other words, 'the stranger' becomes this by force of the dominant perception of the self that he 'gears into'; this 'looking-glass self' (cf. Cooley 1964) becomes a collective self-reflection. Low cultural status and subordinate social position become the fundaments for identity processes; both of them seen as natural attributes of 'the stranger'. While the social in these 'characteristics' is readily observable, it is routinely depicted as 'the stranger's' own creation, connecting him/her either with cultural heritage or with nostalgia.

The present interest for identities in academic and popular contexts reflects, to a large degree, a phenomenological discourse on the radically unique. When applied to migration, phenomenology becomes represented as 'uprooting' and a subsequent 'transplanting' of the unchanged and forever inescapably ethnic. But 'the poor immigrant' is not a plant and real life ethnic settlements are not cultural transplants, copies of the traditional villages of the homelands. They are rather 'havens', created on the margins of modern society.

5. 'The stranger' and the antagonisms of modernity

Havens arise as a result of a relationship between the migrants' need for social proximity and societal processes of distancing; cultural and social discrimination and segregation. Havens – segregated urban contexts – have been regarded as 'secure zones' for ethnic minorities and the sites for political mobilisation of the labour movement (Hirsch 1990). Havens have, paradoxically, also been newly instituted as an emergency solution for Bosnian Muslims' survival in the face of ethnic purges; that is segregation with the alleged purpose of

integration (of Bosnia). This paradox has, increasingly, in modified form, become a reality for immigrants. The past and the present of ethnic havens is characterised by the public 'problem' of integrating this society of outsiders.

Beyond new inclusive solidarities we can, in the constitution of isolated havens, find a number of exclusivist practices which both historically and now express a social closure towards 'the other'. The constructed 'other' constructs his/her 'other'. Structural disadvantages are organised in correspondence with a vertical cultural mosaic and can generate new differences through solidarity as well as exclusivity.

Without a reflexive connection between matters of cultural identity with questions of social inequality, an opposition movement can be transformed into a simple demand for the right to be different. This is the sensitive dialectical relationship between structure and culture which must be observed. 'Culture' has become a universal ideological category in the political struggle, an indispensable tool for techno-scientific administration and the organisation of differences; a general commonsense popular cliché celebrating the separateness of 'cultural belonging' as a 'natural' right. The cultural has acquired an independent role. Cultural explanations in their bare and distorted form have colonised the social by means of culturisation. The social space has been reduced to a site for the production of identities or merely differentiated entities. But it is usually not acknowledged that the social struggle continues through the cultural. This should be an important point of departure for sociological self-scrutinitisation.

The unrealised modernity has become an 'amodernity' who seeks to purge itself through a sort of cultural catharsis. Amongst all of us who are more or less exposed to the expansion of 'alterity', alienation, and the search for identity, the different effects of the uncertainty caused by the demise of the welfare state, weakened collective identities, economic crises and the broken promises of universalism are ramified. In the face of transnational capital accumulation and hypernational political processes, anonymous forms of control,

and legitimacy crises for the nation state and its system of political representation, the conditions are created for uncertain identities and new ethnicities. We are all ethnicised, at a rapid pace and in different ways – exclusively or inclusively. An increasingly common result of these processes is reactive flight into regional and local imagined communities.

Modernity's triumphs and successes are rooted, Hall reminds us (1992a: 15–16), 'not simply in progress and enlightenment, but also in violence, oppression and exclusion, in the archaic, the violent, the untransformed, the repressed aspects of social life' (ibid.). It is of little wonder, Hall adds, 'that modern societies are increasingly haunted by what Bryan Turner calls a pervasive nostalgia for past times – for lost community' (ibid.). However, while the revitalisation of tradition and demands for the recognition of cultural differences are anchored in a critique of modernity's totalising claims, the turn towards history has shown to be both reflexive and reactive (Schierup & Ålund 1987).

While South-East Europe purifies her new ethno-national identities in the name of blood, in urban multiethnic contexts in West Europe, new complex identities appear to address tradition in a different manner. Present dilemmas and struggles are often expressed through the mediation of old ghosts. 'Wrestling with ghosts' (Ålund & Schierup 1991), symbolises the connection of the past and the present through the recognition of the past in the present, and the rejection of both old and new forms of oppression. Translated tradition becomes an element of the complex modern syncretic culture(s). New hybrid cultures are building upon history as the carrier of meaning in the processes forming new cultural identities.

The metaphorical expressions of these processes are deeply embedded in the autobiographical stories of young people that I have collected during my current fieldwork in polyethnic suburbs of Stockholm (Ålund 1993 and *Forthcoming*). The social significance of 'bridges' and 'doors', to again return to Simmel, marks the symbolic universe of young 'multicultural' Swedes. In this context I will address the importance of mixed cultures and of

boundary transgression, often overlooked in favour of an overwhelming scientific interest in differences and boundaries. Individual interviews repeatedly expose a destabilisation of fixed ethnicities in the process. Young people mediate experiences anchored in several social and cultural worlds. Their stories are traversed by a multiplicities of histories, memories and dreams related to overcoming the experiences of not belonging. In their reflexive relation to the 'self' and the 'other', they expose a type of ethnic consciousness that relates in complex ways to present tensions in the countries of emigration. But they usually stress the major structural tensions in relation to the society of immigration, to shared inequality, and to a common outsider identity among modern youths. Thus, to paraphrase Anthony Giddens (1991), social events and social relations 'at a distance' are interlacing with local contextualities, but very seldom in a straight-line way. Gringos and Latinos meet in Sweden, and the history of colonial oppression relates to closed doors, disco security guards, and patronising glances. Flows in space of rhythm and resistance are televised to private rooms, redrafted in texts about the local and particular, and mediated through meeting places to embrace the uniting and common, as a collective insight into outsider status and as a challenge to resist. The local Stockholm rapp artist, Lucco, sings, 'Because they have the name of the country . . . no somos criminales no nos tratan como animales . . . fuck the gringo con el sabor de latino, Huh . . .' (Ålund, forthcoming).

Thus, the conditions are developing for the emergence of collective identities which are ethnicised in a flora of variations (from exclusive ethnic absolutism to inclusive transethnic syncretism). This ethnicity is 'new' in that it assumes its form in relation to the social and cultural boundary-making of modern societies. That is, through inventive processes rather than repetitive practices governed by ritual or tradition – even if the latter can appear as old symbols (actual or invented) injected with new meanings for purposes other than traditional ones, albeit in the name of 'tradition'. The symbols of tradition often assume their

place in the service of modern solidarities. Emerging mixtures of cultures and of cultural innovations, new boundaries and transgressions of boundaries, illustrate the diversity of the contemporary multiethnic society, its potentials for change, and its inner tensions.

Among immigrant ethnic minorities the ambivalence is strengthened by a cross-breeding between the general cultural crisis and the specific discriminatory and stigmatising practices of an increasingly racialised society. 'Immigration' is developing into a dilemma joining far-flung times and places, Europe and America. It is a European dilemma resembling what Myrdal terms the 'Negro-problem', but without an automatic connection to skin colour. It is a matter, in Balibar's terms, of 'racism without race'.

The social construction of 'the stranger', societal practices of exclusion and the creation of a 'distanced proximity' represent fundamental challenges to our common future. The societal configurations of distance in proximity are concentrated in the modern city. The modern metropolis bears the seeds, but does not harvest the fruits of its multiplicity of life-forms as the structure is still 'characterised by sharp boundaries and carefully preserved purity in the social division and grading' (Simmel 1970: 13). New transethnic identities are developing, not least among youth in the multiethnic environments of the cities. These new European identities are besieged, however. The social contexts and immediate life-worlds, with their inequalities and tensions, carry fundamental conflicting forces, which are particularly important for young people who still are called 'immigrants' and strangers. The young contest their 'not belonging' status more sharply than their first-generation parents do. Like Simmel's 'stranger', they are near yet distanced. They are, to paraphrase Simmel again, an element of the group itself, yet excluded, not to be fully part of it. They are equipped to mediate but forced to struggle.

As for 'doors' and identities, the processes of individual liberation and the elaboration of individuality itself are still in action. Those are the processes that have most obviously been behind modern iden-

tity crises since the beginning of the century. The struggle for the general values of welfare and equity have been continuously coupled with the dilemmas of universalism-particularism since its beginnings.

In conclusion, for sociologists it can be of importance to keep in mind what Simmel, reflecting on *Bridge and Door* in 1909, wrote: 'In the immediate as well as the symbolic sense, we are at any moment those who separate the connected or connect the separate'.

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